Our Shared Vision: Representations of the Trans-Mississippi American West

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OUR SHARED VISION: REPRESENTATIONS OF THE TRANS-MISSISSIPPI AMERICAN WEST

by

Joshua D. Koenig

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate College
In partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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This dissertation examines the role played by museums in shaping our understanding of the American West. The history of the American West holds a place in American popular culture, evidenced by music, movies and television shows, novels, art, architecture, clothing, and numerous other examples. However, such examples raise questions of authenticity depending on medium and setting.

Representations of the American West depict certain images or beliefs held by society. At the same time, the United States houses nearly 1,500 historic sites and museums focusing on the American West. These museums and sites are found scattered throughout thirty-eight states, in addition to the District of Columbia. As educational institutions, it is reasonable to assume that museums and historic sites offer a more authentic and reliable representation of the West than versions found throughout popular culture, such as films, television programs, and other forms of media. This work seeks to examine the ways in which four museums depict, explore, and preserve the history of the American West.

This study critically analyzes four of the largest Western Heritage Museums that focus on depictions of the American West: the Museum of Westward Expansion, the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, the Buffalo Bill Historical Center, and the Autry National Center. Through an analysis of historical documents, oral histories, and museum exhibitions, this work establishes a historical record of each institution, provides a critical examination of the exhibits found within each institution, and explores the ways in which each institution fits into the larger place of the American West.
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ROADS LEADING WEST
CHAPTER I

ROADS LEADING WEST

There is no doubt that Americans are interested in their history. While this interest varies from person to person, and the display of this interest may take different forms, history and its representation are necessary for both personal and national identities. Museums, monuments, and historic sites exist to serve as keepsakes of history; they spark memory and emotion, and allow us all to connect our past with our present and our shared future. Yet, we all interpret our history in different ways. Historical memory diverges from person to person as well. Popular culture, commercialization, academic scholarship, and personal experiences, to name a few, all shape the ways in which we approach, understand, and consume our history.

This dissertation examines the history of the trans-Mississippi American West and its representation in contemporary society through museum exhibits. The history of the American West holds a place in American popular culture, evidenced, for example, by music, movies, and television shows, novels, art, architecture, and clothing. However, such examples raise questions of “authenticity.” Representations of the American West depict certain images or beliefs held by society. However, do these representations serve to portray the history of the West? Do the stories omit specific groups?

By 2002, the United States housed nearly 1,500 historic sites and museums focusing on the American West. These museums and sites are found scattered throughout thirty-eight states in addition to the District of Columbia.¹ As educational institutions, it is reasonable to assume that museums and historic sites offer a more authentic and reliable version of the West than

versions found throughout popular culture, such as films, television programs, or music. This dissertation explores the messages conveyed by four of these museums, and the ways in which the museums interact with visitors regarding the West. This project is informed by three major lines of inquiry: the historiography of the American West, the American West in popular culture, and the historiography of public history. Each study has a direct influence on the ways in which we interpret, approach, consume, and understand the American West, yet each line of inquiry has its own historical timeline. While the three timelines do have momentary points of intersection, the three threads develop at different paces, yet they do not develop independently.

Contemporary academic literature shows how scholars attempted to tackle numerous issues and myths concerning the West. For example, both academics and museums alike, continuously contest such notions of the romantic or Wild West. No longer does the command to “Go west young man,” presented by Horace Greely, or John O’Sullivan’s idea of manifest destiny fit into the scholarship of contemporary studies of the American West. Historians such as Richard White, Patricia Nelson Limerick, William Cronon, Donald Worster, and Sara Deutsch all attempt to reexamine previous notions of the West, exploring such topics as environmental history, place, identity, and exploitation. My project begins at the end of a thirty-year process during which historians reexamined the history of the American West. Simultaneously, public historians shifted their focus to topics of authenticity, heritage, historical accuracy, identity, and inclusivity, to name a few. The museums and their exhibits discussed throughout this work came about as products of this process. They exist as representations of the culmination of roughly thirty years of academic scholarship.

Why then does there still exist a fascination with the Wild West? Many current representations depict the rugged nature of the landscape and the dangers involved in its taming.
While it is true that the West could at times be a dangerous place, and at times wild events did occur, the process of establishing communities west of the Mississippi was in no way a fanciful or mythical process. Why is it that contemporary portrayals of the American West often depict a whimsical and wild image of its history? Does it serve as a place to play out ideas of the ways in which colonization or settlement should have taken place for some? Does there exist a sense of guilt for exploiting peoples and destroying the environment? Do we replicate the past?

The history of the American West has long been recorded. Before any point of European contact, Native American cultures recorded and preserved their own histories. Early explorers such as Cabeza de Vaca and Coronado provided the world with accounts of, for what was to them, a new world. In 1803, under the presidency of Thomas Jefferson, the United States purchased the Louisiana Territory from France, and Congress subsequently funded an expedition designed to explore the nation’s new acquisition. In 1804, Jefferson challenged Lewis and Clark and the Corps of Discovery with the task of exploring the region and record their findings. The early writings of explorers such as Lewis and Clark, Zebulon Pike, and John Fremont, as well as the artistic renderings produced by George Catlin and Karl Bodmer, provided the United States with early accounts of the West.

Throughout the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, two important processes transformed the landscape of the American West. First, major corporations expanded their business into the American West in order to seek profit through corporate exploitation. These enterprises took many different forms, as no one single economic endeavor opened the West. The fur trade, railroads, fishing industry, logging mining, industry, ranching, agricultural, and petroleum industries all played crucial roles in commercializing the American West.
The second crucial process to aid its creation was land tenure: settlement and dispersal or acquisition of public lands. As corporations created businesses in the West, settlers chose to make their homes in similar fashions. This duality of home and business established what we now regard as the trans-Mississippi American West, and served to further the larger process of exploitation. Each group both supported and exploited the other. Business supplied work and space for settlers, while settlers supplied labor to the industries. The final result established the creation of community, or place. As settlers identified with specific types of labor, such as agriculture or mining, communities grew around these occupations.

Almost immediately, the American West became a topic of interest and research. The literature of such writers as James Fennimore Cooper’s *The Pioneers* and *The Last of the Mohicans*, Francis Parkman’s *The Oregon Trail*, and later novels by Zane Gray and Louis L’Amour provided readers with western adventures and experiences. In *Historians and the American West*, Michael P. Malone argues that “Popular literature abounded with larger-than-life frontiersmen-heroes, from mountain men to cowboys, whose exploits were a mélange of fact, fiction, fantasy, and sheer nonsense.”² The American West quickly became both a homeland of real people with real lives, as well as a mythical world of folklore and heroes. Westerners recorded early histories in their own writings.³ Additionally, men such as John Wesley Powell became increasingly concerned with the environment of the West and the impact of settlement and exploitation upon the land.⁴ Similarly, individuals like John Muir and Henry David Thoreau began western environmental movements.

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³ Malone, ed., *Historians*, 3
While such works indeed play a role in the historiography of the American West, in no way are they sources of serious scholarly inquiry. Malone states,

Given this, the point remains that truly scholarly history of the West is a product of the past ninety years that has been fostered mainly in university, college, research library and historical society professional settings. Three people merit special attention as the “founding fathers” of a truly serious frontier-western historiography: Herbert Eugene Bolton, Frederick Jackson Turner, and Walter Prescott Webb. Of the three, Herbert Bolton (1870-1953) had the least impact upon the historiography of the West as a broader region but the greatest impact upon that of any specific subregion – namely, the Southwest.

In 1893 in Chicago, Illinois, Frederick Jackson Turner delivered his famed thesis, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” at the American Historical Associations annual conference. Throughout his essay, Turner outlines the process of western settlement. He argues that a unique American character allowed settlers to transform frontier-wilderness, creating civilization and connection the West to the East, and ultimately closing the frontier. As Malone explains, “While Turner’s name will always be synonymous with the frontier; that of Walter Prescott Webb (1888-1963) will always be associated with the Great Plains.” Webb wrote about the West from a western perspective. Both Turner and Webb opened up the field of western scholarship and influenced numerous scholars to come. Yet these early writings are not without criticism either.

Just down the road at the Columbian Exposition, America’s public watched as Buffalo Bill performed with his Wild West show. Turner’s version of the West, now completed by 1893, was a natural process of replication. Cody viewed the West as experiential and very much alive, as seen in the fact that he brought the West to the public. Both individuals were educators, each

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offering a different version of the West, and their presentations were at the same time both accurate and flawed. Cody saw himself as more than an entertainer. He intended to provide his audiences with what he viewed as an authentic experience that would inform his audiences about the history of the American West. While Turner delivered his famed “Frontier” thesis, arguing that the West was closed, he opened the door for new historical analysis. At the same time, almost literally, while Buffalo Bill entertained his audiences with his Wild West show, Turner actively created western history—not just the myth of the American West, but a facet of the history itself.

The cowboy hero is a significant figure in American culture. Politically, we can see the image of the cowboy hero come about through the presidency of Theodore Roosevelt. Writer Owen Wister dedicated his novel *The Virginian* to Roosevelt, his friend, and the book became a key document having established the original cowboy code, which became the standard for Hollywood image of the cowboy figure. According to Michael Duchemin,

> Wister’s relationship with Theodore Roosevelt and with Frederic Remington, and other people in the Boone and Crockett Club really create this image of American identity as a means to establish an American character at a time when the nation really needed something like that, and also to take advantage of new technologies.

The next year, in 1903, Edwin S. Porter released his film *The Great Train Robbery*. While less than twelve minutes long, the film became the first narrative film, one with a western context. By the turn of the century Americans embraced the cowboy as their heroic icon. The popular

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9 The Boone and Crockett Club is an organization of ethical and conservationist hunters founded by Theodore Roosevelt in 1887. Roosevelt chose the name *Boone and Crockett* to honor the memories of Daniel Boone and Davy Crockett.
image of the Hollywood cowboy plays an important role in American culture, identity, and politics. Items such as cowboy boots convey a message of values. With these foundational works such as *The Virginian* and *The Great Train Robbery*, the myths that they embody spread throughout culture, and they become part of our national narrative.

By the turn of the twentieth century the American West played a significant role in both popular culture and academic scholarship. At the same time, America was interested in preserving its own history. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries witnessed the creation of numerous parks, museums, and other preservation efforts. Wealthy socialites often exhibited displays in their homes, which functioned largely as collections of curiosities. By the late nineteenth century, a shift came about that pushed for the creation of public institutions. Historian Steven Conn states that early museums took the shape of orderly, professional institutions. Their collections served a larger purpose and did away with early haphazard displays of random collections seen during the Victorian Age. He continues by noting that visitors saw artifacts as factual representations of the past. “This faith in objects as the source of knowledge lay at the center of how Americans of the late Victorian period understood the world, and it lay at the heart of the whole museum enterprise.” Museums served as a link between the present and the past.

Museums such as the Peale’s Museum and the Smithsonian Institute not only served to collect the nation’s history, but they pushed citizens to think of themselves as American citizens with a shared history. Conn notes,

American museums grew alongside American cities. Those cities, of course, became increasingly filled during the years of this study with immigrants from

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Southern and Eastern Europe whose cultural connections with the Anglo elite were tenuous at best. Indeed, it is probably the case that a majority of New Yorkers or Chicagoans at the turn of the twentieth century spoke only passing English. Some historians have noted how institutions, including museums, tried to instruct immigrants on the forms of proper behavior and functioned to turn what elites saw as unruly foreigners into well-mannered citizens of the United States. In this sense, museums functioned – and continue to function - as places of “civilizing rituals.”

Museums provided the native-born and immigrant alike with both a public pastime as well an institution of learning. Thus, museums began to preserve, promote, and publicly produce a national history.

Simultaneously, museums branched out into other fields of study. Harvard’s Peabody Museum, the Field Museum in Chicago, and a number of other institutions, such as the Smithsonian, started to work more closely with inquiries of Anthropology and natural science. This model and new line of inquiry brought the study of past cultures and foreign peoples into the public view, while only further serving to foster an American identity. Yet, the display of indigenous peoples, such as Native Americans, for example became quite hegemonic and led to a visible stratification of peoples. Conn states that, “Clearly, this evolutionary view of culture placed Western civilizations at the apex of cultural achievement, and it served to relegate other cultures below it in the hierarchy.” American history was a topic of social display; it was history. However, Native American history was relegated to science museums; a topic of scientific study and analysis that was something other than history. It should come as no surprise that in the age of Jim Crow and the science of phrenology that museums would isolate their subjects into categories of otherness. Yet, this practice would have far-reaching trends and become increasingly difficult to dismantle.

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18 Conn, *Museums*, 90.
At the time, art museums served a far different purpose. They existed as institutions for the elite. Such museums collected treasured prizes of history’s great artistic masters.

That art museums enjoy a greater status than other kinds of museums seems now self-evident and obvious. At the turn of the twentieth century, however, their position at the top of the hierarchy was not guaranteed. Several factors doubtless contributed to this victory, among them that art museums attracted a disproportionate number of this country’s wealthiest philanthropists.19

Again, much like natural history museums, it would be some time before art museums institutionally collected indigenous works or even thought of themselves as public institutions where the masses could learn from their collections. The process of museum building in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries fundamentally shifted the ways in which we view our history. Not only did museums shape our attitudes and outlooks on what we view as historically important, but they depicted a level of authority and accuracy. Again, as noted by Conn, early museum-goers felt a connection to the object as a factual depiction of history. The museum served as a concrete representation of the past. Yet, this would in no way diminish the power of popular culture.

By the 1930s, Hollywood constructed the quintessential cowboy hero, played by such stars as Tom Mix and Tex Ritter. From here, the Western’s popularity rapidly increased. Between the years 1940 and 1980 the Hollywood Western experienced its heyday. Directors such as John Ford, Sam Peckinpah, and Sergio Leone constructed their visions of life in the American West. Actors such as Gene Autry, Henry Fonda, Jimmie Stewart, John Wayne, Van Heflin, Glenford, and Clint Eastwood played America’s heroes and villains. Movies such as *Fort Apache* (1948), *The Man from Laramie* (1955) *3:10 to Yuma* (1957), *Once Upon a Time in the West* (1968), and *The Wild Bunch* 1969) provided audiences with western images and


In her book *West of Everything*, Jane Tompkins explores the way in which the American West influenced American popular culture, and the lives of audiences. In it she notes that,

> From roughly 1900 to 1975 a significant portion of the adolescent male population spent every Saturday afternoon at the movies. What they saw there were Westerns. Roy Rogers, Tom Mix, Lash LaRue, Gene Autry Hopalong Cassidy. From the twenties through the early seventies there were hundreds of nationally distributed feature films which gave the general population the same kind of experience on a more sophisticated level. Some of these films – *High Noon* (1952) (“Do not forsake me, oh my darling”), *Shane* (1953) (“Come back, Shane”) – have become part of the permanent repertoire of American culture. Western radio shows in the thirties and forties were followed by TV shows in the fifties and sixties. In 1959 there were no fewer than thirty-five Westerns running concurrently on television, and out of the top ten programs eight were Westerns (Nachbar, x). John Wayne, the actor whose name is synonymous with Western films, became the symbol of American masculinity from World War II to Vietnam. 20

Tompkins argues that a broad spectrum of Americans read and watched Westerns. These cultural products heavily shaped American perceptions of masculinity, morals, codes of conduct, values, and concepts of good and evil, right and wrong. As a result, these cultural products and stereotypes influenced America on all levels. 21

By the 1930s the image of the cowboy and the popularity of the Western as a genre became increasingly important in American popular culture. By the 1960s, with the Vietnam War, the popularity of the cowboy hero began to fade, and by the early 1970s the Western film genre was nearly gone. Yet, by the 1980s American culture saw a revival of the cowboy hero with Ronald Regan that resonated through the presidency of George Herbert Walker Bush and through the Clinton years as well. At the same time, two major projects took place that examined

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the image of the American cowboy and its surrounding popularity in a serious way and on a national level. In 1981, the Smithsonian Institute released “The Smithsonian Collection of Classic Country Music,” an eight-record set of definitively classic country music, comprising a chronological collection of one hundred and forty-three songs, from seventeen different record labels. The Smithsonian’s seal of approval gave credence to the genre of country music. It helped shatter previous stereotypes surrounding the genre and granted it importance.

In 1983, the Library of Congress developed the exhibition The American Cowboy, which examined the hero in a public way. The exhibit ran at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., from March 24 through October 2, 1983, and then traveled until October 26, 1984. Roy Dockstader, the coordinator of the American Folklife Center, states,

Together the exhibition catalogue offers a scholarly review of the changing image of the cowboy as depicted in paintings, sculpture, photographs, books, manuscripts, music, maps, prints, collectibles, and memorabilia. Through them the American Folklife Center takes a serious look at the cowboy as an American folk hero, examines his origins, and investigates some questions. Where did the cowboy come from? What happened to him as time passed? Has the image of the cowboy been commercialized? Does the cowboy still exist today? The cowboy iconography presented here has allowed us while addressing these questions to show off the varied treasures if the Library of Congress, one of the world’s largest libraries.

The exhibit served to present the American public with the image of the cowboy while tackling the myth that surrounded the figure. Photographs, paintings, and material culture showed the cattle business in action, while serving to shatter the myths surrounding the industry. The exhibit presented both the men and women who worked on the range and ranches throughout the American West, how they led their lives, and depicted their day-to-day activities.

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24 Taylor and Maar, American Cowboy, 29-59.
While *The American Cowboy* presented the lives of cowboys and cowgirls throughout the West, it also tackled the myth of the West in a serious, scholarly manner. It highlighted the roles played by men such as William F. Cody, Bill Pickett, and the public presentations of the American west, which helped shape and define the myth of the American West. Additionally, the exhibit took popular culture and the commercialization of the cowboy icon head-on, examining both its role in distorting the history of the American west, and also its important influences on our perception of such histories.25 Such exhibits began an exploration of western heritage. As discussed *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*, historian David Lowenthal argues that heritage exists as a shared set of traditions, history, cultural traits, ways of living, and ways of thinking common to a group of people. Heritage comes to define a shared experience.26

Finally, the exhibit recognized that the image of the American cowboy transformed in various ways since its inception. Yet, the actual cowboy did not vanish from the American landscape at the turn of the twentieth century. The final portion of the exhibit acknowledged the fact that men and women still work on western cattle ranches today in our modern world. *The American Cowboy* explored the current world of the cattle industry in our modern, technological world. Through images and personally experience, the exhibit presented the working cowboy in his or her current state, and the changes that ranching has undergone since its historic establishment.27

On March 24, 1983, at the exhibit’s opening, President Ronald Reagan addressed the museum’s first visitors and expressed his appreciation and approval over *The American Cowboy*. Some of you may be aware of my fondness for Western art. And in the last couple of years we’ve tried to bring its influence to the White House – a natural home for

a very American expression. Like that art, this exhibit can remind those of us who work or visit here what America is all about. If we understand this part of our history and our continuing fascination with it, we will better understand how our people see themselves and the hopes they have for America.

Another President from the West, Dwight D. Eisenhower of Abilene, Kansas once said, “Whatever America hopes to bring to pass in the world must first come to pass in the heart of America.” Well, I think America’s heart is on display here. This exhibit explores both the reality and myth of the American West. And both are important. Here are more than the bits and pieces of rough and gritty life, but the tangible remnants of a national legend.28

He later continued,

It all comes back as you browse through this exhibit. The difference between right and wrong seems as clear as the white hats that the cowboys in Hollywood pictures always wore so you’d know right from the beginning who was the good guy. Integrity, morality, and democratic values are the resounding themes.

Life wasn’t that simple then, and it isn’t today. But in the words of a noted historian, “Americans, in making their Western myths, were not put off by the discrepancies with reality. Americans believed about the West not so much what was true, but what they thought out to be true.” He went on, “Lacking the common heritage that bound other nations together, they were forced to look elsewhere for the basis of their national existence. And they found the West.

While the exhibit is here, I hope all of Washington takes time to get to know the American cowboy again. And as the exhibit travels from city to modern city, I hope it reinforces the glue of a very good society, born and bred in the wide-open spaces.29

The president’s remarks fostered a new-found importance in the cowboy icon, the American West, and the mythic reality surrounding the subject. At the same time, Reagan worked himself into the image of the West, imposing the values of integrity and morality, and the place of right and wrong into both his office and a national character, all while lauding the exhibit. Through

29 Reagan, Remarks at “The American Cowboy.”
this, this history of the American West yet again transformed. It reinforced this notion of heritage.

These two projects “The Smithsonian Collection of Classic Country Music” and the Library of Congress exhibit *The American Cowboy*, established the history and culture of the American West as a nationally important topic in a public light. However, while the public popularity of the American West lost its appeal, the scholarship of the history of the American West as well as public history grew in increased interest and examination.

Toward the end of the twentieth century a new branch of western history emerged. Recent scholarship presented by historians of the American West begins to more deeply investigate such subjects. By the late twentieth century, a group of historians often referred to as the New Western Historians sought to examine such issues. According to Jerome Frisk and Forrest G. Robinson, “Central to the agenda of the New Western History is a shift in perspective that produces histories told from a “bottom up” – from the point of view of the margins and the marginalized.” 30 These historians worked to expose the unexposed. The new academic mission was to demythologize the history of the American West. In 1992, many of the so-called New Western Historians compiled a collection of essays titled *Under an Open Sky: Rethinking America’s Western Past*.31 The varied topics contained within the text served to greatly expand the field. It proposed (although not for the first time) that the history of the American West was one of a complex nature and numerous agents and stories. It proposed that the history of the West could evolve from previous Turnarian explanations and now examine the subject through

the lenses of environmental history, identity studies, art, religion, empire, and numerous other historical lines of inquiry.

Similarly, scholars evaluated the role of popular culture played within academic scholarship. In her work *West of Everything*, author Jane Tompkins argues that the genre of the Western is exclusive, masculine, and culturally biased. Throughout her text, Tompkins outlines the ways in which the Western has impacted the lives of all Americans. In doing so she highlights how this impact was not always positive in nature. For example, she notes that women and Native Americas are oftentimes depicted in subservient roles, if depicted at all. Such displays served to ostracize groups from a larger historical narrative and failed to grant them their due agency.

Scholars such as William Cronon, Patricia Nelson Limerick, Clyde Milner, Richard White, and Donald Worster laid the fundamental groundwork for a reexamination of the American West. New Western Historians tasked themselves with bringing to light new historical narratives. Yet, as Jerome Frisk argues,

> The New western History is now lode enough to have a history. It has secured such stature (indeed, having arguably become the now dominant reading of the West) that many New Western historians have recently initiated a self-critical reassessment if the regulative metanarratives that structure the “new synthesis” the announced in 1987.

Recent scholarship proposes that previous notions, held by Frederick Jackson Turner and his earlier predecessors, are quite outdated. The New Western Historians argue that the West itself was and still is a complex place and subject. In order to fully understand the nature of its events and processes, we must further examine all of its events and agents. If this is the case for recent scholarship, how then are museums tackling such notions? The scholarship of the New Western

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33 See Tompkins, *West of Everything*.
Historians directly informed the museums discussed throughout this work. Changes in scholarship resulted in the reinterpretation of the history of the American West, as well as the idea of western heritage. However, these changes and interpretations fostered tension as well. They highlight the contradiction between history and mythology, yet both remain central aspects of heritage.

The history of the American West has become the topic for a great deal of both academic and vernacular production, in many cases of image and myth. Society is filled with examples ranging from scholarship and museum exhibits to films and video games related to the American West. However, oftentimes these representations are skewed. There exists a push to depict the fanciful, mythical, and even wild nature of the West within these historical reproductions. Historian Martha Norkunas states that “the creation of the past legitimizes contemporary personal, social and political circumstances.”34 The production or reproduction of history serves some need, be it political, economic, or social.

There exists a common tendency among humans to combine historical fact with historical fiction. For the public, there often lies a problem with confusing entertainment for authenticity. Through their chosen sources, most individuals, when obtaining historical knowledge, receive a simulacrum. Jean Baudrillard defines this phenomenon as hyperreality, or the conscious inability to discern between fact and fiction.35 The process of viewing history gives society an experience, and in many instances this experience fulfills a need or desire for recreation and enjoyment. As a result, the representation of history is a selective process. A museum board of directors or an exhibition designer might choose the final product of an exhibition. Similarly, a film company

decides the ultimate outcome of a Hollywood production. Regardless, the consumer or tourist often receives a “selected representation” of historical fact. As a result, the product is often accepted as an example of historical fact. Herein lies a problem.

**Historical Context and Issues**

Oftentimes, the general public receives its historical knowledge from popular venues rather than scholarly or academic sources. This is not to necessarily to say that the latter is always more reliable, as both offer historical representations. However, public venues often receive far less scrutiny than academic literature. In addition, such forms of information, specifically in the arenas of film or fictional literature, are not held to the same factual scrutiny to which academic historians must adhere. Therefore, one must seriously question the historical information presented to the public as a whole. In the past thirty years, historians have become increasingly interested in how people acquire their historical knowledge and beliefs. In the case of museums or monuments, similar problems exist as well. While a museum or monument may tell an accurate history of a specific event or time, the display may not tell an event’s entire history; inevitably, some aspect of history is left untold, as shown by, for example James Loewen in his book *Lies across America: What Our Historic Sites Get Wrong*, or *The Politics of Public Memory: Tourism, History, and Ethnicity in Monterey, California*, by Martha Norkunas. Many stories are left unheard through the construction of a museum exhibit or historical monument.

Similarly, in his work, *Written in Stone: Public Monuments and Changing Societies*, historian Sanford Levinson argues that, “All monuments are efforts, in their own way, to stop time.”36 Monuments provide physical reminders of the past. As Levinson argues, they become places for people to remember, commemorate, and heal. Yet, they also exist as products of their

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time. As our collective values change over time, so do the people and events we choose to commemorate and remember. This can lead to, for example, the misrepresentation or omission of specific groups.\textsuperscript{37} Monuments often tell us more about the times in which they were built, that what they serve to commemorate. This creates a tension in our understanding of history. The same situations often apply to museums.

In their work, \textit{Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life}, Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen provide copious evidence to support the fact that Americans in general are concerned with history. In 1994, the authors and their research staff interviewed a sampling of 1,453 individuals; 808 of whom were randomly selected Americans, and 645 African Americans, Native Americans, and Mexican Americans.\textsuperscript{38} The purpose of these oral interviews was to evaluate the importance of history to the general public. Significantly, the oral histories concluded that Americans do feel a strong connection to history.\textsuperscript{39}

However, the survey suggested that not all sources of historical information were considered trustworthy. When asked about sources of historical information, an overwhelming 79.9 percent of those individuals interviewed stated that museums were the most accurate or authentic source of historical information.\textsuperscript{40} Not surprisingly, movies and television ranked last on the list of credible sources. Yet academics and scholars ranked fourth on the scale of trustworthy sources. Thus, the general public largely views museums as a more reliable source of historical information than an academic professor.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Museums</td>
<td>79.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal accounts from grandparents or other relatives</td>
<td>68.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conversation with someone who was there (witness)</td>
<td>64.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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\textsuperscript{37} See Levinson, \textit{Written in Stone}.
\textsuperscript{39} Rosenzweig and Thelen, \textit{Presence of the Past}, 20.
\textsuperscript{40} Rosenzweig and Thelen, \textit{Presence of the Past}, 21.
College history professors  54.3%
High school teachers  35.5%
Nonfiction books  32.1%
Movies and television programs  11.0%

The survey itself made quite clear the notion that there exists a desire among Americans to understand and connect to the past. An understanding of the past allows an individual or group to better understand the present and help shape the future. Yet, overwhelmingly, participants regarded museums as the best form through which to achieve this understanding. Many believed that movies and television remain problematic and skew history. Numerous Native and Mexican American participants viewed popular culture versions of history, specifically the history of the American West as distorted or even “a gringo story.”

Similarly, there is a lack of trust when evaluating academic sources. Respondents noted that college professors and academics possess “freedom of choice.” College professors and academics have the ability to select not only their topics of inquiry but also their sources of documentation. In addition, several people interviewed noted that personal agendas come into play when academic history is concerned. This study is no exception.

As a result, the majority of the participants interviewed choose to receive their history from institutions such as museums. At a museum, an individual can come to one’s own conclusions about the past through personal participation. Yet, as Rozenzweig and Thelen explain, not all museums are regarded as trustworthy. As the authors note, Americans realize a difference between research-oriented museums, such as the National Museum of American History.

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42 Rosenzweig and Thelen, Presence of the Past, 66-8.
43 Rosenzweig and Thelen, Presence of the Past, 99.
44 Rosenzweig and Thelen, Presence of the Past, 102.
45 Rosenzweig and Thelen, Presence of the Past, 103-4.
History and entertainment-oriented museums, such as Ripley’s Believe It or Not. The American public is less concerned with national or patriotic narratives and much more interested in individual or group histories. Museum-goers are able and willing to draw distinctions between museums. As the survey indicated, the public is less concerned with national or patriotic narratives and much more interested in individual or group histories. They want museums to help them see themselves in the larger story. Overwhelmingly, participants felt that they could connect to the past through such institutions. Yet museums can be problematic as well. This is challenging for the case of the West, suggesting that the nearly 1,500 museums discussed by Victor Danilov face the task of educating the public on the history of the American West and linking them to the larger story, but some, perhaps many, may not be doing their job.

The history of the American West is a complex story of trappers, miners, farmers, Native Americans, women, minorities, and any number of other identities and categories, all of whom played vital roles in Winning the West. The notion of winning held different meanings for the various groups present throughout the landscape. For some it meant military or environmental conquest. In many instances this equated to dominance over nature or people. For others it meant exploitation, removal, or genocide. In other words, for every victory there is a rival, and consequently a conquered or defeated subject. As a result, it is no surprise that the history of the American West is one of a complex nature, and no one group alone is responsible for its production. However, is this larger, more complex story presented to society? We must ask ourselves, what history are we telling? I would argue that in the past thirty years, the re-examination of the history of the American West, along with the critical analysis of museums, monuments, and other public sites has become a fundamental piece of both the larger study of

46 Rosenzweig and Thelen, Presence of the Past, 108.
public history and the way in which people understand their past, present, and future. The effort attempted to tell a more inclusive story of the past. By incorporating historically ignored groups, the stories told provide a more accurate depiction of the history.

As Philip Burnham notes, the rise of new history, or social history in the 1960s, forced historians and museums alike to reevaluate their presented stories. The goal of new history was to include those groups, primarily minorities, previously excluded from the historical record.48 Throughout his work, *The Way the Other Half Lived: A People’s Guide to American Historic Sites*, Burnham analyzes the historical representation of minorities, such as women, blacks, Native Americans, and Asians, throughout various historical sites, such as plantations, missions, the home, and battlefields. He notes that many of America’s historic sites fail to accurately depict the histories of the nation’s many ethnic groups. Museums and historic sites served a collective desire to purge the landscape and its stories of controversial or unpopular portions of history, depending on who controls the storytelling.

Oftentimes their group histories are silenced, and those sites that do include such histories often skew their presentations. For example, as Burnham explains, two-thirds of the nation’s road markers discussing Native Americans deal with the topic of violence.49 In addition, many museums and historic sites fail to address potentially controversial topics. For example, Burnham notes that many of America’s railroad museums remain silent about such topics as violence, prostitution, mobs and militias, African American scab labor, or the hatred of the railroad by many farmers.50 Similarly, the former home of the Mormon faith, Historic Nauvoo, Illinois, silences a great deal as well. Nauvoo focuses primarily on the topic of persecution. Visitors see

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49 Burnham, *Other Half Lived*, 199.
50 Burnham, *Other Half Lived*, 181.
the story of community and how the Mormons were driven from their homes and forced to relocate in Utah. However, not only is there no mention of the topic of polygamy, guides are instructed to avoid discussing its existence completely.51

Public historians have asked similar questions. For example, Martha Norkunis, in her works Monuments and Memory and The Politics of Public Memory, and James Loewen, in his work Lies Across America, scrutinize public monuments and historical sites in relation to the role of public history. Historians such as Steven Lubar remain quite critical of historical representation as well. In Legacies, Lubar examines the Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of American History and the problems it faced over time concerning the exhibition of national history.

There is no doubt that museums have faced both public and academic assault. In 1991 the Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of American Art The West as America depicted the history of the American West through a large exhibition of paintings and sculptures. From March 15 through July 7, 1991, the exhibit displayed roughly one hundred years’ worth of western art, from 1820 through 1920. The exhibit sought to accurately represent the history of the American West through a visual representation. Yet many argued the presentation was problematic. Numerous critics contended that the exhibit was not accurate, as the artwork was exclusionary or imagined. Its romantic portrayal of the West strayed away from the notion of a continuously exploited landscape and peoples.

Simultaneously, the National Museum of American Art published The West as America: Reinterpreting Images of the Frontier, 1820-1920 as a compendium to the exhibition. Throughout its pages, contributing authors discussed the ways in which art is a product of the

51 Burnham, Other Half Lived, 132.
imagination and a tool of personal motivations and desires; an interpretation of physical reality. The work’s authors repeatedly note how artistic renderings of the American West provided a justification for the conquest of its land and people. Artistic images served as motivators, which sparked curious settlers to travel west. Additionally, art and artists warped reality. As author Julie Schimmel notes, “No sooner had the first representation of American Indians appeared on canvas than the question was raised as to whether or not it was accurate.” Artists drew upon and simultaneously recreated misconceptions of the indigenous peoples of the American West. Finally, much of western art depicts a nostalgic West. It implies that one can go see a wild frontier, regardless if such a land ever existed in the in the first place.

*America as West* aimed to present the American public with a lens through which to view its past; yet, that lens was distorted or blurred. As numerous critics argued, the exhibit failed to recognize that the art of the American West was a byproduct of the myth and symbolism that surrounded the very history it intended to depict. This is not to say that art in and of itself is useless. The exhibit did display a collection of some of the most acclaimed pieces of western art. Yet the failure of the exhibit lay in the exclusion of any discussion of myth, romanticism, nostalgia, and imagination.

However, as noted by Philip Burnham, correcting such issues is not always an easy task, especially in the case of sites operated by the National Park Service. Finite resources such as finances or the mindset of a museum staff often impede change. The power to create historic sites and appropriate funds is still held by Congress, not the National Park Service. As a result, this becomes a problem for ethnic and minority sites, and as Burnham notes, this problem is

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53 Truettner, *West as America*, 149.
54 See Truettner, *West as America*. 
quite visible in the American West, specifically the far west. The National Park Service is given sites to administer, but it still relies upon congressional support. Therefore, the National Park Service cannot simply create a historic site, nor can an existing site easily be altered. This requires congressional approval. Since ethnic groups constitute a small percentage of the national population, congressional approval for the creation ethnic or minority sites is not always easily acquired.

Burnham further argues that depicting social histories is an ironic task that is not easily achieved. As he explains, “Telling minority history is full of irony – in many cases the group involved was not a minority at all, whether in a local or regional sense.” As a result, many groups are missing from our public history, but it is difficult to find a way to retell our histories. The nature of many historic institutions slows the process of change in several ways. For Burnham, the inclusion of ethnic, minority, or uncomfortable histories remains problematic for several reasons. “First, many nonprofits are admission-driven, and therefore sensitive to the specialized public they serve, whether at Williamsburg or Plymouth Plantation. Not scaring away a middle-class audience (largely white) is uppermost in the minds of people responsible for interpretation.” In many cases museums and sites operate on admission fees. Administrators must ask whether or not a change in the exhibit would alter attendance. That is to ask, do people want their myths and preconceptions affirmed?

Secondly, every site has a mission or agenda. As Burnham notes, “… the independence of nonprofits is not to be confused with neutrality.” Oftentimes the institution's missions, as

55 Burnham, Other Half Lived, 194.
56 Burnham, Other Half Lived, 197.
57 Burnham, Other Half Lived, 213.
58 Burnham, Other Half Lived, 212.
59 Burnham, Other Half Lived, 212.
60 Burnham, Other Half Lived.
well as the missions of donors dictate a site’s final product. “Third, a reliance on corporate funding has made it hard to discuss elements that may be sensitive to sponsors, as in the case of railroad museums telling industrial history.”61 Today, many museums and sites, specifically major institutions, rely on corporate giving in order to keep their doors open. Corporate funders have no desire to attach their names to controversial issues, topics, or histories. It is unlikely, for example, that Americans will ever see the stories of African slavery or Native American genocide brought to them by Coca-Cola. Such a presentation could possibly spell disaster for the company. “Fourth, even sacred shrines – from Washington’s tomb to the chapel of the Alamo heroes – thrive on a whopping souvenir trade.”62 Nearly all historic sites and museums sell their histories to the public. Much like the cost of admission, souvenir sales fuel a museum or site’s livelihood. The institution then becomes a business faced with the task of supplying its visitor with a tangible, attractive product. Here, the museum or site again falls into the trap of authorizing many historical myths, such as selling authentic clothing and goods. It is in this instance that commercial America and popular culture step in and supply the visitor with a shopping mall of history.

Yet tourism remains vital for many communities in today’s society. Tourism and service industries generate revenues for communities and in some cases comprise the entire economic component for some communities.63 By marketing, promoting, and sometimes creating places of interest within a community, visitors supply revenue while creating a demand for tourism. This also creates a need for labor throughout the tourism industry.64 Tourism serves to foster

61 Burnham, Other Half Lived.
62 Burnham, Other Half Lived, 211.
64 Nykiel and Jascolt, Marketing Your City, 21.
community identity, and in many cases provides a medium through which a community can connect with its past. Yet, this dependence on tourism leaves a large impact or mark on society. In the case of historical tourism, issues of authenticity are frequently questioned. However, this is not the only issue found throughout communities reliant upon cultural tourism. As noted by Hal K. Rothman, tourism is a “devil’s bargain.” He continues by explaining that,

Tourism is the most colonial of colonial economies, not because of the sheer physical difficulty or the pain of humiliation intrinsic in its labor but because of its psychic and social impact on people and their places. Tourism and the social structure it provides transform locals into people who look like themselves but who act and believe differently as they learn to market their place and its, and their identity.

Tourism becomes a local economy in which local community members are no longer allowed to participate. Oftentimes its events and locales are for outsiders only. As Rothman notes, this is the “devil’s bargain”; the more successful tourism becomes, the more destructive it is to a community and its residents. Additionally, tourism can become so exclusive that only those of extreme wealth are allowed to enjoy its offerings. Tourism is not always the saving grace for which communities hope. As Hal Rothman explains, “Tourism typically fails to meet the expectations of communities and regions that embrace it as an economic strategy.”

Tourism is destructive in its very nature. Numerous examples of its impact can be seen almost everywhere throughout the American West. For example, in their book *The Last Gamble*, Katherine Jensen and Audie Blevins examine the rise of gambling in Rocky Mountain mining

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69 Rothman, *Devil’s Bargains*, 27.
70 Rothman, *Devil’s Bargains*, 5.
71 Wrobel and Long, *Seeing and Being Seen*. 
towns. The stories and legends associated with boomtowns and mining camps attract tourists to areas such as Deadwood, South Dakota. In order to increase revenue through tourism, one such example or solution is to legalize gambling. For example, in 1989, Deadwood legalized gambling, quickly followed by Central City and Cripple Creek, Colorado. These former mining camps had been suffering economically and sought the legalization of gambling as its solution for economic relief. However, as noted by Jensen and Blevins, this form of tourism was not without problems, such as addiction and criticism. Such solutions encourage gambling among those who can least afford it. Regardless of the tourist site, natural features and environmental places, man-made locales, sites of historical events, and places of curiosity, all tourist sites remain exploitative sites at some level.

The issue of authority and expertise remains a difficult and controversial topic among both historians and museums alike; opinions on the matter vary. This complicates issues if accuracy, authenticity, and heritage. In her work *Voices of a Thousand People: The Makah Cultural and Research Center*, Patricia Pierce Erikson argues that community histories should be conducted and addressed through an insider perspective. She argues that outsider research, such as the work conducted by anthropologists and oral historians, has been destructive to indigenous peoples. “Typically, Makah experience with anthropology has been give and take – Makah people have given incredible amounts of cultural knowledge, and the anthropologists have happily taken it with them in order to earn degrees and write esoteric papers.”

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75 In Erikson’s work she addresses the opening of the Makah Cultural and Research Center. See Patricia Pierce Erikson, *Voices of a Thousand People: The Makah Cultural and Research Center* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002).
76 Erikson, *Voices*, xi.
argues against the notion of the museum as a place to theorize about people. Rather, she supports the idea that people record their own stories and present their own histories.

Erikson argues that native peoples have been exploited for purposes of “nation building” since the point of contact. The idea of an outsider expert only advances this process of exploitation. To further complicate the issue, we must look at ownership of objects and knowledge. Several indigenous groups throughout the United States, Canada, and Mexico are challenging museums over ownership rights of objects. Finally, she argues that what anthropologists claim as “knowledge” oftentimes does not match the native version of “knowledge.” Therefore, she questions what really defines an expert. She argues that indigenous peoples become their own experts and tell their own histories.

Erikson’s argument claims that it is impossible for non-indigenous peoples to conduct research on indigenous peoples. The same argument can be made claiming the impossibility for whites to conduct African American history, or even that a modern historian could never conduct proper research on the nineteenth century American West. Yet others would argue with Erikson’s opinion. In his work *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History*, Michael Frisch argues that the issue is not one-sided. That is, through collaborative efforts richer histories may be told. He explains that memory differs from history, as memory remains “living history, the remembered past that exists in the present.” Thus, by combining this memory with history, a discourse of rediscovery emerges. Frisch argues that oral

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78 Erikson, *Voices*, 18.
79 Erikson, *Voices*, 27.
80 Erikson, *Voices*, 32.
81 Erikson, *Voices*, 54.
82 Erikson, *Voices*, 67.
84 Frisch, *A Shared Authority*, xxiii.
history functions both as a source of historical information and as a way to approach and interact with the past.\textsuperscript{85} Therefore, through oral history, both the informant and historian are empowered, granting both parties authority to history.\textsuperscript{86} Yet Frisch warns historians to treat such memories carefully, not as a “commodity whose supply they seek to replenish, whether by bringing down illuminating fire from elite heights or by gathering gold in mineshafts dug from the bottom up.”\textsuperscript{87}

Herein lies the problem with which museums, as well as an interpretive obstacle for this project, are faced. How do museums deal with issues of authority and knowledge? They must remain cautious when presenting knowledge or authentic versions of culture and people. Such representations can quickly become “hegemonic practices that reproduce the values and privileges of the center.”\textsuperscript{88} In 1987, through a collaborative effort organized by the American Association for State and Local History, historians and museologists argued that there is room for improvement among history exhibits.\textsuperscript{89} Throughout this study, several temporary, traveling, and permanent museum exhibits were evaluated. All of these exhibits focused on some facet of American history, and all dealt in some form with the issues of knowledge and authority.

Each exhibit faced its own difficulties regarding representation. For example, Alexander Price examines the exhibit in his essay \textit{From Victory to Freedom: Afro-American Life in the Fifties} at the National Afro-American Museum and Cultural Center in Wilberforce, Ohio. The exhibit sought to examine black history comprehensively. Throughout the planning phase, the exhibit team chose to focus on the decade of the 1950s, due to the landmark events of ending

\textsuperscript{85} Frisch, \textit{A Shared Authority}, 9.
\textsuperscript{86} Frisch, \textit{A Shared Authority}, 15.
\textsuperscript{87} Frisch, \textit{A Shared Authority}, 26.
segregation in the United States. Additionally, the exhibit intended to depict black history through a “celebratory approach.”

From its inception, the exhibit faced a number of issues such as funding and building up collections. Roughly 99 percent of the exhibit’s objects were donated. The planning team intended to acquire objects from across the country in order to more succinctly represent all African Americans. The largest example of conflict occurred between the museum staff and the design team. The museum staff, comprised largely of African American scholars wanted to depict a “profusion of objects,” while designers chose a more “orderly exhibit.” The outcome was a more “artifact rich show.” The museum wanted to show the complex nature of African American life throughout the United States. Yet this raises questions. Is a celebratory approach to representing culture an accurate depiction of people, and is it even possible to accurately represent the experiences had by all African Americans throughout the 1950s? Does highlighting famous people and their involvement in historical events create a sense of experience through which all people can see themselves?

The exhibit Hidatsa Indian Family: 1840-1920 faced similar issues. Author Peter H. Welsh explains that in 1982, the Minnesota Historical Society chose to develop a traveling exhibit focused on two generations of a Hidatsa family. The exhibit sought to challenge assimilationist views of Native American history, arguing that culture, values, and belief systems still matter in modern times. The exhibition programmer Nicholas Westbrook, who studied under Henry Glassie, argued that the project required a new approach, the involvement of native

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90 Ames, Franco, and Frye, Images and Ideas, 9-11.
91 Ames, Franco, and Frye, Images and Ideas, 11.
93 Ames, Franco, and Frye, Images and Ideas, 18.
94 Ames, Franco, and Frye, Images and Ideas
95 Ames, Franco, and Frye, Images and Ideas, 31-46.
96 Ames, Franco, and Frye, Images and Ideas, 32.
people. While the complex exhibit was largely a success, it did face some criticism. Many Native Americans questioned why the exhibit did not focus on their own culture. The exhibit also idealized the Hidatsa family, and the use of one family created jealousy among other Natives. Again, this example forces us to question whether or not the depiction of one family accurately represents the entire Hidatsa culture.

The case of the Museum of International Folk Art in New Mexico differs slightly. As Michael Heasley explains, the museum initiated a project to recognize its Hispanic population through an exhibition on culture. The exhibition process began in 1985 with the goal of exhibiting traditional culture and to show its change over time. From the start the museum staff wanted to depict Hispanic culture in a respectful manner, but also incorporate community involvement. The project team brought in Helen Lucero as the exhibit’s guest curator and established an advisory committee comprised of Hispanics living in both Mexico and New Mexico. Moreover, the project staff continuously consulted the general community regarding design and exhibition. Differing opinions plagued the project from its inception. The community did not like the design of the exhibit, and by incorporating community concerns, the project staff faced conflicting information. Additionally, the staff conflicted with the design team over issues of cultural and historical accuracy. Finally, as a guest curator, Helen Lucero became the de facto “spokesperson for an entire ethnic group,” causing further conflict by creating divisions within community groups and the institution.

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The final exhibit, *The Hispanic Heritage Wing: Familia y Fe*, was housed in two divided locations. The past and present were represented in two separate spaces, confusing this idea of change over time.\(^{104}\) Despite its intent to incorporate the concerns and visions of several varied groups, the institution lacked the required space to form a cohesive exhibition in one location.\(^{105}\) The exhibit serves as an example of the difficulties associated with the issues of expertise, authority, and interaction.

In 1988, the Museum of Our National Heritage developed an exhibition dedicated to the depiction of folklore and folk life throughout American history. The exhibit *Folks Roots, New Roots: Folklore in American Life* aimed to represent folk history from 1880 to the present. The exhibit itself contained seven thematic and chronological sections. It depicted “Romantic Visions,” such as Buffalo Bill and the stoic Indian; “Social and Aesthetic Reform,” including Appalachia; “Cultural Nationalism,” examining the 1920s; “The Common Man,” dedicated to the New Deal, and such individuals as Dorthea Lange and Woody Guthrie; “Consumerism and Mass Media,” examining America’s obsession with such popular versions of cowboy culture as Gene Autry, Tom Mix, Tonto, and the Lone Ranger; “Grass Roots and the Folk Revival,” which displayed a 1960s or 1970s hippie sitting room; and finally “Community Roots,” a section encouraging the visitor to detail his or her own folklore.\(^{106}\)

However, as Mary Ellen Hayward notes, the ultimate goal was to show a “larger cultural picture of history.”\(^{107}\) Yet the exhibits were comprised of images and objects such as album covers or Lone Ranger lunchboxes.\(^{108}\) This serves to also limit the history displayed to the

\(^{104}\) Ames, Franco, and Frye, *Images and Ideas*, 94.
public. Instead of a historically driven exhibit, visitors were presented with pieces of nostalgia. The outcome was more popular culture than historical presentation. Furthermore, the lack of scholarly explanation skews the images of history presented throughout the exhibit. The exhibit depicts the romantic or stoic Indian, a romantic and Wild West, the quaint or sad depression, and the drug-fueled 1960s.109

Such representations are misleading and even dangerous. For example, as Hayward explains, the Works Progress Administration, “photographed poverty, not the quaintness of folk traditions.”110 Romantic and celebratory representations of history oftentimes “disconnect with the academic side.”111 Without historical context, such representations present visitors with nostalgic images and objects, leading them to believe that such exhibits represent an entire culture or generation, despite the fact that not everyone in the 1960s was a hippie, not all children owned a Lone Ranger lunchbox, and that the music of Woody Guthrie did not necessarily represent all people throughout the Great Depression.

Interaction is required when the decision is made to represent culture. As seen through the situation faced by the Museum of International Folk Art, Helen Lucero was faced with the difficult and even impossible task of speaking for an entire culture. Ethically, the correct decision was made to consult the Hispanic community regarding the exhibit’s outcome. Yet, as seen by the outcome of the exhibit, such consultation creates difficulties as well. For example, while African Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans, and Hispanic Americans may very well be experts and authority figures on their own histories and cultures, do the opinions of

110 Ames, Franco, and Frye, Images and Ideas, 133.
111 Ames, Franco, and Frye, Images and Ideas, 134.
individuals or even advisory groups accurately represent entire cultures of people? Additionally, who remains the final authority when the public depiction of culture is at stake?

Cultural groups may be authority figures on their own histories, but are they authorities and knowledge keepers of public history, or museum display? It is unlikely that they are able to contextualize themselves within a larger narrative. All of the questions and juxtapositions remain problematic for the museum and historical worlds. Without interaction and mutual input an exhibit dangerously approaches a narrow, confusing, celebratory, or even hegemonic dialogue of history and culture. Yet, if the process of mutual input and interaction among community, the museum staff, and scholars runs too broadly, the exhibition spins out of control. The task is to develop a well-rounded balance of expertise and authority.112

Problematic exhibits such as *America as West* sparked public historians to examine exactly what it is our public institutions prescribe as factual history. Public history initiatives not only critically analyzed museums, monuments, and sites throughout society, but altered the preservation and exhibition processes themselves. As public trusts, these institutions serve as not only caretakers of history, but they are placed in positions of acting as leading authorities on local and national histories.

**Methodology and Theory**

In Victor J. Danilov’s *Museums and Historic Sites of the American West*, he states that by 2002, the United States housed nearly 1,500 historic sites and museums focusing on the American West. These museums and sites are found scattered throughout thirty-eight states and the District of Columbia.113 It is reasonable to assume that museums and historic sites offer a

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more authentic and reliable version of the West than versions found throughout popular culture, such as films, television programs, or popular music. This dissertation explores the messages some of the many museums communicate to visitors regarding the West. How do such museums depict the history of the American West? Are museum presentations based on recent scholarly publications, or do their own researchers develop other interpretations? Finally, what connections exist between those who are developing and dismantling information about the American West? What version of history is the populous holding as truth? Who decides the ultimate outcome of the historical representation at leading museums and historical societies devoted to the history of the American West?

In *Defining Memory Local Museums and the Construction of History in America’s Changing Communities*, Amy K. Levine looks at such issues. The collection of essays that comprise her text all examine the ways in which people embrace history in our modern world. However, her text also serves as a warning. The public display or representation of history cannot and should not be taken simply at face value. One such essay written by Jay Price looks at a problematic example. In “The Small Town We Never Were: Old Cowtown Faces the Urban Past,” Price discusses Old Cowtown Museum, a living history museum in Wichita, Kansas, which is located less than one mile from the town’s original site. According to Price, Cowtown’s visitors are presented with a recreated frontier town consisting of buildings that were either newly made or relocated from Wichita’s downtown area. “In many ways, Cowtown looks strikingly similar to the sets of Little House on the Prairie or Gunsmoke. Visitors assume they are at the original town site instead of at a collection of buildings assembled in the

115 Levine, *Defining Memory*, 97.
1950s.”

Old Cowtown places the visitor in a recreated past. The site serves as a place in which the visitor is moved to think of himself or herself being transplanted to another place and time. The museum conveys the notion that Wichita started out small and grew slowly over time; a misconception, as Price notes. While Old Cowtown attempts to recreate Wichita’s early history, the museum’s story is flawed. Wichita was a boomtown, and like most boomtowns, Price argues, “Wichita was never a small town in the Jeffersonian, agrarian sense.”

Old Cowtown was created from a sense and drive to preserve Wichita’s built environment. The vision to create Old Cowtown came from Victor Murdock and Richard “Dick” Long of Wichita Eagle, both of whom were deeply interested in Wichita’s early history. According to Price, in the early 1940s Murdock set out to save Wichita’s oldest church. With Long’s help, Murdock began efforts to save the structure. He continues by noting that Murdock made Long “promise to continue the effort to save the building if he died.” Murdock did in fact pass away before the preservation was complete, and Long acquired the building in 1945. After an argument over the use of public funds, Long and other citizens formed Historic Wichita, Inc., in to preserve the church and create a museum. The preservation effort was underway, and shortly thereafter, through local support and interest, the organization acquired the first jail, as well as the log cabin of Darius Munger, an early resident of the community. In 1952, Historic Wichita subleased twenty-three acres of land from the city of Wichita, moved the buildings to the newly acquired location, and opened to the public in 1953.

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116 Levine, Defining Memory, 97-8.
117 Levine, Defining Memory, 98.
118 Levine, Defining Memory,
119 Levine, Defining Memory, 99-100
120 Levine, Defining Memory, 100
121 Levine, Defining Memory,
Price explains that, at an early stage as Long later recalled, Historic Wichita set out to “go ahead and restore 20 to 30 buildings which were part of Wichita during the Cowtown period of community, from 1870 to 1880.” Additionally, he notes that Historic Wichita encouraged citizens to actively participate and sponsor the construction of replica buildings of the historic period. Fueled from the popularity of Western film and western popular culture, Cowtown found its place in the West. Price explains that, “By then, the Wichita Chamber of Commerce boasted that ‘Cow Town’ authentically depicts the roaring cowboy era of 1869-84.” While Historic Wichita’s preservation efforts saved a number of historical places while also managing to construct a stereotypical representation of a frontier town, they failed to create what they boasted – an authentic depiction of Wichita.

Price explains that as the status of the Wild West faded from the popular spotlight, so did the interest in Old Cowtown. Its place among both the historic and vernacular landscape became lost. He notes that,

By the late 1970s, as the cost of operating and maintaining the facility went up, the city encouraged Historic Wichita to seek financial assistance from Sedgwick Country. The country agreed to help with the museum’s staffing crisis by placing several positions on its payroll. This resulted in a reshaping of the main organization into “Historic Wichita Sedgwick Country, Inc.” Now the museum also had to tell the story of Sedgwick Country, which did have a more rural, agricultural character than “born-booming” Wichita.

Over the next two decades the site, now renamed Old Cowtown Museum, was forced to redefine itself and its mission. In the 1990s, after years of work, the museum was accredited by the American Association of Museums and lauded as a quality living history museum.

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125 Levine, *Defining Memory*, 103.
Like many other similar institutions, Old Cowtown serves as an example of its founders’ intention to preserve the visible, tangible history from which communities identify themselves. Yet, such sites deliver confusing messages. As Price notes,

Cowtown continues to struggle with reconciling several different, even conflicting visions of the past. While the museum’s basic theme has centered on 1870s Wichita, the history that appears to today’s visitor is really an amalgam of several different versions of the past.\(^{126}\)

He continues by noting, “Most institutions emerge as compromises between the ideals of the founders, visions of later staff and supporters, and the reality of local resources.”\(^{127}\) While Cowtown may serve as an example of conflicting or confused agendas, the depiction of such histories has an impact on the visitor. Labels such as “authentic” or “accurate” when placed upon history museums and sites convey the message that such sites give visitors and accurate an authentic lens through which they can experience the past.

Museums and public history sites are vital for communities. They should help local residents research, document, and interpret their own history. Museums should foster a sense of belonging and identity within one’s community. Arguments such as those posed by Erikson are not sympathetic to the visitor, as they do not account for the desire or need of an individual to share an experience rather than exploit history. Thus, accurate representations of history within museums remain vital to communities, as they serve as conduits for education and identity. Much like the story of Old Cowtown, the history of an institution largely accounts for its current presentations of exhibits and our history.

This dissertation critically analyzes four museums that depict the history of the American West. Throughout this I work I examine the Museum of the Westward Expansion, found in the

\(^{126}\) Levine, *Defining Memory*, 104.
\(^{127}\) Levine, *Defining Memory*, 106.
Jefferson National Expansion Memorial in St. Louis, Missouri; the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; the Buffalo Bill Historical Center in Cody, Wyoming; and finally, the Autry National Center in Los Angeles, California. These four institutions have been the topic of other scholarly work as well. In the case of each museum there exists a variety of literature, from institutional histories to guidebooks. Additionally, each institution was founded with a specific purpose or goal. Historical events and figures such as Lewis and Clark, rodeo, the National Park Service, Buffalo Bill, and Gene Autry are all topics of scholarly endeavors and debate. Keeping in mind the long and scattered histories of the American West, western popular culture, and America’s history of preservation, it should be of little surprise that each of the four case studies in this dissertation has a unique place in our larger national history.

The methodology for conducting this investigation is threefold. In the first section, I establish a historical record of each institution from their inceptions to the time of my research. In doing so, I give an account of the initiatives and motivations behind the creation of each institution, and the goals and missions of how each chose to preserve and depict the history of the American West. Next, the second section critically examines the exhibitions found within each institution. This section identifies the historical arguments and themes presented by the institution. It analyzes the stories held within each institution, and what they see as the history of the American West. The final section explores the place and role of each institution within the contemporary West. Section Three examines the ways in which each institution fits into the larger place of the American West, and how the serve as places of community. Through this analysis I hope to more clearly examine the involvement between academics, public historians, and museums; the relationships between museums and corporations; and explore the fascination
with the Wild West. The sources utilized for this work primarily include two forms: oral histories and archival evidence. During the course of my research I spent roughly three years gathering and analyzing documents from each museum’s institutional archives. Additionally, I conducted thirty-four oral history interviews with staff members from each of the four case studies.

The four selected museums are among the largest western heritage museums in the United States. By definition heritage museums present a broad history of a region and its people. According to Danilov, “Many Museums have collections and exhibits pertaining to fur traders, explorers, pioneers, cowboys, Indians, and other aspects of the frontier period, but relatively few give as broad a perspective as western heritage museums.”128 Additionally, three of the museums – the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, the Autry National Center, and the Buffalo Bill Historical Center – belong to the Museums West Consortium. According to the organization’s mission statement,

Museums West is a consortium of collegial institutions organized for the purpose of developing and expanding awareness and appreciation of the North American West. Through joint efforts of its members, Museum West Shall explore opportunities and initiatives to study, exhibit, publish, interpret, and otherwise advance the region’s art, history, and culture for the benefit of diverse audiences.129

The fourth museum, the Museum of Westward Expansion, falls under the supervision and administration of the National Park Service.

Each museum aims to depict the history of the American West through broad narratives rather than local or regional facets topics. Due to the nature of western heritage museums, one can expect to see a much more inclusive explanation of the history of the American West. At the same time, however, each museum embraces mythological and romantic aspects of the West.

128 Danilov, Museums and Historic Sites of the American West, 9.
129 Museums West Consortium, “The Western Museums of North America.” http://www.museumswest.org/. I am currently in the process of further researching this organization.
The duality between history and myth continues to foster tension. They depict the history of the American West while simultaneously replicating its mythology. In a museum setting, this could encourage visitors to consume all the information presented as accurate representations of western history. Additionally, it reinforces any preconceived beliefs and myths held by the visitor. In addition, the museums selected for this dissertation are geographically scattered throughout the American West. Rather than selecting museums from one state or region, I chose to examine a wide variety of institutions. As a result, case studies provide varied representations of the American West. However, many of the stories told throughout the institutions also mirror, if not match, one another.

Yet nowhere throughout this work do I rank the institutions in order of “success.” It is not my intention, nor do I argue that it is possible, to place one above another. Of the four institutions, no particular one stands out as being the best in its class. I organize the institutions in such a manner that they will show fundamental changes in the museum world. Each of the four case studies underwent significant institutional changes over the course of this study. This work is organized in a way that follows each institution through what I see as a larger process of change with which today all museums, not just western museums, are faced. With that in mind, this work provides a record of each institution as a facet of the larger, continuing history of the American West. Also, it is mere coincidence that the four case studies here are arranged in an east to west fashion according to their individual geographic locations.

Finally, while this work focuses on western heritage museums and the history of the American West, its methods of evaluations and the questions it asks are applicable to the larger studies of American history, museum studies, and public history. Today, all museums face issues of institutional survival. They increasingly compete for their visitor’s entertainment and are
challenged with the mission of providing interesting, meaningful, and educational exhibits and programs to their audiences. Additionally, museums struggle with the task of attracting new audiences in a world of changing technologies and interests. As a result, each institution is shaped by the ways in which we approach our national history as well as our shared future. The four case studies for this work have all been shaped by the history of the West, popular culture, and public history initiatives. Each institution was created with the broad mission of displaying the wide-ranging history or heritage of the American West. While the various institutions were founded with different motivations and agendas, the one constant remains that the history of the American West is a vital part of their existence.
THE WEST AS PLACE
In St. Louis, Missouri, along the banks of the Mississippi River, stands one of our nation’s great monuments, the Gateway Arch. St. Louis, founded in 1764, is often referred to as the gateway to the West. Throughout the nineteenth century, thousands of immigrants traveled through this region on the way to their final destinations in the West. The St. Louis Arch serves as a memorial to those men and women who journeyed West and created a national history.

Structurally, the Gateway Arch is a striking feature on St. Louis’s riverfront landscape. However, it is one facet of a much larger memorial, the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial, founded and operated by the National Park Service.

The St. Louis Arch served as the cornerstone for the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial, which was to also encompass the old St. Louis Courthouse, where the famous Dred Scott case was held, and the Museum of Westward Expansion, all under the control of the National Park Service. The intent of the memorial park was to celebrate and remember Jefferson’s influence in the opening of the West and his role in the Louisiana Purchase; the pioneers who shaped the history of both our nation history and the West; and Dred Scott, who sued for his freedom from slavery.

The National Park service was established through an act of Congress on August 25, 1916. The mission of the National Park Service states that, …The service thus established shall promote and regulate the use of the Federal areas known as national parks, monuments, and reservations hereinafter specified by such means and measures as conform to the fundamental purpose of the said parks, monuments, and reservations, which purpose is to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the
enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.¹

The history of the Jefferson National Expansion memorial holds a unique place in the history of the National Park Service. “It was the first urban National Park Service area to be created outside of Washington, D.C., and the first area designated under the Historic Sites Act of 1935.”² The original preservation effort for the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial was led by Luther Ely Smith, a prominent St. Louis lawyer. Smith realized that the city of St. Louis was in dire need of restorative and preservation projects in order to revitalize the city’s landscape. Smith proposed the idea of a monument to Mayor Bernard Dickmann. Over the next several months civic leaders raised money and support for the project that would preserve the rich history of St. Louis.³ Historian Sharon Brown writes that President Franklin D. Roosevelt was enthusiastic about the idea and said,

I am greatly interested in the suggestion for the Jefferson National expansion Memorial for the St. Louis Riverfront…I can…tell you that I like the principle underlying the thought of a memorial to the vision of Thomas Jefferson and the pioneers in opening up the Great West.⁴

In 1934 the city received a state charter for the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial Association, granting the project nonprofit status. Early on, the Memorial Association’s vision aimed to honor early explorers such as Lewis and Clark, territorial expansion, and the lives of those individuals involved with the opening of the West.⁵

⁴ Brown, Administrative History, 1.
⁵ Brown, Administrative History
It was estimated that construction of the memorial would cost more than $30 million—an astronomical amount during the Great Depression. Over the next several months a great deal of debate ensued throughout government. Brown notes that Roosevelt remained skeptical that federal funds could cover the entirety of the effort, yet there was some money available to help defray the cost of construction. On June 15, 1934, President Roosevelt signed the bill that created the United States Territorial Expansion Memorial Commission.

Despite continued debate over finance and bond concerns, a litany of legal issues, such as land acquisition, and varied opinions over the general project, plans moved forward with a great deal of support. Then on August 21, 1935 President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed what became known as the Historic Sites Act. The act grants federal power for the preservation of “historic sites, buildings, and objects of national significance for the inspiration and benefit of the people of the United States.” Additional, the act provided the National Park service the power to oversee such affairs and executing policy.

The Historic Preservation Act is a landmark piece of legislation in the history of American preservation movements. However, its spirit directly affected the Jefferson National Expansion memorial in a fundamental way. The act provided President Roosevelt and the National Park Service the power to designate the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial as a worthy cause, and allocate funds for the preservation effort. On December 21, 1935, Roosevelt issued an executive order that served as the enabling legislation for the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial. The order states that the Secretary of the Interior found the project worthy of preservation and important to the nation.

6 Brown, Administrative History, 6.
7 Brown, Administrative History, vi-vii.
9 49 Stat. 666.
WHEREAS the Secretary of the Interior through the National Park Service has determined that certain lands situate on the west bank of the Mississippi River at the near end of the old St. Louis, Missouri, possess exceptional value as commemorating or illustrating the history of the United States and are a historic site within the meaning of the said act, since thereon were situate: the Spanish Colonial office where, during the administration of Thomas Jefferson, third President of the United States, all the first territory comprised in the Upper Louisiana Purchase was transferred to the United States; the Government House at which, on March 9, 1804, Charles Dehault Delassus, the Spanish commandant in St. Louis, transferred possession of Upper Louisiana to Captain Amos Stoddard of the United States Army, who had been delegated by France as its representative, and at which, on the morning of March 10, 1804, Captain Stoddard, as agent of the United States took formal possession of the Louisiana Purchase and raised the American flag, by reason of which transactions the Spanish, French, and American flags waved successively over the site within a period of twenty-four hours; the old French Cathedral of St. Louis, earliest home of religion on the western bank of the Mississippi; the place where Laclede and Chouteau established the first civil government west of the Mississippi; the place where Lafayette was received by graceful people; the places where Santa Fe, the Oregon, and other trails originated; the place where Lewis and Clark prepared for their trip of discovery and exploration; and the Court House in which Dred Scott was tried…

The order not only gave authority to the preservation effort, it justified the memorials existence. It also outlined the memorial’s scope, which would include the land on the bank of the Mississippi River designated as the future site of a monument, the French Cathedral, and the St. Louis Court House.

The legislation also included provisions for funding the project. It stated that the city of St. Louis would provide $2,250,000 to fund the project. Additionally, Roosevelt argued that the project would create jobs in a time of economic need. Through the Emergency Relief Appropriations Act of 1935, Roosevelt allocated an additional $6,750,000 of Works Progress Administration funds to the Secretary of the Interior for development of the site. The project came about during the nation’s Great Depression, but it provided jobs and work relief for

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11 Roosevelt, Executive Order 7523
thousands of St. Louis area residents. Yet, construction of the site would not begin for some time. As Sharon Brown states, “Only in 1939 did the first building fall before the bulldozer, making way for Thomas Jefferson’s memorial.” Not until 1940 did the government receive title to the entire property; thirty-seven blocks designated for the memorial park. In the meantime, fundraising efforts for the project would continue.

Jefferson National Expansion Memorial Historian Bob Moore notes that from the beginning, plans for the memorial always included a museum.

They knew they could build this thing, and they also knew that they wanted a museum. It was always part of the plan; that there would be a museum to interpret westward expansion, and interpret St. Louis’ role in westward expansion. So, early on; the museum, there were just plans for what the buildings to hold the museum would be. But, then in the 1930s, when Charles Peterson worked here, who I’m sure you know was the founder of the American Historic Buildings Survey; he was kind of the lead historian here and he came up with the concept for museums. There actually were going to be two of them.

Moore explains that the original plan was to construct two museums: one dedicated to the fur trade, and a second museum devoted to memorializing architecture, specifically St. Louis architecture. Carl P. Russell, chief naturalist of the National Park Service, proposed that the Museum of the Fur Trade would cover the early fur trade in the American West and also honor Thomas Jefferson’s role in the Louisiana Purchase. Additionally, Charles Peterson proposed the restoration of the Old Courthouse.

Due to a variety of legal and financial issues, very little development took place between 1939 and 1950. Demolition was a cumbersome process and fundraising was slow.

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14 Brown, *Administrative History* Appendix D, xxv.
16 Moore, interview.
Additionally, the question of the memorial’s design still remained unanswered. To address that, plans were set in 1946 for a nationwide architectural competition for the memorial’s design. George Howe, advisor for the competition, stipulated that the design should follow modern architectural styles. As Sharon Brown explains,

> The competition jury was composed of seven prominent architects selected by the association. The jury’s deliberations, scheduled to take four days in the first stage of competition and two days in the second, centered on the response of the entries to the site, and the intent.\(^\text{19}\)

In all, 172 entries were submitted, covering a variety of styles and techniques. Over a period of four days the jury narrowed down the selection to five candidates. During the second stage, the jury needed to consider practical issues such as traffic and neighboring buildings, in addition to more theoretical questions such as symbolism and meaning.\(^\text{20}\)

Unanimously, the jury chose the submission by Eero Saarinen of Saarinen, Saarinen and Associates of Bloomfield Hills, Michigan. On February 18, 1848 the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial Association held an elaborate, celebratory dinner to honor Saarinen and his design.\(^\text{21}\) At the time, Saarinen and his father Eliel were two of the most widely known and well-respected architects in the country. However, the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial offered Eero Saarinen an opportunity to create a structure independently. Saarinen’s modern design was groundbreaking. Brown explains that,

> Eero Saarinen’s major idea was to search for a simple, basic form as the centerpiece of the design. He wanted to create a monument that would have lasting significance and would be a landmark. He considered several basic shapes, including an open vaulted structure, and a three-legged dome; but after visiting the St. Louis site he decided neither obelisks nor domes seemed right. Eventually, the initial concept of a three-legged dome evolved into a two-legged arch.\(^\text{22}\)

\(^{19}\) Brown, *Administrative History*, 84.  
\(^{20}\) Brown, *Administrative History*, 84.  
\(^{21}\) Brown, *Administrative History*, 84-5.  
\(^{22}\) Brown, *Administrative History*, 85.
Saarinen’s memorial connected together the various aspects of the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial. It literally served as a gateway to the West. William Everhart, historian for the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial from 1959 to 1962, notes, “And as Eero would say, he was trying to design a structure that would seem to be “leaping up out of the ground, rather than squatting down.”” The memorial ushered travelers across the Mississippi River. Additionally, the plan included museum space directly below the monument—an underground museum.

Saarinen’s original plan was altered slightly over the years, and in 1957 he redesigned his plan to include the 630-foot stainless steel arch, a ninety-one-acre open-air mall, and two large staircases leading visitors downward into the museum. By the end of 1948 there was a definitive plan for the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial. The project could now move into its construction phase. In 1949, as Brown notes, the Army Corps of Engineers started construction on the memorial’s base and foundation. On June 10, 1950, President Harry S. Truman opened the dedication for the Jefferson National expansion Memorial. Over the next decade financial and legal issues continuously plagued construction of the memorial. The project proved to be extraordinarily costly.

On February 1, 1959, George B. Hartzog, Jr., took over as superintendent of the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial. Hartzog stated that upon his arrival to the park, the entire project seemed chaotic. His first action was to simply clean up the entire area. Finally, on June 23, 1959, a groundbreaking ceremony took place and memorial construction began. Hartzog

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24 Brown, Administrative History, 85.
25 Brown, Administrative History, 94.
26 Brown, Administrative History, 99.
27 Hartzog replaced Julian Spotts, who served as the initial superintendent for the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial.
28 George B. Hartzog, Jr., interview by Bob Moore, October 25, 1994.
29 Brown, Administrative History, 123.
administered the bulk of the memorial’s construction. By 1959, designs for a museum and visitor’s center were underway as well. The museum would be the largest of the National Park Service’s operations. In 1959, Hartzog and William Everhart, the memorial historian, began development of programmatic planning. They agreed that a museum and interpretational center were vital components to the overall memorial. Kathryn Thomas, curator for the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial, explained that the inclusion of a museum was a fundamental aspect in the conveyance of the memorial’s overall themes and stories to the visitor. “The Arch works as a symbol, but the museum really explained why the Arch was built to symbolize, and what it is symbolizing. So, I think it’s a primary educational interpretive component in the park in terms of actually carrying out our park mission of interpreting history.”

In 1962, the museum staff produced an interpretive document, outlining the museum’s direction. The exhibits would revolve around four major themes: land, the people who traveled West, the acquisition of land, and the larger meaning and significance of westward movements. As Moore explained,

Our original themes were very Turnarian; I mean, harkening back to Frederick Jackson Turner and his Frontier Thesis, and I think the people in the 1930s who set the park up, that was their primary thought and goal. It was a heroic, movement that went from East to West, of people who passed through this area, and some settled here, some set up businesses that helped to promote and continue the further peopling of the West, as Turner would have looked at…Simultaneously, they held up Thomas Jefferson as being the exemplar of this era and of the movement; the person who enabled the movement by approving the Louisiana Purchase and encouraging that, and encouraging the exploration of the West through Lewis and Clark.”

30 Kathryn Thomas, interview by the author, March 5, 2008, 3.
32 Moore, interview by the author. 1-2.
Sharon Brown notes that at this time the staff acquired some of the first pieces of the museum’s collections. “The staff acquired artifacts that they catalogued and cleaned. Among the acquisitions were a chuck wagon and an original bronze casting of the “Bronco Buster” by Frederic Remington.” While the museum staff began acquiring artifacts, the first piece of the Arch was set in place on February 12, 1963. On October 28, 1965, the last stainless-steel section of the memorial was set in place. Crowds watched on as the exterior structure of the arch was made complete. The visitor’s space took shape as well.

Bob Moore explained that the National Park Service faced the dilemma of exhibit design. Arguably, the memorial housed a very nontraditional, cutting-edge monument. As a result, the National Park Service approached acclaimed designers Charles and Raymond Eames to draft a plan for a nontraditional museum. Charles Eames was friends with Aero Saarinen, and the two had worked together in the past. According to Moore, the two presented a film to the National Park Service Director Conrad Worth and other park officials. The presentation was not well received, and the Park Service chose to go in a different direction. As Moore explained, this fact was unfortunate, because the memorial could have included a Saarinen monument with a Charles and Ray Eames museum. Had this occurred, the museum itself would act as an artifact. He said that, “We could never look at the museum and say we’re going to renovate it or modernize it.” However, this was not the case, and the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial administrators were forced to look for other options.

33 Brown, Administrative History, 133.
34 Brown, Administrative History, 135.
36 Moore, interview by the author, 4.
37 Moore, interview by the author. 4.
In 1964, George Hartzog became director of the National Park Service. William Everhart had moved on as well and in 1970 became the director of the Harper’s Ferry Center. Both individuals continued to argue for a nontraditional museum. They approached Aram Mardirosian, who had previously collaborated with the Park Service, as well as Saarinen, on various projects. However, Mardirosian had never before designed a museum. In 1971, the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial Association met with Aram Mardirosian, chief designer of the Potomac Group, and appointed him chief architect and designer for the Museum of Westward Expansion. Design and space became Mardirosian’s chief concerns. From the start, Mardirosian faced the task of designing a museum in a space roughly the size of a football field. In that space he would need to design exhibits that would clearly depict the history of the American West to its audience.

Aside from creating order in the empty space, Mardirosian was faced with a range of variables. He was concerned with visitor needs. How would the visitor’s needs be met in relation to the physical space of the complex? Additionally, he was concerned with the intersection between the goals of the Park Service in relation to the visitor’s experience. Could the Park Service achieve its mission in the provided space while offering the public a worthwhile experience? Finally, could the product work, continue to work in the future, and remain easily maintainable? With these questions in mind, Mardirosian started the task of constructing a museum. He began by carefully reviewing the Park Services storyline. He reviewed the provided historical information and produced a number of concepts. He notes, “So in a sense we created a

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39 Moore, interview by the author, 4.
40 Brown, Administrative History, 170.
41 Aram Mardirosian, interview by, Bob Moore, 4.
42 Mardirosian, interview by Bob Moore, 4.
library in that concept, if you look at it.”43 His concern, however, was how all of the various concepts and stories fit together.

The story would largely focus on the history of Westward Expansion from the years 1803-1903. Its various elements would focus on Lewis and Clark, Thomas Jefferson’s role in the history of the American West, the lives of those individuals involved in its making, and the historical relationship of all involved elements.44 Mardirosian viewed the project as a landscape, realizing that land played a crucial role in the overall story. “So, in a sense the museum becomes a landscape, which is what it is; the change of landscape vertically [with steps and platforms] is both to suggest landscape and to provide interest, architectural interest.”45

Mardirosian chose two defining principles for his design. First, the museum itself would consist of one massive circular room. He explained that the spherical design allows the visitor to approach the exhibits in several ways. That is to say, there is no specific beginning and end. Through this, Mardirosian hoped to show the various interconnections of the history housed within the museum.46 In order to emphasize this notion, decade rings were constructed on the museum’s ceiling. He took a physical, historical timeline, broke it into sections, and then wrapped the various sections into rings. He referred to these rings as “horizon lines.”47 When the visitor enters the room, the various decade rings remain visible and give the appearance that one is not only viewing a physical horizon, but, as Mardirosian explained, the theoretical horizon of history. The rings, again, allow for the visitor to view the connection and overlap of historical events and topics. The circular design serves an additional purpose as well, that of security.

43 Mardirosian, interview by Bob Moore, 4.
44 Mardirosian, interview by Bob Moore, 6.
45 Mardirosian, interview by Bob Moore, 6.
46 Mardirosian, interview by Bob Moore, 10.
47 Mardirosian, interview by Bob Moore, 14.
In his second critical decision, Mardirosian chose to design the exhibits with almost no barriers between the objects and the visitor. Through this, his intention was for the visitor to almost literally connect to the object.

The idea was if you could provide the subtle security – making it inviting to let people – trust people, so to speak – that you would get the proper response. I know museums have become more and more concerned about security and vandalism, and the like; but the Park Service was willing to gamble on this, because it seemed like the more democratic, the right thing to do, to not separate things behind glass and so on.

He intended to lift physical barriers from the exhibit with the hope that it would remove learning barriers. He wanted the experience to be real; to be physical. Additionally, he chose reflective surfaces in his design concept. Through this, visitors would actually see themselves in the exhibit, perpetuating the connection between present and past. Yet, as he mentions, this decision was a gamble, because in almost all cases there is nothing to stop a visitor from touching an artifact. Here again, the circular design comes in to play.

Mardirosian noted that the circular design allows the Park Service to watch its visitor for purposes of security. With individual galleries, the barrier-free exhibits would have been impossible. He explained,

One of the things was that the museum was designed so that one Park Service person standing at the door on a rainy day in the winter, when there are practically no visitors, can keep an eye on the whole museum. That was very important. If we had created a whole bunch of galleries, let’s say, a dozen or more galleries, you’d have to have somebody concerned about security, you’d have to have things behind glass, much more so, and you’d have to have somebody standing, if it could conveniently be done, at least in the doorway between each gallery, or in each gallery.

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48 Mardirosian, interview by Bob Moore, 10, 16.
49 Mardirosian, interview by Bob Moore, 16.
50 Mardirosian, interview by Bob Moore, 18.
51 Mardirosian, interview by Bob Moore, 18.
52 Mardirosian, interview by Bob Moore, 9.
Finally, taking into consideration the amount of visibility in the museum, Mardirosian explained that visitors could more easily pick out specific topics and subjects and walk to those areas.\textsuperscript{53}

The original museum consisted of a bronze statue of Thomas Jefferson and three main exhibits. When the visitor entered the museum, the first piece that he or she saw was a larger statue of Thomas Jefferson, honoring his role in westward expansion. From there, one walked into the main room. The first exhibit presented one-hundred years of history, from 1803 to 1903. Mardirosian explained that the exhibit, located on the left wall, contained 100 panels of text, one for each year. Included on these panels were dates and events in U.S. history. Its purpose was to contextualize the American West to a larger national history.\textsuperscript{54}

The second exhibit, located on the right wall, is what Bob Moore defined as the ever-changing West.\textsuperscript{55} This exhibit contained two, areas, the first of which was dedicated to Lewis and Clark and chronicled their journey to the Pacific. Utilizing portions from their journal and large graphics, Mardirosian hoped to reproduce the journey for the visitor. “The Lewis and Clark expedition, which was so tied to Jefferson, is an incredible journey, with an incredible journal that comes out of it.”\textsuperscript{56} The goal was to visually tie these journal entries directly to the landscape. To accomplish this, they hired David Muench to follow the Lewis and Clark trail in relation to the journal’s timeline and photograph the landscape. From this, large mega-graphics would serve as a backdrop to the stories written in the journals. The second portion of the exhibit contained an audiovisual presentation of the contemporary West. It provided the visitor with sounds and

\textsuperscript{53} Mardirosian, interview by Bob Moore, 9.
\textsuperscript{54} Mardirosian, interview by Bob Moore, 7.
\textsuperscript{55} Moore, interviewed by the author. 9.
\textsuperscript{56} Mardirosian, interview by Bob Moore, 12.
images of contemporary people and places throughout the American West. In effect, it tied
together the travels of Lewis and Clark to the product of their efforts.57

The third and final area of the museum lay in roughly the center of the room. This exhibit
presented the various peoples involved with the creation of western history. It was to be the story
of land and people. According to Mardirosian,

The story in a larger sense wasn’t about big people. It was about thousands and
millions of people, both Native American as well as settlers, who just had a hell
of an interaction with a huge piece of land over 100 years. So, the story really
should be about the land and the people. And sure, it mentioned one or two here
and there, but really only in passing, and not with lots of artifacts, because there
really isn’t enough room, the subject is much too big. The thing we realized very
early on, as I’ve said it before, in another context, the subject was too big. You
cannot put this in a museum and do justice to every aspect of it. But yet, if you
approach it in a certain way, you can present it in a dramatic way, and lend
sparkle to the potential of what this really represented, rather than “Oh, now we
are going to cover the Mormons in Utah,” and “Now we’re going to cover the
Scandinavian settlers in Wisconsin.” How could you possibly – where would you
end? Where would you start? Each one of these is a museum in itself.58

The exhibit would discuss the various experiences of those who resided throughout the American
West. Again, these exhibits would contain a minimal number of objects.

In 1973, the Park Service approached Neil Deaton to help with exhibit design. Deaton
had significant experience with exhibit design, specifically in the realm of taxidermy. In addition
to the various peoples who inhabited the American West, the museum’s third exhibit would
include many animals native to the West, displayed in recreated habitats.59 Deaton was presented
with the task of locating a variety of animals suitable for the exhibit. He explained,

The bull bison had to be an adult bull, and in good shape, you know, a nice
specimen, preferably with no brand or anything visible. The appaloosa had to be
of the spotted variety that you have, because there is quite a variation in those.
The grizzly was supposed to be a Rocky Mountain grizzly from Colorado,
Wyoming, wherever, but that just turned out to be impossible to get, that’s why

57 Mardirosian, interview by Bob Moore, 8.
58 Mardirosian, interview by Bob Moore, 17.
we ended up in Alaska. As far as the design, or what we did with the platforms, we did – they told us approximately what they wanted, and then we made sketches and scale models, and suggested that we put them in this pose, in fact we gave a couple sketches of the bison, I know one was head down, and one was up and turned like this.\textsuperscript{60}

This proved difficult for Deaton. He had several concerns. For example, safety was an issue regarding the size of animals and their extremities. The exhibit was to include a longhorn cow. The animal’s horns presented a potential safety hazard for the visitor. Aside from safety, maintenance and preservation factored into his planning process as well.\textsuperscript{61}

Deaton explained that the next step was to locate the animals. He and the Park Service located a beaver from the Quantico Marine Base in Virginia. The Beaver was to be displayed in a recreated setting that would as closely as possible resemble a natural habitat. It would be built from materials that were actually harvested and constructed by beaver.\textsuperscript{62} They located a horse at a Montana ranch and purchased it for roughly $900. The Appaloosa came from Arkansas and the bison from Montana. The longhorn was located in Texas. Finally, just before the museum was scheduled to open, the Park Service acquired its grizzly from Alaska.\textsuperscript{63} All of the animals were live specimens. The Park Service euthanized the animals either by shooting them or through lethal injection.\textsuperscript{64} From here the animals were prepared and Deaton constructed the taxidermy exhibition.

The final aspect of Mardirosian’s design was an absence of exhibit labels and text panels. His original intent was for the objects and images in the exhibit to represent the masses. In his mind, this allowed the visitor to come to his or her own conclusions regarding specific topics.

\textsuperscript{60} Deaton, interview by Bob Moore, 8.
\textsuperscript{61} Deaton, interview by Bob Moore, 10-11.
\textsuperscript{62} Deaton, interview by Bob Moore, 17.
\textsuperscript{63} Deaton, interview by Bob Moore, 17-23.
\textsuperscript{64} Deaton, interview by Bob Moore, 20-3.
According to Bob Moore, Mardirosian and his team intended for the museum to remain as natural as possible. However, as Mardirosian explained, the exhibit only scratched the surface of a larger western history. “In the larger sense, the exhibit material is only a drop in a bucket to cover the various subjects that are there.”

As Deaton states,

> And so, it’s interesting from that standpoint that I think it’s probably the first museum I was familiar with that put that much burden on the viewer to find out what this was about. So, this museum, of course it was controversial in the respect, too, that it didn’t answer your questions, it asked the questions, essentially.

Historian Bob Moore explained that the initial plan for a visitor center included the construction of two theaters. “The 325-seat North Theater was opened on May 13, 1972, for the premier showing of Charles Guggenheim’s prize-winning film, “Monument to the Dream,” detailing the construction of the Gateway Arch.” Funding shortages delayed the construction of the South Theater. Bi-State Development Agency expressed an interest in funding the construction of an IMAX theater. According to Moore, it was the first large screen theater in a National Park Service Facility. The dedication of both the new Tucker Theater and the statue of Thomas Jefferson took place on April 13, 1976. Construction of the new theater required additional expansion and renovation, and preliminary plans would not begin until 1987. The inclusion of an IMAX theater created a series of partnerships for the Park Service. Bob Moore recalls the creation of the theater as the Park Service challenging itself.

> Let’s build the first large screen theater in the Park Service, and let’s experiment with public-private partnerships and see if we can hire part of our ranger corps

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65 Deaton, interview by Bob Moore, 11.
66 Deaton, interview by Bob Moore, 8.
67 Deaton, interview by Bob Moore, 11.
70 Moore, interview by Aram Mardirosian, 24.
from our book sales, and try all of these somewhat crazy ideas and see if they work, and if they do, then maybe other parks would want to try them too.”

The idea of including private theaters changed the way in which the Park Service operated, saw itself, and executed its vision. In 1993, the construction of the Odyssey Theater was complete. The final component of the original plan for the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial included a transportation system by which visitors could travel to the top of the Arch. The system included a series of “trams” that go the 630-foot distance to the top; one from the south leg, and one from the north. On May 18, 1968, both systems opened for public use.

With this, the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial had its outline for the Museum of Westward Expansion. Early on the museum acquired a few key pieces, and over time, more pieces trickled in. Exhibit specialist Terry Weber explained that at the same time the park was created in the 1930s, the National Park Service started collecting items specifically for future museum collections. It did not seek out specific objects; rather, it chose to acquire a variety of items through which the broad story of the American West could be told. Kathryn Thomas, curator of Cultural Resources for the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial, explained that the Harper’s Ferry division furnished specific objects required for the exhibit.

After controversy and financial debate, the Museum of Westward Expansion was completed on August 10, 1976, with a total cost of $3,178,000. Upon completion it was the largest museum in the National Park Service, housed in a space nearly the size of a football field.

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72 Mardirosian, interview by Bob Moore, 24.
73 Brown, Administrative History, Appendix D, xxxvi.
75 Thomas, interview, 2.

From the beginning, the museum was to take an alternative approach to representation, which differed from traditional museums. The purpose was to “impress upon the visitor the drama of the West as a personal experience, to depict in powerful and compelling fashion just what it meant to be one of the Americans who went west in the years between 1803 and 1890.”\footnote{Moore, \textit{Urban Innovation}, 215.} Events and famous figures were introduced in order to provide necessary context. From its inception, the museum of Westward Expansion began with problematic Turnarian, and romantic undertones; specifically, Frederick Jackson Turner’s date of 1890 as the closing of the West.

The exhibits are much more a product of designers than museum professionals. Today, the Museum of Westward Expansion has over 10,000 objects in its collection and roughly 400 located throughout the permanent exhibits.\footnote{Thomas, interview, 2.} Yet, the exhibitions really have not changed since the museum opened in 1976. Mardirosian planned for the museum to change over time and for objects be replaced as needed. The National Park Service, however, viewed the situation differently. Moore notes that the purpose of the National Park Service is to preserve everything. As a result, the entire museum has been preserved, largely in its original state. Not only is the museum a memorial to the American West, but it also serves as a memorial to Mardirosian’s design concepts.\footnote{Moore, interview by the author, 15.}
The Jefferson National Expansion Memorial has remained relatively unchanged since its opening in 1976. Largely, it has operated independently from any outside collaborative efforts with community groups, advisory groups, or academics. Moore explained that,

I think it’s important for museums to have that type of collaboration, but we don’t have much of it. I think one of the reasons for that is just the way in which the memorial was constructed and designed. And, they brought in Mardirosian as a designer, who came up with the concept that we have, and it was all really done without any of that kind of consultation. And then when it was put in it became almost instantly institutionalized.80

More explained that there was some consultation in regard to the depiction of Native Americans throughout the exhibit. Evelyn Molker, who was a St. Louis resident and a member of the Comanche Nation, greatly assisted in the installation of Native American exhibits. Additionally, the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial worked internally with National Park Service Staff members who are also Native American. Gerald Baker and Otis Halfmoon reviewed text for the museum exhibits.81 Aside from such examples, very little collaboration exists between the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial and other institutions.

Eric Barnett, the director of the University Museum at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, explained that the university has a relationship with the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial, but it is not one of collaboration.

Well, we have a relationship with the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial itself. We actually have in our possession a group of objects on loan from them, which are fragments of buildings that were torn down to make way for the Arch. They had for years been stored in the basement of the Old Courthouse and we, and them, and some cranes, and some heavy equipment got them out of there, and they are now in storage here at SIUE. They needed the space for more exhibits and things that they were doing at the Old Courthouse. But, the Arch is more of a product of a separate group of individuals that work up in the Old Courthouse [referring to the Park Service staff].82

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80 Moore, interview by the author, 15.
81 Moore, interview by the author, 16.
Barnett argues that, in his opinion, academics are far more open to collaboration than museums. He notes that, through public perception, museums are seen as more authoritative than universities. As a result, the Park Service is slow to seek outside help and collaboration.83

Kathryn Thomas explained that the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial’s library and archive faces a similar situation. The creation of the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial library and archive really began with the creation of the park itself.84 By 1988, the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial began to inventory all of its holdings and in 1991 hired a full-time archivist.85 The library is open to the public, but its primary role is to serve the research needs of the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial staff. The public is welcome to conduct research projects, but the collections mainly serve to support the overall mission of the institution.86

Moore notes that few academics and western scholars conduct research at the institution, and few scholars realize that the museum and its resources exist.87 However, the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial does attempt to reach out to the community. As Thomas explained, the Museum of Westward Expansion and its larger memorial are important resources for the community. Exhibit specialist Terry Weber notes that almost daily the museum conducts tours for St. Louis regional schools as well as other organizations, such as the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts of America.88

According to Moore, the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial sees an estimated two million visitors each year. Local citizens account for a portion of the memorial’s visitation. Moore explained, “There’s some locals; there’s some people from within, let’s say a three-

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83 Barnett, interview, 5.
86 Thomas, interview, 4.
87 Moore, interview by the author, 20.
88 Weber, interview, 8.
hundred-mile radius.” He continues, however, by stating that the bulk of the museum’s visitors are coming from different parts of the country and the world. The museum conducted a survey and found that Chicago, Indianapolis, Cincinnati, Kansas City, and Los Angeles produced the largest number of visitors. However, few visitors specifically seek out the Museum of Westward Expansion. The majority of the people who visit the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial specifically come to the park to see the Arch. “It’s rare also that we get people who are coming in because they’re aficionados of westward expansion, which sets us apart from other sites.” In fact, many people do not even realize that the museum exists. The Museum of Westward Expansion exists to serve the public, and it does receive millions of visitors every year, but visitation is not always planned.

Moore explained that many visitors are surprised by the museum. He hopes that visitors enjoy their experiences at the Museum of Westward Expansion and leave with a greater knowledge of the history of the American West. Rangers try to introduce visitors to the various themes throughout the exhibit, but largely, the exhibits really provide audiences with a broad introduction to the American West. “They come here to learn more about Lewis and Clark, and they’re actually utilizing this museum in the way that Mardirosian, when he designed it, intended that it be utilized, as kind of a primer on westward expansion.” Yet, the institution does hold a revered place in St. Louis’s landscape. It has become a destination place for visitors.

However, there have been some exceptions to this level of visitation. Moore said that heritage tourism has at times played an important role in museum visitation. During the Lewis

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89 Moore, interview by the author, 12.
90 Moore, interview by the author.
91 Moore, interview by the author.
92 Moore, interview by the author, 13.
93 Moore, interview by the author, 14.
94 Weber, interview, 8.
and Clark bicentennial the Museum of Westward expansion welcomed numerous tours and bus trips. Terry Weber argues that the Museum of Westward Expansion does hold a place among other western heritage museums. He notes that there are people who come to the museum because they visited similar institutions and have a real desire to further explore the topic or see how the history presented in one museum compares to that of a different museum. Yet, Weber argues that this trend is possibly declining in recent history.  

Moore explained that the Museum of Westward Expansion has a different importance among various western heritage museums. “Personally, and not speaking for the agency, but personally, right now I see the museum more interesting as a museum than as a tool to enlighten anybody about the American West or any of those things.” For Moore, the history of the museum itself makes it more unique than the history that it actually displays. The museum design remains unique among other institutions. However, other models and existing museums were not referred to throughout the institution’s construction. Other western museums and the stories they presented never factored into the planning or mission of the Museum of Westward Expansion. There was never a discussion on how the various western museums in the United States fit together, how they mirrored one another, and where their individual strengths lie.

Despite the lack of copy label and other design decisions, Moore argues that, on one level, the exhibit presentations do resonate with the museum’s audiences. He said that today’s visitors enter the museum with a basic skill set that allows them to navigate the various messages, themes, and stories within the exhibits. Yet, the question remains as to whether the museum could better serve its audiences. There exists a large disconnect between the material

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95 Weber, interview.
96 Moore, interview by the author, 21.
97 Moore, interview by the author, 23.
98 Moore, interview by the author, 22.
presented at the Museum of Westward Expansion and current academic scholarship. Many current topics of scholarly debate and research are given little space, if they are mentioned at all. According to Moore, the museum has not dealt with changes in western scholarship. This was one of Mardirosian’s main reasons for not including a great deal of text throughout the exhibit. The lack of text allows scholarship to change and the visitor to interpret the exhibit for him or herself, while also freeing the museum from continuously having to update text panels. Moore does admit that the exhibits are outdated. The history present in the museum is a product of the scholarship of the 1970s. Budget, staff numbers, and even the museum’s original design prohibits the Museum of Westward Expansion and its staff from following the latest scholarship of the American West and even public history methodology.

Furthermore, exhibits in the museum, in combination with the lack of copy label serve to perpetuate myth. The museum includes several examples of the myth of the West, such as its numerous paintings, yet there are no panels explaining how art is a product of myth and interpretation; no explanations of western myth in general and its role in the history of the West. “But it really comes down to our staff, you know. A lot of it, that’s what we really rely on to make the museum work, to make it relevant and up-to-date. It all comes from the staff. The so-called living labels, you know, that concept that they had.” Terry Weber explained that the staff realizes that scholarship and interpretation does change. Weber notes that over time, objects in the exhibits have been removed or replaced for purposes of accuracy or authenticity. The staff at the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial tries its best to stay on top of these changes and trends and disseminate this knowledge throughout its interpretive programs. According to

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99 Moore, interview by the author, 18.
100 Moore, interview by the author.
101 Moore, interview by the author, 19.
102 Weber, interview, 5.
Weber, these changes can be seen through the training received by the park’s rangers and other staff members.  

Much of the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial’s development is due to the efforts of the Jefferson National Expansion Historical Association and its members. The Historical Association cooperated with Memorial and largely ran the sales outlets in various buildings. Raymond Bruen served as executive director of the historical association from the 1970s through the 1990s. As Moore explained, Bruen was a scholar and extraordinarily involved in the life of the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial.

I mean, he used to lead bus trips along the Lewis and Clark Trail back in the ‘90s before it had even become bicentennial fashion to do any of that stuff. He was doing it at a very early point in time. Very interested in the fur trade in particular. He was one of the people who brought Ramsey Crook’s to life, and a couple of other things. He was a great guy, and he worked here. I think he was interested in maybe starting a friends group, but it never came to pass. I mean, he, a lot of people thought that he ran the park. You know, because he was very outgoing, and people in the community knew him probably better than our various superintendents that we’ve had, that worked for the Park Service.

Bruen was a member of the Western History Association as well as Westerners International. Additionally, he started the institution’s volunteer program, which today is quite active, with over 100 people. The efforts of the Jefferson National Expansion Historical Association and its director Bruen generated the funding and support for many of the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial’s public programs.

Since its opening, the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial has experienced a series of repairs. In 1990 the museum was forced to undergo a massive construction effort because of

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103 Weber, interview.
104 Moore, interview by the author, 23.
105 Ramsey Crook was an agent for the American Fur Company.
106 Moore, interview by the author, 23.
flooding. The water damage required that the National Park Service repair the museum’s roof.107 On September 28, 1998 a fire broke out at the Museum of Westward Expansion’s main electrical distributor, forcing it to close. According to an article in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, two workers were injured in the fire.108 Repairs cost the National Park Service roughly $450,000.109

The original design for the Museum of Westward Expansion provided a space for temporary exhibits. The museum has, over the years, had a fairly active temporary exhibits program. At first, these exhibits were borrowed from other lending institutions or featured in traveling exhibitions. As Terry Weber explained, the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial did not have the staff or resources required to construct temporary exhibits onsite. As a result, all early temporary exhibits were on loan to the museum. As a result, in previous years the museum saw a very heavy rotation of exhibits. Weber notes that, “In the past we had more exhibits coming through each year. Now we have sort of been on track; we’re making our own exhibits. Instead of being up for sixty or one hundred twenty days, they’re sometimes up for months or years at a time.”110 In 1989, the Museum of Westward Expansion hosted its first temporary exhibit titled *Faces of Destiny*, which displayed a series of Native American portraits from the 1898 Indian Conference.111 Temporary exhibits over the years have focused on such topics as Native American life, the landscape of the American West, and western images.

According to Weber, all the temporary exhibits deal with the topic of westward expansion, the city of St. Louis, and the monument’s theme. Again, the museum staff constructs

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110 Weber, interview, 3-4.
its temporary exhibits onsite.\textsuperscript{112} As he explained, the preliminary phase consists of a planning stage where the curator of exhibits and the historian meet to construct the exhibits main focus and outline. From there the group develops the exhibit’s main story and themes. Finally, the staff installs the exhibit. Recently, temporary exhibits focused on the construction of the Arch and the commemoration of Lewis and Clark.\textsuperscript{113} Since 2004, the museum has rotated a series of exhibitions focusing on the bicentennial celebration of the Lewis and Clark expedition.\textsuperscript{114}

Today, the museum is comprised of three parts: one dedicated to the 1804 Corps of Discovery, better known as the Lewis and Clark Exhibition; a second exhibit depicting famous “explorers” and a chronological timeline of the West; and a final exhibit that examines the lives of those individuals who went west. The museum itself was designed as a great, open space. Aram Mardirosian argued that the open space provided limitless possibilities for the viewer to experience the American West. The museum has no beginning or ending point, and the three exhibits somewhat run together. As a result, there is little structure to the exhibit’s larger purpose. Aram Mardirosian chose to design the exhibits with no labels and no glass barriers or security cases. His intention was to let the objects speak for themselves. The story of the West is told through photographs, personal narratives, and artifacts.

The story of the 1804 Corps of Discovery is examined through the chronological diary entries of Meriwether Lewis, William Clark, and their companions. The narratives are accompanied by megagraphic scenes of the natural surroundings and the changing of the seasons. As visitors walk through the exhibit, they actually follows the narrative story as well as the visual scenery of the Lewis and Clark story. The purpose is to provide an experiential

\textsuperscript{112} Weber, interview, 3-4.
\textsuperscript{113} List of Temporary Exhibits, The Museum of Westward Expansion, Jefferson National Expansion Memorial, curatorial files.
\textsuperscript{114} Moore, interview by the author, 14.
journey as seen through the eyes of Lewis and Clark. While this exhibit does provide the visitor with a sense of traveling West, it fails to explain the purpose behind the expedition, or the importance of its success. There is very little context to the overall portion of the exhibit. Yet it serves as a backdrop for the entire museum. It largely functions as the foundation storyline of both the history of the American West and the museum.

The exhibit entitled “Explorers” becomes more challenging. It contains a chronological timeline of 1800-1900. Each individual year throughout the century long timeline is accompanied by photographs of more notable individuals, such as James Madison, George Custer, Thomas Jefferson, and Andrew Jackson, and lists of major events. However, the content remains problematic. For example, under the year 1830, there is no mention of the Indian Removal Act. Under the photograph of President Andrew Jackson, the visitor will see the year 1838, where there simply exists the phrase “Trail of Tears, the forced removal of the Cherokee people,” again with no explanation. Furthermore, the exhibit strays many times from its intended purpose of depicting the history of the American West. For example, “1840, The expression “O.K.” comes into use.” “1855, Walt Whitman publishes the first version of *Leaves of Grass.*” Or, “1871, P. T. Barnum produces the first “Greatest Show on Earth” circus in Brooklyn, N.Y.” While information such as the previous two examples places the history of the American West into a larger context of national and even global history, they do seem out of place and confusing to the story at hand.

Bob Moore explained that the history wall contained many errors as well. He argues that, while the purpose of the exhibit was to provide context and organization to the timeline of the American West, the exhibit itself was confusing and disorganized.

I mean, when you decide to put up a series of however many facts are in there, I mean it’s one hundred years; there’s one hundred separate plaques, one for each
of those years and each year has at least three, some of them eight or nine facts on
them. So, if you do the multiplication, you’ve got a lot of information. It’s like a
book. It’s a book that’s a dynamic one because we keep changing everything.
You know, just as for instance, when they first put those plaques up in the ’70s,
they referred to African Americans as Negros; not even Black. They used the
term Negro. So, we had throughout this thing, constantly using the term
Negro.115

As he explained, the wall was full of factual errors, confused stories, and offensive material.

Over time, certain plaques were replaced and rewritten, but the exhibit remained troublesome.
The history wall was redone in 2007, but Moore explains that the plaques still contain errors.116

The third exhibit, “The Way West,” tells the story of the American West from the point
of view of those involved in its acquisition and settlement. The various stories are told from
different viewpoints: farmers, miners, cowboys, soldiers, buffalo hunters, fur trappers, and
Indians. Throughout each portion of the exhibit, each group’s story is told through a series of
photographs, objects, and personal narratives. Again, the exhibit remains largely problematic. By
1976, the museum possessed 200 historic artifacts used to tell the tale of Western Expansion. In
1985, 259 additional objects were catalogued into the museum’s collection. Following the
original exhibition plan, the artifacts and photographs are displayed with no labels. As a result,
objects are displayed without names or explanations of use. The exhibit provides the visitor with
small glimpses of western life. For example, the sod house shows an example of homestead life.
However, there is no explanation concerning the household objects throughout the display.
Additionally, the objects scattered throughout the display send confusing messages. For instance,
the exhibit displays a pair of women’s heeled boots. This conveys the notion that all farm women
wore heels, yet this type of footwear is not practice for the nature of physical labor that the
frontier woman faced. Furthermore, each group is presented in isolation. There is no way for the

115 Moore, interview by the author, 8.
116 Moore, interview by the author.
visitor to connect the ways in which the various communities of the American West interacted. Additionally, the personal narratives depicted throughout the exhibit do not reveal a diverse history but rather tell a story of manifest destiny.

“There wasn’t any place as pretty as the one that lay ahead.” – A.B. Guthrie Jr.

“A frenzy seized my soul...piles of gold rose up before me...castles of marble...thousands of slaves bowing to my beck and call. In short I had a very violent attack of goldfever.” – J.H. Carson, miner.

Not only is there no discussion of environmental exploitation or the effects of Western Expansion, but the topic of social exploitation is avoided as well. All Native Americans west of the Mississippi River are lumped into the general category of “Indians.” Objects are displayed, again, without explanation, to represent all Native cultures. Therefore, the visitor is led to believe, for example, that all Natives lived in tipis. The exhibit does depict the connection to the land, but the lack of explanation remains problematic. Historian Bob Moore agrees that the lack of narrative is challenging from an educational standpoint.

There’s other museums where you can go, and you can kind of find out a storyline and have more of a direct point of view on what happened than what we’re presenting. But, one person, and I think it was over the bison or something, but they said, “Educationally, I brought my kids in here,” I don’t remember if it was a teacher or a parent, but they said “If I hadn’t been here to tell them what this animal was, they really had no idea.” So, just real basic like, we don’t have a label saying that a bison is a bison. You know, that type of thing. It is lacking. You know, I think in terms of education the type of thing that; I mean, the National Park Service is an institution and a government agency that prides themselves on educating the public about various things, and I that we could do more in the museum; definitely a lot more to help educate people.117

In 1985, the museum acquired, through donation, the largest privately-owned collection of peace medallions in the United States. It contains a complete set of presidential medals from George Washington to Benjamin Harrison, as well as a series of Colonial Medallions. As

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117 Moore, interview by the author, 12.
stipulated through the donation agreement, the Museum of Westward Expansion placed the collection on permanent display. Moore said that for years there were problems with the exhibit, the Ever-Changing West. It never properly functioned, and the audiovisual equipment continually required maintenance. As a result, the staff chose to remove the exhibit and utilize the space to display the new collection of peace medallions. It remains unclear as to whether the collection is a separate exhibit or was intended to become an addition to the exhibit, “The Way West,” as it is located on the north wall in the vicinity of the previously existing exhibit.

As a result of the new collection, the museum and the Park Service were forced to confront the topic of Indian Policy and Removal. In 1991, an exhibit text was outlined and forty medals issued between the years 1789 and 1896 were displayed in order to discuss the complex relations between the United States and Native Americans. The display discusses the meanings behind the medals and notes that the medals were given as gifts or through the signing of treaties as symbols of diplomatic authority. Furthermore, it notes that during the last phase of use, peace medals were given to “good Indians” who moved to reservations or convinced others to do so. As one might assume, the topic of Indian policy and removal was treated very delicately. American Indian groups demanded that a more accurate story be told. The National Park Service office in Washington requested that the park work with Native American groups, as well as the American Indian Center in St. Louis. The result was, as might be expected, less than adequate. Four life-size, Disney-like animatronic figures were constructed to tell the tale of U.S. and American Indian Relations. The four figures—medal-maker Charles Barber, William Clark during his period as Indian Agent, the Lakota Chief Red Cloud, and an African-American

118 Moore, interview by the author, 9.
119 Moore, Urban Innovation, 268.
120 Moore, Urban Innovation, 268.
cavalry soldier—trace the topic of removal from the production of a medal through the reservation system. However, throughout the narratives of each animatronic figure, the words removal or policy are never mentioned. The word reservation is voiced only once.

Throughout the entire display of presidential medallions, the Museum of Westward Expansion fails to adequately address the notion of American Indian removal, as it mentions only once the key events that forcibly relocated Native Americans. The 1991 addition of presidential medallions to the museum’s permanent collection was the latest change for the Museum of Westward Expansion. Since then, the museum’s exhibits remain unchanged. Therefore, they largely resemble those debuted in its opening in 1976. The museum fails to expand its history in order to address topics examined by historians of the American West. The command to “Go West Young Man,” spoken by Horace Greely, or John O’Sullivan’s notion of manifest destiny are no longer the paradigms of academic discourse. Yet the Museum of Westward Expansion holds tightly to the history told by Frederick Jackson Turner. The exhibits depict the successful farmer, endless land and resources, and the possibility of wealth for all men. In addition, as for Turner, the American Indian is an obstacle that one must overcome. Recent academic scholarship seeks to dispel such previous paradigms by examining topics such as gender, identity, race, religion, environmental history, exploitation, and conquest.

Moor argues that the museum needs a change. The exhibits housed beneath the Arch have remained relatively static since 1976. “We need something that’s more in line with current scholarship, and we need something exciting like that museum was in 1976.”121 Moore is not the only one to think along these lines. He said that there is great interest throughout the National Park Service to move in a new direction.

121 Moor, interview by the author, 25.
I think everybody here from the top on down even sees the need. They see the need, and it’s been talked about in the highest circles, you know the superintendent’s office, and everything, that we have to think about funding. We have to think about proceeding forward. You know, the first step is just funding the actual design. So, we’re hoping that we can start in the next few years actually, because we know that it’s a road, and we’ve got the wagon loaded. We’ve got to get out there, because it’s going to take us a long time to get to Oregon.122

Aside from a fresh perspective, Moore admits that the exhibits need care. As time goes on, the original exhibit deteriorates, “in scholarship, wear and tear, and just in the wow factor.”123 Kathryn Thomas agrees that it is time for a change. She is uncertain as to what form it will undertake, but the need exists. She argues that ideally she would like to see a great deal of research go into the planning of both a future and previous exhibit, so that the staff at the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial might learn from the previous exhibit what worked and what did not.124 Moore agrees and notes that he would like to gather the leading scholars in the field and form a debate over the future of the Museum of Westward Expansion.125 Regardless of the future story and theme, Thomas explained that she would like to see some fundamental changes in design.

The product, I think I’d like to, ideally, I’d like to see exhibits that maintain some of the flexibility and openness of what we now have. I mean openness in terms of content. Along with the design, which would enable us to in some ways provide additional information for people who are really seeking a lot more detail than they’re able to get due to circumstances that have risen. From a curatorial standpoint, I would like to see a design that does a better job of protecting objects in the exhibit.126

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122 Moore, interview by the author, 26.
123 Moore, interview by the author, 25.
124 Thomas, interview, 8.
125 Moore, interview by the author, 25.
126 Thomas, interview, 8.
As one might assumes, over the years the museum’s open design has led to a great deal of damage and loss. Regardless, throughout the institution there is a sense of need for change concerning the present exhibits. The staff is not alone in this thought process.

A 1988 article in the *San Diego Union* expresses concern over the Museum of Westward Expansion. Travel journalist Walt Miller lauds the Arch as an impressive, historical memorial but is less impressed with the park’s other attractions.

But then, there is an entry to a cavernous room beneath the arch. A walk down an incline leads to what is called the Museum of Westward Expansion. There are signs urging payment of entry fees and directing visitors to a ticket window to purchase rides inside the arch to its peak.

The poorly lighted, poorly organized museum is a collection of stuffed dead animals, artifacts of the pioneer era and large murals along the walls.

And there are National Park Service personnel. That’s when the truth hits.

This municipal logo, this huge edifice and the turf it occupies are paid for and operated by funds provided by the U.S. taxpayer. How the citizens of this Midwestern city persuaded the federal government to adopt that role is not so surprising. The city’s history explains it.

Founded by fur traders who exploited Indians for their furs, the growth that followed was based on supplying the needs of travelers who risked death on the prairie over staying in what was to become the city. They bought the food, wagons and animals they would need on their westward journey.¹²⁷

Needless to say, the Museum of Westward Expansion is not without problems. However, I would argue that Walt Miller’s article too harshly criticized the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial.

The Museum of Westward Expansion exists as an unchanging memorial to the opening of the American West. It embraces both the history and romance of the West. The fact that it remained unaltered throughout its existence only further highlights this tension. However, the

¹²⁷ Walt Miller, “St. Louis’ Arch Impresses, but Only from the Outside,” *San Diego Union*, October 6, 1988, C:2.
Jefferson National Expansion Memorial is far from a failure. Millions of visitors enter the memorial each year, many of whom intend to see the Arch. As a result, the visitor center acts more as a holding facility for tourists who eagerly await their turns to ride to the top of the Arch. While waiting, the Museum of Westward Expansion provides an opportunity, often unexpected, to occupy one’s time while waiting to ride the tram. It is here that the National Park Service gets an opportunity to educate the public on the history of the American West, St. Louis’ role in westward expansion, and the way in which the Arch memorializes this history. With this in mind, if each visitor takes away something new regarding the history of the American West, the museum itself can be considered a success.
CHAPTER III

CODY, WYOMING: THE BUFFALO BILL HISTORICAL CENTER

One of the earliest western heritage museums, the Buffalo Bill Historical Center, initially began as an effort led by a small group of individuals to memorialize famed showman William F. Cody. Through their collective action sprung a vibrant institution dedicated to the exhibition, preservation, and study of the American West. Today, the nearly seven-acre complex in Cody, Wyoming, houses a collection of five thematic museums. Throughout its existence, the Buffalo Bill Historical Center positioned itself as a leading institution in the Study of the American West, and directly influenced future museums of western American history.

Both the town and the museums trace their roots to one man: William Frederick Cody. Cody is a small town in Wyoming, located 52 miles outside of Yellowstone National Park, with a population of fewer than 10,000 residents. However, despite its size, Cody possesses a very unique history. In the 1870s, Colonel William Frederick Cody, otherwise known as Buffalo Bill, traveled to Wyoming’s Big Horn Basin to study development possibilities for irrigation and agriculture, and grew quite fond of the region. In 1895 he built the TE Ranch and established the town of Cody, named after himself, the following year. In 1902, the town of Cody, Wyoming, was incorporated, and Buffalo Bill built the Irma Hotel, which he named after his youngest daughter.\(^1\) Throughout his life, Buffalo Bill worked as a scout, soldier, hunter, and most notably a showman. His life served as the topic for a great deal of historical research and debate. Buffalo Bill’s Wild West show toured both nationally and internationally, and was one of the most

popular spectacles of the nineteenth century. It made Buffalo Bill an international celebrity. Wyoming held an important place for Buffalo Bill, and within the history of the West. In many ways, the region attracted Buffalo Bill and thus played a central role in his idea of the West.

Buffalo Bill died on January 10, 1917, in Denver, Colorado. His death ultimately led to the creation of the Buffalo Bill Historical Center. When he died, Buffalo Bill was one of the most famous people in the world. At the time, a number of his friends and relatives lived in the city of Cody, and residents there wanted to create a monument to his memory. Over the years, this desire to honor William F. Cody led to the creation of the Buffalo Bill Historical Center. In its early years, the institution suffered from a number of financial setbacks and legal troubles. It managed to survive through the efforts of a few ambitious, persistent, and strong-willed individuals. Over the course of its history, center evolved into one of the largest western heritage museums in the world.

Buffalo Bill was popular and well-liked by the citizens of Cody. At the time of his death in 1917, residents desired to commemorate his life and preserve his memory. They created the Buffalo Bill Memorial Association (which would ultimately become the Buffalo Bill Historical Center) in order to organize the commemoration effort and preserve the memory of William F. Cody in the form of a monument or statue. At the time, the board consisted of nine trustees.2 Dwight E. Holister served as the first president, and nine other trustees formed the body of the organization.3 The Buffalo Bill Memorial Association began its efforts to fund and create a memorial to Buffalo Bill. Simultaneously, members of the Cody Family Memorial Board, an organization of members from Buffalo Bill’s family, sought similar goals. In 1917, the Wyoming

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3 “Tabulation of Officers and Trustees of the Buffalo Bill Memorial Association, By Years.” Buffalo Bill Historical Center, McCracken Research Library, Vertical Files.
State Legislature appropriated $5,000 for the purpose of establishing a memorial to Buffalo Bill.\(^4\)

At this time, the memorial effort saw little further success until Mary Jester Allen, the niece of Buffalo Bill, took over. In a 1939 interview, Allen recalled the early efforts to create a memorial.

The country was at war so at the request of the family nothing was done so the fund stayed in the State treasury [referring to the $5,000 appropriation]. There is a time limit on state appropriation and the limit was drawing to a close, so the Cody people and the state were quite anxious that some sort of a memorial should be erected and this forced action.\(^5\)

Allen took it upon herself to lead the memorial effort and the decision was made to erect a statue in the honor of Buffalo Bill Cody. Mary Jester Allen created the foundations for the Buffalo Bill Historical Center.

As Allen recollected, the town of Cody contacted her to locate an artist undertake the project. In 1922, she contacted Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney of New York to discuss her possible involvement with the memorial.\(^6\) According to Mindy Besaw, curator of the Whitney Gallery of Art at the Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney was a well-known patron of the arts, and an artist in her own right.\(^7\) According to her recollections, Allen explained that the Whitneys were close acquaintances with Buffalo Bill, and that Cody allowed Gertrude Whitney to sketch his Wild West shows.\(^8\) Additionally, in 1921 the Cody Club, a local civic organization, assisted in the fundraising efforts and land acquisition for the memorial’s location. Whitney agreed to the project at a cost of $50,000, and in 1922 began construction on a memorial statue to Buffalo Bill Cody. She titled her piece *Buffalo Bill- The Scout*.\(^9\)

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\(^4\) Buffalo Bill Memorial Association, “Brief Sketch of History of the Buffalo Bill Memorial Association,” Buffalo Bill Historical Center, McCracken Research Library, Vertical Files, 1.

\(^5\) “Notes in the History of the Development of the Buffalo Bill Memorial Association,” given by Mary Jester Allen to Elizabeth Derr Davison, Secretary of the Eastern Committee of the Cody Pioneer Center, 1939. Buffalo Bill Historical Center, McCracken Research Library.

\(^6\) “Notes,” Allen and Davison, McCracken Research Library.

\(^7\) Mindy Besaw, interview by the author, August 8, 2008, Buffalo Bill Historical Center, 1.

\(^8\) “Notes,” Allen and Davison, McCracken Research Library.

\(^9\) “Notes,” Allen and Davison, McCracken Research Library.
envisioned the statue as a larger-than-life bronze depiction of Cody on horseback. The Cody family sent one of Buffalo Bill’s horses, Smokey, to New York, along with a saddle and other gear to serve as a model for the statue. Lloyd Coleman, a western movie star, modeled for the statue.\(^\text{10}\)

On February 26, 1923, the Buffalo Bill Memorial Association purchased two square blocks of land on the west end of town from the Lincoln Land Company as the site for a museum dedicated to Buffalo Bill. The plot of land cost $4,000, four-fifths of the sum appropriated by the state of Wyoming.\(^\text{11}\) In many ways, the efforts of Mary Jester Allen and the Buffalo Bill Memorial Association were working against one another. It is unclear whether or not Mary Jester Allen favored the land purchase, but Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney did not approve the transaction. Similarly, Allen lacked the support of the Buffalo Bill Memorial Association.\(^\text{12}\) As it stood, the town of Cody and its various associations owed Whitney a great sum of money for the statue, which they did not possess, and already spent $4,000 of what little money they raised. Everyone involved seemed unhappy with the lack of progress and fundraising efforts in Cody. To prevent total financial loss, according to Mary Jester Allen, Whitney formed the Buffalo Bill American Society to finance the completion and installation of the statue. Additionally, she purchased 40 acres of land to house her statue, directly across the street from the land just recently acquired by the Buffalo Bill Memorial Association.\(^\text{13}\) Without ample space, she feared future development and visitation might overwhelm her piece.\(^\text{14}\) Whitney planned to erect her statue no matter what, and incur as little financial loss as possible. Whitney completed the statue

\(^{10}\) Buffalo Bill Memorial Association, “Brief Sketch,” McCracken Research Library, Vertical Files, 2.

\(^{11}\) Lincoln Land Company, “Deed,” Buffalo Bill Historical Center, McCracken Research Library, MS 4, Box: Legal, Folder: Lincoln Deed.

\(^{12}\) Ernest J. Goppert, “Rough Draft of My Recollections,” Buffalo Bill Historical Center, McCracken Research Library.

\(^{13}\) “Notes,” Allen and Davison, McCracken Research Library.

\(^{14}\) Buffalo Bill Memorial Association, “Brief Sketch,” McCracken Research Library, 2.
in 1924, and its dedication took place on July 4, 1924. Local citizens, as well as “prominent folks from afar” gathered on the plot of land purchased by Whitney for dedication of her memorial to Cody, *Buffalo Bill – The Scout*.\(^\text{15}\)

At this time, Mary Jester Allen took it upon herself to move ahead with the idea for a museum dedicated to her late uncle. However, she and the Buffalo Bill Memorial Association still did not really support one another in their efforts to memorialize Buffalo Bill. Thus, Allen started to work with Cody family to turn her vision of a museum into a reality. Allen established the Cody Family Memorial Board as the committee to spearhead the museum effort, on which she sat as chairperson.\(^\text{16}\) Through this organization, Allen maintained a business relationship with the family regarding the museum effort. Before the dedication of *Buffalo Bill – The Scout*, Allen pushed for the idea of a museum, which she stressed should be located in the town of Cody because of the town’s direct connection with her late uncle. She convinced the Cody family that this was the right decision. However, the Buffalo Bill Memorial Association owned the plot of land designated for the museum and was unwilling to support the effort financially. In 1926, Allen formed the Buffalo Bill Museum Association, an organization comprised of many local citizens. It served as the main fundraising network for her project.\(^\text{17}\)

Through the efforts of the Buffalo Bill Museum Association and the Cody Family Memorial Board, Allen convinced the officers of the Buffalo Bill Memorial Association to transfer title of the land purchased in 1926 to the Cody Family Memorial Board.\(^\text{18}\)

\(^\text{15}\) Buffalo Bill Memorial Association, “Brief Sketch,” McCracken Research Library, 2.
\(^\text{16}\) Goppert, “My Recollections,” McCracken Research Library, 1
\(^\text{17}\) Goppert, “My Recollections,” McCracken Research Library, 1.
1926, the Buffalo Bill Memorial Association transferred the two square blocks of land to the Cody Family Memorial Board, with the condition to

...erect thereupon a Memorial in the form of a Museum to William F. Cody, known as Buffalo Bill, on or before the first day of Jan., 1928, that said land will not be used for any purpose excepting for the erection and maintenance thereon of such museum and not for any commercial purpose whatsoever, and in case of the failure of either said agreements or warranties at any time the title to said land shall immediately revert to the grantor and the grantees further agree that in case of the failure of said warranties or agreement they will recover said property by proper conveyances to said grantor.

She possessed the land necessary for her museum, but she now required the funds needed for the construction of the building. Allen and the Buffalo Bill Museum Association began a citywide fundraising campaign, seeking contributions for the construction of the museum. The effort saw only partial success. The campaign was unable to raise the required funds necessary for the building project, and forced the Cody Family Memorial Board and the Buffalo Bill Memorial Association, who still held interest in the project in regards to the land, to execute a deed of trust with the First National Bank of Cody in order to finance the museum.

In the trust, the Cody Family Memorial Board secured 40, $250 promissory notes payable over five years from the date of issue, at an interest rate of 8 percent per annum. The $10,000 loan funded the completion of the museum project and its furnishings. Trustees of the Cody Family Memorial board purchased eighteen of the promissory notes. Prominent real-estate developer J.C. Nicholas purchased four. Cody citizens and business owners purchased the remaining bonds. However, the effort still required further investment, and the Cody Family

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19 The land was legally transferred to Hiram A. Cody, Frances A. Cody, Harry B. Cody, and Mary Jester Allen who served as trustee for the Cody Family Board.


Memorial Board found itself in debt. Even after the museum opened, the board owed a sizeable sum of money.  

All parties involved, having secured funding, moved ahead with the construction project. Allen next sought donations for the museum itself. Dr. Robert Pickering, the Collier-Reed Deputy Director of the Buffalo Bill Historical Center, noted that it was not difficult for Mary Jester Allen to acquire donations for the museum. Buffalo Bill had a great number of friends and family in the area who were more than willing to donate objects and artifacts to the museum. So, early on, the museum acquired a number of objects directly related to Buffalo Bill and his life. Through the efforts of Allen and the various organizations involved, plans took shape, and it appeared that the project would reach completion. The final project resulted in a museum designed to look like William F. Cody’s log-cabin home and hunting lodge, the T.E. Ranch. The Buffalo Bill Museum, located at 836 Sheridan Avenue, was dedicated on July 4, 1927. A large crowd attended the event, including members of the Cody family, numerous dignitaries and celebrates, and the majority of Cody’s citizens. Later that year on August 27, President Calvin Coolidge and First Lady Grace Coolidge visited the museum, at which time he held a dedication for the building’s copper door. The building served to preserve and present the materials of Buffalo Bill and his history until 1966.

Mary Jester Allen served as the museum’s first director and curator. In its early days, the Buffalo Bill Museum presented itself as a collection of displays related to the life and times of Buffalo Bill, existing as a very object-driven institution. It worked with the objects it possessed and presented its stories accordingly. Lynn Houze, curatorial assistant for the Buffalo Bill

26 Today, the building houses the Cody Chamber of Commerce.
Museum, explained that local people from Cody donated objects and artifacts to the museum, thus it acquired a very eclectic collection. She said its presentation was that of a mom-and-pop roadside museum of today. Yet, the public found the institution to be of great appeal.

By 1929, the museum found itself in financial trouble. Allen needed to run a museum, but the former bond issue required payment as well. In 1929, the Cody Family Memorial Association found itself deeply in debt and could no longer pay its bills or finance the institution. To deal with the financial crisis, Mary Jester Allen revived the Buffalo Bill Museum Association, the organization she formed in 1926. She held a meeting of the association on March 13, 1929, attended by Dwight E. Hollister, Dave Jones, Fred McGee, Agnes B. Chamberlin, and Mary Jester Allen. According to the recollections of Ernest Goppert, “They agreed they should have a Board of Directors consisting of seven persons and appointed a Committee to craft by-laws in order to give this new Museum Association a more legal background.” The organization drew up and later adopted by-laws, and elected officers. Frank M. Williams served as chairman of the board. However, on April 16, 1929, at the organization’s next meeting, Chairman Williams informed the group that as long as the Buffalo Bill Memorial Association existed and held title to the museum land, the Buffalo Bill Museum Association had no legal status. As a result, the group resolved to combine forces with the Buffalo Bill Memorial Association.

The Buffalo Bill Museum Association requested that the Buffalo Bill Memorial Association dissolve its board and hold new elections in order to solve the legal dilemma and consolidate the memorial holdings. The board members of the Buffalo Bill Museum Association resigned, and on October 14, 1929, the Buffalo Bill Memorial Association met to hold an

28 Lynn Houze, interview by the author, August 12, 2008, Buffalo Bill Historical Center, 1-2.
elected. At the event, the group nominated Frank M. Williams, Ernest J. Goppert, and Raymond W. Allen as trustees to serve three-year terms; Fred F. McGee, Jacob M. Schwoob, and Dave Jones for two-year terms; and Will Richards, Mary Jester Allen, and Agnes B. Chamberlin for one-year terms. Two days later on October, the group reconvened and elected Frank M. Williams as president, Raymond W. Allen as vice-president, Agnes B. Chamberlin as secretary, and Fred F. McGee as treasurer. All parties consolidated themselves under the Buffalo Bill Memorial Association, and now sought full legal rights to the property of the museum, monument, and land, all acquired through various entities and under different names. The association took full title to the museum land in 1935.

Over the next several years, the Buffalo Bill Museum experienced a period of change and expansion. Back in June of 1934, the Cody Family Memorial Board deeded its claims to a portion of the Buffalo Bill Museum property to the Buffalo Bill Memorial Association. The deed stipulated that,

The said land will not be used for any purpose excepting for the erection and maintenance thereon of a Museum to the memory of Colonel William F. Cody, commonly known as Buffalo Bill, and will not be used for any commercial purpose whatsoever, other than the sale or distribution of books, post cards, and mementos of Colonel William F. Cody, commonly known as Buffalo Bill, or of said Museums; and particularly, that the said property will never be used for any filling station, store, camp ground or other similar commercial enterprise, and in the event the same be so used, title thereto shall revert to the Grantors herein.

This move consolidated the original museum grounds. Additionally, it guaranteed the lands be used solely for the purposes of maintaining the museum. The move ensured that commercial development and expansion not overtake the existing memorials.

31 Goppert, “My Recollections,” McCracken Research Library.
By 1930, Ernest J. Goppert, president of the Buffalo Bill Memorial Association and prominent Cody attorney, involved himself more heavily with the Buffalo Bill Museum, and now handled the institutions legal affairs. By 1934, Mary Jester Allen pushed for Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney to donate to the Buffalo Bill Memorial Association her statue, *Buffalo Bill - The Scout*, and the land upon which it sat. Whitney still owned the property, and thus the Buffalo Bill Memorial Association was in no legal position to protect, control, or maintain the grounds or statue. Ernest J. Goppert represented Mary Jester Allen regarding this issue. They reasoned that if Whitney gave up her claim, the city of Cody, and moreover the Buffalo Bill Memorial Association, could better look after the land. On January 15, 1935, after a great deal of debate, expense, and time for all those involved, the Buffalo Bill Memorial Association received a Quit Claim Deed, whereby Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney gave the memorial association the 40 acres of land. Additionally, as Allen noted, Whitney also donated her statue of *Buffalo Bill – The Scout* to the Buffalo Bill Memorial Association, thus forgiving any remaining debt.

Finally, on February 1, 1935, the Cody Family Memorial Board transferred the remaining land on the Buffalo Bill Museum site to the Buffalo Bill Historical Center. It stated that the land was only to be used for the purposes of memorializing Buffalo Bill. The deed also included stipulations regarding the Buffalo Bill Memorial Association itself. It required that at all times at least two members of the Cody family sit on the board of the Buffalo Bill Memorial Association, and that, “During their lifetime Hiram S. Cody and Mary Jester Allen, or persons designated by them shall be members of the Board representing the Cody family.”

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36 “Notes,” Allen and Davison, McCracken Research Library.
37 “Quit–Claim Deed,” McCracken Research Library.
Mary Jester Allen in charge of the Buffalo Bill Museum throughout the remainder of her lifetime. Thus, by 1935, the Buffalo Bill Memorial Association consolidated all of the land and holdings related to the memory of Buffalo Bill, and Mary Jester Allen controlled the museum. The consolidation faced a fair amount of criticism as well. Some in the community of Cody felt as though the Cody family conducted business and made these moves “for their own personal glory and benefit.”

Mary Jester Allen envisioned very elaborate plans for the museum grounds. She desired to build a reference library and an art gallery on the museum grounds for the purposes of research and the exhibition of Western American Art. She also wanted to build an art school and construct an art colony for resident artists. She desired an auditorium for musical and theatrical performances. Allen planned for a collection of old buildings; somewhat of a historic town that she called the “Old pioneer settlement.” She constructed her vision around the framework of education. She argued that the museum and its exhibits, along with her other ideas could link directly to schools and serve to educate children. Buffalo Bill saw himself as just as much an educator as he did a showman. Allen desired to continue this tradition of education and entertainment. In many ways, it seems this only fueled public speculation concerning her intentions.

At the same time, the Buffalo Bill Museum experienced a period of expansion in terms of buildings and displays. The Ladies Auxiliary to the Museum Association purchased the Frank

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38 “Quit–Claim Deed,” McCracken Research Library.
39 “Correspondence between Mary Jester Allen and the Law Firm of Ernest J. Goppert,” May 25, 1934. Buffalo Bill Historical Center, the McCracken Research Library.
40 “Notes,” Allen and Davison, McCracken Research Library.
41 “Notes,” Allen and Davison, McCracken Research Library.
Houx cabin, one of the first structures built in Cody, and located it on the museum grounds.\textsuperscript{42, 43} The museum relocated an additional cabin, the Elwood Building, and utilized it for storage, and in 1933, the Burlington Railroad moved Buffalo Bill’s boyhood home from LeClaire, Iowa, to the town of Cody. When the railroad closed, the museum gave the structure to the Buffalo Bill Memorial Station and moved it to its location on the current museum property. Throughout the late 1930s and early 1940s, the Works Progress Administration built additional structures and displays.\textsuperscript{44} The Works Progress Administration and the National Youth Administration assisted with museum projects as well, cataloguing objects and serving as guides and clerks.\textsuperscript{45}

By the mid-1930s the museum still owed roughly $8,500 of its original land debt. In 1936, the Cody Club offered to pay $500 if the Buffalo Bill Memorial Association raised $1,000 per year. Ernest J. Goppert led the fund drive. By the fall of 1936, they managed to raise $2,014.50. The Cody Club continued to donate $500 each year, and the Memorial Association paid off the balance in 1939. That year the Cody Club held a bond burning party at an organizational meeting.\textsuperscript{46} The Buffalo Bill Memorial Association managed to relieve its indebtedness and still maintain a museum and memorial throughout the Great Depression, albeit not without difficulty. Mary Jester Allen controlled the museum, and collections continued to grow.

At the beginning of World War II, the museum once again struggled financially. Visitation slowed, and the museum could no longer support itself. In 1943, the Buffalo Bill Memorial Association requested that the city of Cody assume temporary financial responsibility

\textsuperscript{42} Buffalo Bill Memorial Association, “Brief Sketch,” McCracken Research Library, 3.
\textsuperscript{43} Frank Houx served as Cody’s first mayor. The Houx Cabin, sometimes referred to as the Mayo’s Cabin, was built in 1897 and is currently located at Old Trail Town, a historic building site outside of Cody.
\textsuperscript{44} Buffalo Bill Memorial Association, “Brief Sketch,” McCracken Research Library, 3.
\textsuperscript{45} “Correspondence between Mary Jester Allen and the Buffalo Bill Memorial Association.” January 25, 1939. Buffalo Bill Historical Center, McCracken Research Library.
\textsuperscript{46} Goppert, “My Recollections,” McCracken Research Library.
for the Buffalo Bill Museum, its holdings and exhibits, and the property upon which it was located. It requested that the city operate and maintain the facilities through the duration of the war, after which the facilities and property be returned to the Buffalo Bill Memorial Association. At the time, Mary Jester Allen stayed on to act as the museum’s curator. Records indicate that after the war’s end, the city refused to return the property, museum, and its holdings to the Buffalo Bill Memorial Association. Ernest J. Goppert indicates that the city additionally, “…sued to quite title thereto.” In 1946, Allen and the Buffalo Bill Memorial Association once again retained the legal assistance of Goppert, who served as the president of the Buffalo Bill Memorial Association. In a 1946 letter to Goppert, Allen expressed an interest to enlist his assistance, and indicated that they demanded the immediate return of all museum property. In her letter, she indicated that at this time, the American Association of Museums officially recognized the Buffalo Bill Museum, and that they were known throughout the world. She stated that the 1943 agreement was a deed of trust, and that the city of Cody not only failed to meet its side of the agreement, but also failed to act in the best interests of the Buffalo Bill Memorial Association, the Cody family, or Buffalo Bill’s memory.

On June 1, 1946, Goppert responded to Allen. In his correspondence he agreed to represent the interests of the Cody family and the Buffalo Bill Memorial Association. He noted that he expected the town to be very uncooperative in this matter. However, he explained that he would continue to keep the museum open and operate its facilities throughout the legal battle.

51 “Correspondence between Ernest J. Goppert and Mary Jester Allen.” June 1, 1946. Buffalo Bill Historical Center, McCracken Research Library, MS: 58, Series: IIC, Box: 4, Folder: 7.
On October 11, 1946, members of the Cody family held a public forum at the Buffalo Bill Museum to discuss the issue. At the event, Finley A Goodman moved,

That the Buffalo Bill Museum be preserved in accordance with all the conditions and clauses contained in the deed of trust to the Town of Cody, of the Cody Family Inc., the Buffalo Bill Memorial Ass’n Inc. and the Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney deeds; being convinced that an intent of the administration of the Town of Cody to destroy the memory of Col. Wm. F. Cody “Buffalo Bill,” and breaking faith with Mrs. Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, a generous and gracious giver, as this land was deeded in trust and can not [sic] be taken away; that it is the desire of the Family to have all the properties which were deeded to the Town of Cody in trust for the duration of the war, be returned intact to the Buffalo Bill Memorial Association Inc.\(^{52}\)

The motion unanimously carried, and the Cody family, along with the Buffalo Bill Memorial Association and their legal counsel, Ernest J. Goppert, sued for the return of their holdings. According to Goppert, the case went before the District Court, which refused to hand over the holdings to the Buffalo Bill Memorial Association. The association appealed, and the case ultimately went before the Wyoming State Supreme Court. In 1946, Goppert argued before the Wyoming State Supreme Court on behalf of the Buffalo Bill Memorial Association for the return of all property, temporarily deeded in trust to the town of Cody. By 1948, Goppert’s efforts proved successful. On August 3, 1948, the Wyoming State Supreme Court unanimously ruled in favor of the Buffalo Bill Memorial Association in the Case of Cody vs. the Buffalo Bill Memorial Association.\(^{53}\)

Between 1940 and 1960, the museum and memorial underwent a new period of growth and expansion. During this time, Ernest J. Goppert continuously served as president of the Buffalo Bill Memorial Association.\(^{54}\) In 1949, the Buffalo Bill Memorial Association board

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\(^{52}\) "Transcript of motion made by Finley A. Goodman at Public form," October 11, 1946. Buffalo Bill Historical Society, McCracken Research Library.


\(^{54}\) “Tabulation of Officers and Trustees of the Buffalo Bill Memorial Association, by Years.” Buffalo Bill Historical Center, McCracken Research Library, Vertical Files.
wanted to construct and dedicate a plaque for Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney’s statue, *Buffalo Bill* - *The Scout*, and discussion took place between Goppert, on behalf of the Buffalo Bill Memorial Association, and Cornelius Vanderbilt Whitney, the son of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney. Whitney died in 1942, and the Buffalo Bill Memorial Association wanted to honor her memory and efforts. The board desired that the plaque read, “This Statue of Col. William F. Cody “Buffalo Bill” sculptured and presented by Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, Born 1875, Died 1942.” Cornelius Vanderbilt Whitney replied and recommended that rather than list the years of her birth and death, the plaque state that date in which the statue was dedicated, July 4, 1924. In the early 1950s, the Buffalo Bill Memorial Association negotiated the acquisition of a number of major collections related to the American West and Plains Indians. “The Mary Jester Allen collection was bought for $35,000, the Garlow collection for $75,000, and the Cody Boal Collection for $15,000. Other important gifts were received from many sources and the collection has grown to be one of the finest of any in the field of Western America.” These acquisitions both broadened and improved the museum’s collections, and today serve as part of the institutions core collections related to western history. Additionally, it appears that by the 1950s, the museum and the memorial association became financially solvent. In a 1954 letter to Cornelius Vanderbilt Whitney, Ernest J. Goppert explained that in recent years museum attendance grew, the association remained largely debt-free, and the organization was no longer financially dependent upon outside contributions for operational expenses. He noted, “Our annual income has reached the sum of approximately $20,000.00 per annum. We conduct our

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operations to live within that amount. From time to time we obtain contributions for specific projects. We make it a rule never to incur an obligation until provision has been made to pay the bills arising therefrom.”

In this letter, Goppert indicated the Buffalo Bill Memorial Association was financially sound. However, he explained that the organization sought funds for two new projects: the construction of an art museum named in honor of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, and a building for the display of Native American and pioneer artifacts. The estimated cost amounted to $250,000 per building.

In 1954, at the 25th anniversary dedication of *Buffalo Bill – The Scout*, Cornelius Vanderbilt Whitney donated $250,000 to the Buffalo Bill Memorial Association in memory of his mother’s life’s work. He stipulated that the association board include three additional members that he would nominate to oversee the funds and advise the board. In 1955, per Whitney’s stipulation, Lloyd Taggart, Irving H. Larom, Glenn E. Nielson, and Cornelius Vanderbilt Whitney joined the Buffalo Bill Memorial Association’s board of directors. The board decided the funds should be spent to build a museum of western art as a memorial to Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, and locate the museum on the same grounds as *Buffalo Bill - The Scout*. The Buffalo Bill Memorial Association hired local architects, along with the Hintz Construction Company out of Billings, Montana, to design and create the new fire-proof facility.

In 1955, William Robertson Coe died. For years, Coe spent time in the Cody region and actively supported the Buffalo Bill Museum. In 1951, the Buffalo Bill Memorial Association

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appointed his son, Henry R. Coe, to the board of directors. At the time of his death, William Coe
donated a percentage of his estate in trust to the Buffalo Bill Memorial Association, which
amounted to $456,319.36. Over the years, the trust grew and investment in the institution
continued. The Coe Trust established the lifeblood for the overall endowment of the institution,
which allows the Buffalo Bill Historical Center to acquire new objects and exhibitions, fund its
staff, and operate on a daily basis.

The plan for the Whitney Gallery of Western Art incurred further debt. As a result,
Cornelius Vanderbilt Whitney provided additional funds for the completion of the project, and a
small sum of money with which to acquire art. However, the first major acquisition came
through a purchase of the Coe Foundation. In 1957, the funding from the foundation allowed for
the purchase of the Frederic Remington Studio Collection. According to Mindy Besaw, curator
of the Whitney Gallery of Art, in 1957, the Coe Foundation purchased the entire Remington
Studio Collection from the Remington Art Museum. This purchase, along with the funds donated
by Cornelius Vanderbilt Whitney, really formed the foundation for the Whitney Gallery of Art.
On September 23, 1958, The Buffalo Bill Memorial Association offered art historian Dr. Harold
McCracken the position of director of the Whitney Gallery of Art. McCracken accepted the
position on October 15, 1958. At the time, he was writing a book on the artist George Catlin.
McCracken assumed control as director on January 19, 1959. For his first task, he planned to a
formulate a direction for the new museum, and acquire display pieces for the museum’s
opening. According to Besaw, at the time the board hired McCracken as director of the

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64 Mindy Besaw, interview, by the author, August 8, 2008, 2-3.
65 “Correspondence between Harold McCracken and Ernest J. Goppert.” October 15, 1958. Buffalo Bill Historical
Center, McCracken Research Library, MS: 58, Series: IID, Box: 7, Folder: 4.
66 Harold McCracken, “A Brief History of the Whitney Gallery of Western Art and the Buffalo Bill Historical
Center.” June 29, 1968. The Buffalo Bill Historical Center, McCracken Research Library, Vertical Files, 1.
Whitney, construction for the new museum was almost completed, but the museum owned very little art to hang on its walls. As a result, McCracken had to borrow a great deal of art for the museum’s opening.67

The Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney Gallery of Art opened on April 25, 1959. According to McCracken, “In spite of [an] untimely spring snow storm and disadvantageous bad weather, more than 3,500 people attended the festivities.”68 The opening of the Whitney Gallery of Art marked the beginning of the Buffalo Historical Center, which over time would expand to the five museums it holds today. From its earliest days, the Whitney housed and displayed great art of the American West, produced by artists such as George Catlin, Frederic Remington, Charles Russell, Alfred Jacob Miller, Albert Bierstadt, and Solon Borglum. It actively sought to showcase the products of western popular culture. At the same time, Additionally, the museum displayed traditional works of art and craft art by Native Americans of the Northern Plains region. Again, at first, the museum owned very few pieces. This constructed dichotomy exhibited the mythical West alongside representations of traditional Native history. While this created contradiction in an ideological sense, it simultaneously reinforced the notion of western heritage. Over time, the Whitney acquired more pieces through donation. Aside from the Remington Studio Collection, the Whitney displayed the Charles Russell Gallery, which included 65 paintings and 81 sculptures. The Whitney exhibited two stagecoaches, one of them being the original Deadwood Stage. When it opened, the Whitney Gallery of Western Art was unique among other art museums as no similar collection of western American art existed. It displayed a very

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67 Besaw, interview, 18.
comprehensive collection of art dedicated to the representation of the American West. As Besaw explained, as time went on the museum continued to expand its collections. Aside from the Remington Studio Collection, it also acquired other major artist’s collections, including the Joseph Henry Sharp collection and his cabin, the W. H. D. Koerner collection, and the Alexander Phimister Proctor studio.

Shortly after the opening of the Whitney Gallery of Western Art, Dr. McCracken submitted plans for the future of the Whitney. They included the construction for a building similar to the Whitney in order to house the Buffalo Bill Museum. The old building no longer suited the museum’s needs and also posed a potential risk for fire and other damage to the collections. Early in 1960, McCracken and the board started efforts to raise funds for the project. It was at this time that the organization faced a personal loss. On August 26, 1960, Mary Jester Allen, the long-time director and curator of the Buffalo Bill Museum passed away. After her death, the museum hired Mary’s daughter, Helen Cody Allen, to take over as director; she had assisted her mother from the museum’s opening. She served as director for only a brief period of time. After one year of service, she resigned to pursue other interests. At that time, board member Richard Frost assumed the position of curator of the Buffalo Bill Museum.

By 1960, the Buffalo Bill Historical Center came into existence through McCracken’s planning process. Not only did this plan include the construction of a new building for the Buffalo Bill Museum, but now an additional building to house a Plains Indian Museum. In 1960, McCracken set out to raise the sum of $3,292,600.00 for the construction of the buildings.

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70 Besaw, interview, 2.
71 Funeral Program of Mary Jester Allen. October 30, 1960. The Buffalo Bill Historical Center, McCracken Research Library, MS: 58, Series: IIE, Box: 8, Folder: 3.
collections and acquisitions, development and operating expenses, and funds to increase the endowment. The plan saw limited success. McCracken then devised a campaign to secure 10 individuals to each donate $50,000 for the new Buffalo Bill Museum. In 1960, William Weiss Jr. of New York donated the first $50,000 towards the construction campaign. After two years, Weiss remained the sole donor, so McCracken ended this plan as well. In 1962, Weiss altered his donation and purchased the Frederic Remington painting *The Buffalo Hunt* for $65,000 and donated it to the Whitney Gallery of Western Art. The fundraising effort saw little more headway until 1964.\(^{73}\)

On August 4, 1964, Pearl C. Newell died. Newell owned and operated the Irma Hotel, original constructed by Buffalo Bill. At the time of her death, Newell bequeathed to the Buffalo Memorial Association the Buffalo Bill Art Collection, located in the Irma Hotel, and the sum of $307,982.37 for the explicit purpose of building the Buffalo Bill Museum. This act reinvigorated McCracken’s efforts to raise the monies necessary to construct the Buffalo Bill Museum. In 1965, he approached John Olin of Winchester-Western and Olin Industries to incorporate Buffalo Bill into Winchester’s 100th Anniversary Commemorative Rifle. In 1966, the board established a group of associate trustees to raise further funds. The new group included H. Peter Kriendler, owner of the historic 21 Club in New York’s Greenwich Village.\(^{74}\) Other members included John S. Bugas of the Ford Motor Company, William E. Weiss, Barry T. Leithead of Cluett Peabody and Company, Larry Sheerin from San Antonio, Texas, and H. P. Skoglund of North American Life and Casualty Company.\(^{75}\) Again, donations started coming in for the project. William E. Weiss donated an additional $50,000, and Cody residents donated roughly

\(^{74}\) McCracken, “Brief History of the Whitney.”4.
\(^{75}\) Buffalo Bill Memorial Association, “Brief Sketch,” McCracken Research Library, 5.
$60,000. Additionally, the Buffalo Memorial Association planned to sell the property that held the old museum. Members of the board and other Cody residents raised roughly an additional $500,000. McCracken and the Memorial Association decided, as a result of the fundraising efforts, to move ahead with plans. On June 5, 1967, the Ellis Construction Company of Cody, Wyoming, received the contract for the construction of the Buffalo Bill Museum at roughly the cost of $900,000, and stipulated a completion date of September 1968.

According to Richard Frost, in 1966 the board relocated the collections of the Buffalo Bill Museum to the Whitney Gallery of Western Art. They believed that the old museum no longer suited the preservation needs of the collections. The old building posed a direct threat to the collections from fire hazard. Additionally, Plains Indian collections continued to grow. During the fall and winter of 1967, the museum relocated its entire collection to the basement of the Whitney. The following year, the Whitney displayed portions of the Buffalo Bill Collections throughout its gallery. Additionally, Frost relocated his office to the Whitney. Once the new Buffalo Bill Museum was completed, staff planned to move the collections from the Whitney to their new locations and create new exhibits.

Even though the project was now underway, the Buffalo Bill Memorial Association still faced a deficit of roughly $300,000. In 1967, Fred Garlow, board member and grandson of Buffalo Bill, flew to New York to appear on television in order to promote the town of Cody and boost support for the Buffalo Bill Museum. For the event, Garlow dressed as his grandfather and carried several of his Winchester rifles. This television spot, along with others arranged by Peter Kriendler, drew the attention of Winchester-Western, a division of the Olin Corporation. The

77 Buffalo Bill Memorial Association, “Brief Sketch,” McCracken Research Library, 6-7.
success of Garlow’s television spots resulted in an agreement by Winchester to produce a commemorative Buffalo Bill rifle, where the Buffalo Bill Memorial Association received $5.00 in royalties for each rifle sold. Additionally, Winchester-Western designed a special edition rifle specifically for the Buffalo Bill Memorial Association to be made available through the institution, and given as gifts for those who donated $1,000 or more to the building fund. Sales of commemorative rifles raised roughly $700,000 for the new museum. That same year, the old log cabin that housed the Buffalo Bill Museum and the land upon which it stood were donated to the city of Cody through a gift from Paul Stock, the Husky Oil Company, the Coe Foundation, and the board president. This act raised an additional $225,000.00. This now promised ample finances to complete the construction of the new building and museum. The land transfer stipulated that the Houx Cabin and the boyhood home of Buffalo Bill remained the property of the Buffalo Bill Memorial Association and were to be transferred to the Buffalo Bill Historical Center.79

Construction of the new steel and concrete historical center continued throughout 1967. In July, storms damaged portions of the building and briefly set back construction efforts. During the storm, wind damaged 40 feet of wall, and contractors experienced additional problems with equipment.80 The Buffalo Bill Historical Center dedicated the new Buffalo Bill Museum on May 31, 1969. The new addition cost $1,800,000 and quadrupled the size of the original facility to include the Buffalo Bill Museum and an area for the exhibition of Plains Indian artifacts.81 According to an article in the Cody Enterprise, the entire town of Cody, along with roughly 500

guests from out of town, were invited to the ceremony. Immediately following the ceremony, the center held a ribbon cutting ceremony at the new facility, and allowed those in attendance to view the new museum.\(^{82}\)

In contrast to the former location, the new Buffalo Bill Museum greatly expanded its exhibition space. The new museum focused on exhibiting artifacts and memorabilia related to the life of William F. Cody. It now showed numerous items never before displayed. In addition, the museum housed a large display related to cowboy history and culture, from the times of Colonial Spain throughout the nineteenth century. It included a large collection of photographs taken by famed Wyoming photographer and rancher Charles Belden. The Plains Indian area focused on the stories and history of Natives from the Northern Plains Region.\(^{83}\) As Richard Frost explained, the Buffalo Bill Historical Center officially opened its doors on June 1, 1969, although construction of the center continued through February 12, 1970.\(^{84}\) Additionally, at this time the board of the Buffalo Bill Memorial Association transitioned into the board of directors of the center.\(^{85}\)

Through the Whitney Gallery of Western Art, the Buffalo Bill Museum, and the Plains Indian Collections, by 1969 the Buffalo Bill Historical Center presented a very diverse story of the American West.

There is no more popular theme of American Interest than that of the men who explored the vast wilderness of the West; the fur trappers, traders, scouts, mountain men, pioneer families in covered wagons and old-time cowboys, as well as the primitive Crow, Shoshone, Arapahoe, Sioux, Blackfeet and other red knights of the Northern Plains and adjoining Rocky Mountain areas. As the factual story of all this slip further into limbo of lore and legend, becoming more


\(^{83}\) “Dedication Services for the New Buffalo Bill Historical Center.” May 31, 1969. The Buffalo Bill Historical Center, McCracken Research Library, MS: 58, Series IIE, Box: 9, Folder: 27.

\(^{84}\) Richard Frost, “Personal Recollection.” Buffalo Bill Historical Center, McCracken Research Library, Vertical File, Buffalo Bill Historical Center. 3.

\(^{85}\) “Tabulation of Officers and Trustees of the Buffalo Bill Memorial Association, By Years.” Buffalo Bill Historical Center, McCracken Research Library, Vertical Files.
and more diverted by writers of fiction, it becomes increasingly important that we should preserve the records and mementos of that era. This is the concept and purpose of the Buffalo Bill Historical Center.86

The three museums of the Buffalo Bill Historical Center, the Whitney Gallery of Art, the Buffalo Bill Museum, and the Plains Indian Museum, at the time desired to present what they saw as the factual history of the West. The three museums really existed as spaces to exhibit the various objects held among their collections, and the exhibits themselves still primarily remained object-driven. The early exhibitions consisted of numerous glass cases displaying objects and walls lined with paintings and photographs. At the time, the museum’s story centered on and remained driven by its objects.87

In 1973, the Olin Corporation sought a repository for its Winchester Gun Museum. Throughout his life, Buffalo Bill amassed a large collection of Winchester firearms.88 Additionally, the Olin Corporation previously assisted the Buffalo Bill Memorial Association in raising funds for the construction of the new additions to the Buffalo Bill Historical Center. Through the longstanding association with Buffalo Bill and Winchester rifles, and the relationship between the center and the Olin Corporation, at the time the center seemed to be the logical location for the housing of the collection.

In 1974, Harold McCracken retired from his position as director of the Buffalo Bill Historical Center. McCracken trained Don Hedgpeth, assistant director, to take his place.89 The following year the Olin Corporation chose the center to house its firearms collection. Throughout 1975, the Olin Corporation transferred its entire Winchester Firearms Museum to center. At the

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87 For an in-depth view of the Buffalo Bill Historical Center at this time, see Harold McCracken, et. al. The West of Buffalo Bill: Frontier Art, Indian Crafts, Memorabilia from the Buffalo Bill Historical Center (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc. Publishers, 1974).
88 “BBMA Chronology,” Deputy Director’s Files. Buffalo Bill Historical Center, 2.
89 Correspondence between Harold McCracken and the Buffalo Bill Historical Center Board of Trustees.
same time, Don Hedgpeth resigned after having served only one year as interim director.90
According to Wally Reber, interim director of development, exhibit designer, and curator of decorative arts, it was at this same time the center planned for continued growth. By 1975, plans were in motion to construct a new Plains Indian Museum. Once the Olin Corporation began transferring the Winchester Collection to the Historical Center, additional plans were made to create a Winchester Firearms Museum. They planned to locate the collection in the basement of the Buffalo Bill Museum. Construction took roughly one year, and the Buffalo Bill Historical Center dedicated the Winchester Firearms Museum on July 4, 1976.91 The museum consisted of a complete collection of Winchester production firearms, one of the best in the world.

The year of 1976 brought a great amount of change to the Buffalo Bill Historical Center. In addition to the acquisition of the Winchester Collection and the construction of a new museum, the center came under new leadership as well. That year, the center named art historian Peter Hassrick to be its new director. Under Hassrick, the institution saw a great deal of growth and reinterpretation. Following the previously established vision for expansion, the institution began construction on a new Plains Indian Museum to house and exhibit its expanding Native American collections. The center created the Plains Indian Museum in 1969 with the establishment of the Buffalo Bill Museum. However, when the center opened, it really only consisted of a small display area in the basement of the Buffalo Bill Museum. It lacked its own facility and was really nothing more than several exhibits in a larger space dedicated to cowboys and Buffalo Bill. When the institution accepted the Winchester gun collection, the choice to establish a firearms museum displaced the Plains Indian Museum.

90 “BBMA Chronology,” Deputy Director’s Files. Buffalo Bill Historical Center, 2.
91 Wally Reber, interview by the author, August 12, 2008, Buffalo Bill Historical Center, 2.
According to Emma Hanson, senior curator of the Plains Indian Museum, from the very start, the Buffalo Bill Museum possessed and displayed Native American artifacts, as Natives played a vital and active role in Buffalo Bill’s Wild West. As a result, a number of Native objects became associated with his history, and consequently the Buffalo Bill Museum owned a number of Indian artifacts. Hanson explained that in the beginning, most of the items held by the Buffalo Bill Museum were of Lakota origin, primarily due to their large availability. Under the direction of Peter Hassrick, the Buffalo Bill Historical Center decided constructed a new building to house the Plains Indian Museum.

Initial planning for the museum began in 1974. Fundraising efforts continued over the next several years, and in 1976 Mr. and Mrs. DeWitt Wallace pledged $1 million toward the construction of the new Plains Indian Museum. Other grants and gifts soon followed thereafter, with a great amount of support for the project. By 1977, the Buffalo Bill Historical Center approved construction of the new facility. Malone, Irverson, and Associates designed the building plans, and the historical center awarded the contract to the Julien Construction Company, which began construction on October 12, 1977.

The creation of the Plains Indian Museum involved several individuals outside the Buffalo Bill Historical Center. According to Hanson, in 1976 Peter Hassrick formed the Plains Indian Museum advisory board to assist the institution in the creation of the museum. It was the first of its kind in the country. The center established a board of advisors made up of Native peoples to help guide the museum’s message and advise on exhibits and displays. This really set the precedent for the entire institution. Over time, each museum formed its own advisory board

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92 Emma Hanson, interview by the author, August 12, 2008, Buffalo Bill Historical Center, 1.
93 “Plains Indian Museum Dedication,” Buffalo Bill Historical Center 4, no. 2 (April-May 1979) 1-2.
94 “Plains Indian Museum Dedication,” Buffalo Bill Historical Center 4, no. 2 (April-May 1979) 2.
comprised of fifteen members. The boards not only serve as a group of advisors to the museum curators, but according to Bruce Eldredge, executive director and chief executive officer of the Buffalo Bill Historical Center, they also operate as the “fundraising mechanisms and friend-raising mechanisms for not only the center, but for each individual institution within it.”

On June 14, 1979, some 2,000 people attended the dedication and opening of the Plains Indian Museum, led by keynote speaker James Michener, author and historian. A traditional Native American round dance followed the ceremony and museum opening. That year, the Buffalo Bill Historical Center hired Plains Indian advisory board committee member George P. Horse Capture as curator of the Plains Indian Museum. According to Hanson, in 1979, the Plains Indian Museum accepted the Chandler-Pohrt Collection, a major collection of Native American artifacts. This addition greatly expanded the scope of the Plains Indian Museum. Originally, Richard Pohrt and Milford Chandler, two longtime collectors of Native American artifacts loaned their collections to the center, which they then later donated to the institution. The collection consisted of several thousand objects related to Native Americans of the Northern Plains region. Over the next several years, the museum acquired several major collections, such as the Adolf Spohr Collection, the Dr. Robert Anderson Collection, the Simplot Collection, and most recently the Paul Dyke Collection. The museum focused on the people of the Northern Plains. At first, it focused heavily on the Lakota peoples, but over time grew to represent other Natives of the Plains region, such as the Crow, Cheyenne, Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara.

In 1980, with the Plains Indian Museum located in its new facility, the Buffalo Bill Historical Center reinstalled the Winchester Arms Museum in the former location of the Plains

95 Bruce Eldredge, interview by the author, August 14, 2008, 7-8.
96 “Plains Indian Museum Dedication,” Buffalo Bill Historical Center 4, no. 2 (April-May 1979) 1-2.
97 Hanson, interview, 1-2.
98 Hanson, interview, 3.
Indian Museum. That same year the institution dedicated the McCracken Research Library in honor of Dr. Harold McCracken, the center’s first director. At the time, the McCracken Research Library started out as a small reference library. According to Kurt Graham, the Housel Director of the McCracken Research Library and Co-director of the Cody Institute for Western American Studies, the institution really had no vision of a major research library at the time, nor did it really see the future benefits. At the time, Graham noted, the library served as a place to house all of the documents and books that the institution acquired over the years. Over time, its role greatly changed. Today, the McCracken holds over 30,000 books; more than 300 manuscript collections; the William F. Cody Collection, held as the most important; roughly 500,000 photograph negatives; prints and glass-plate negatives; and several rare books, such as a first edition copy of the 1814 Journals of Lewis and Clark.99 The McCracken Research Library evolved into something much larger than originally anticipated. Its motto is “The last word on the West.” Today, the McCracken exists as one of the premier research libraries focused on western American history, and the definitive center for the history of Buffalo Bill.

By the mid-1980s, both the Buffalo Bill Museum and the Whitney Gallery of Western Art underwent substantial changes of reinstallation and reinterpretation, and later the creation of the Cody Firearms Museum. In 1986, Peter Hassrick reinstalled the Buffalo Bill Museum as it currently exists today. As Lynn Houze, curatorial assistant for the Buffalo Bill Museum, explained, the new reinstallation focused more broadly on the life of William F. Cody, his family and the story of his Wild West. The reinstallation included a heavy focus on cowboys and ranching, with a display of Victor Alexander’s saddle shop.100 The museum also contained an

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100 Lynn Houze, interview by the author, August 12, 2008, Buffalo Bill Historical Center, 2-4.
exhibit called *Cody High Style*, curated by Wally Reber, which focused on decorative fashion and furnishings of the American West.

In the following year, the Whitney Gallery of Western Art underwent a similar procedure. At the time, much of the overall institution focused on art. Peter Hassrick desired to update the Whitney to reflect the feel of art museums of the time. According to Mindy Besaw, in 1987 Peter Hassrick told the Whitney to take everything down and redo the entire museum. They put up linen walls, recreated the Remington studio, and recreated the museum to tell a comprehensive story of art of the American West from 1830 to the present. The new installation sought to highlight the romantic, popular representations of the American West. At the same time, much like the Buffalo Bill Museum, the Whitney remains largely the same today since its 1987 reinstallation.

In 1988, the Olin Corporation gave its complete Winchester Collection to the Buffalo Bill Historical Center. The Winchester Arms Museum simply had no space to support its demands. As a result, the center began construction of the Cody Firearms Museum, which opened in June of 1991. The center hired Richard Rattenbury as the senior curator of the Cody Firearms Museum. The museum holds one of the two best firearms collections in the world. When it opened, it exhibited a near complete collection of production firearms, or guns available for public purchase. It displayed a number of firearms, engraved guns, and collectibles, but more importantly it exhibited a massive collection of firearms produced by the most notable American firearms manufacturers.

In 1990, the board of trustees appointed Nancy Carol Draper, who, according to Charles Preston, senior curator of the Draper Museum of Natural History, found it odd that an institution

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101 Besaw, interview, 2, 14.  
102 Pickering, interview, 3.
of the American West, located in short proximity to Yellowstone National Park, contained no reference or exhibits related to natural history. In 1994, the institution conducted a survey among its attendees, and over 90 percent of the roughly 300 people polled stated that they greatly desired a museum focused on the environment of the American West. As a result, Draper argued for the concept and also showed direct interest in financially supporting the effort. In 1997, Byron Price replaced Peter Hassrick as director of the Buffalo Bill Historical Center. Price, who formerly served as the director of the National Cowboy Hall of Fame and Western Heritage Center, moved forward with the idea and began to formulate a concept. In 1998, the board hired Preston as senior curator of the Draper Museum of Natural History, the newest addition to the center.103

As Charles Preston explained, his first task as curator was to design and plan his own museum from the ground up. He wanted the museum to be an immersive experience for the visitor. What emerged was a state-of-the-art museum designed to make visitors feel as if they were walking through the natural environment of Wyoming. The design team constructed a plan to focus on the sights, sounds, smell, and feel of four Yellowstone biomes: the alpine, mountain forest, mountain meadow and riparian areas, and the plains basin and sagebrush steppe.104

Through the financial support of Nancy Carol Draper, the National Science Foundation, and numerous other donations, the Buffalo Bill Historical Center began construction of the Draper Museum of Natural History in October of 2000 and opened its doors in June of 2002. The Draper Museum of Natural History focused on the environmental history of the American West. According to Preston, it exhibited the scientific connection between humans, their history, and

103 Charles Preston, interview by the author, August 14, 2008, Buffalo Bill Historical Center, 1-2.
104 Preston, interview, 3, 7.
the way in which humans impact the land. That same year, Byron Price resigned as executive director, and the board hired Dr. Robert Shimp to assume control of the institution.

At that time, the Draper Museum remained the last addition to the institution. In 2008, Bruce Eldredge replaced Shimp as executive director of the Buffalo Bill Historical Center. At the time of Eldredge’s appointment, the institution entered into a phase of transition. As Eldredge explained, the institution needed to reassess its financial plans and day-to-day practices in order to continue to operate within its means. Despite the desire to become financially conservative, the institution also plans to reinterpret itself through a reinstallation of the Whitney Gallery of Art, the Buffalo Bill Museum, and eventually the Cody Firearms Museum.

The concept behind the Buffalo Bill Historical Center began as an effort by a few very determined individuals to memorialize William F. Cody. Through their efforts, the institution managed to survive financial hardships, legal battles, and institutional dilemmas to create one of the largest western heritage museums in the United States. Through the addition of the Draper Museum of Natural History, the institution grew to over 300,000 square feet. In 2008, Buffalo Bill Historical Center consisted of five museums all under one roof, located on roughly seven acres of land. It employed roughly 100 staff members, and exhibited well over 10,000 objects, with millions of objects in the overall collections. The Buffalo Bill Historical Center exists as a world-renowned institution for the exhibition, preservation, and study of the American West. It paved the way for the interpretation of western American history and served as a model for western heritage museums to come.

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105 Preston, interview, 2, 5.
106 Eldredge, interview, 2, 10-11.
CHAPTER IV

OKLAHOMA CITY, OKLAHOMA: THE NATIONAL COWBOY AND WESTERN HERITAGE MUSEUM

By the 1940s, the Buffalo Bill Historical Center operated as a fledgling institution, while the Museum of Westward expansion existed only in vision. Each organization came about through efforts to preserve and exhibit the American West, but their roots developed from widely different approaches. The initial drive to establish the Buffalo Bill, stemmed from a desire to memorialize one of the most famous figures from western popular culture. The Museum of Westward Expansion resulted from an effort to preserve historical fact. Thus, the popular culture and history led to the creation of two widely different institutions, both of which dedicated themselves to similar missions. In many ways, the creation of these two museums resulted from history and mythology. The National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum further blurred the lines of myth and history.

Cowboys, cattle-culture, and rodeo occupied large roles in our historical and popular visions of the American West. The National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum began as homage to those individuals who contributed to the making and continued popularity of western history and rodeo. Located in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum exists to present a unique take on the American West. Its exhibits focus not only on the history of the West, but also place a heavy emphasis on the popular culture sounding western culture. Its various galleries focus on topics such as frontier culture, western art, the American cowboy, rodeo, firearms, Native Americans, and popular western culture and performers.
The National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum began from a concept created by Chester A. Reynolds. A native of Kansas City, Missouri, Reynolds founded the company and served as president of Lee Jeans. Throughout his life, Reynolds grew to appreciate the history of the American West, cowboy-culture, and the sport of rodeo. In 1948, he visited the Will Rogers Memorial Museum in Claremore, Oklahoma, and was overtaken by the experience. He thoroughly enjoyed the encounter, and it led him to think about America’s memory and preservation of the West. He argued that if our nation found importance in memorializing the influence of one man, it was equally important to memorialize all the individuals who contributed to our western history, both past and present. This notion resulted in his vision to create a memorial to all westerners. According to Charles Schroeder, executive director of the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum,

Reynolds] felt that there should be some place in America, in the West that would indeed capture and pay tribute to those people who came to this difficult region of the world we now call the American West, and overcame remarkable obstacles to create not only an economy; to create viable communities and to establish business entities, but to create a unique culture and to create this place, a sense of order in this rather wild place that continues to be an inspiration to people around the world.

The National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum actually started from his vision to immortalize key players in the history of the American West; a vision that he desired to transform into a reality.

Charles Schroeder first needed to start a nonprofit corporation in order to establish the institution, and organize a fundraising effort. According to Charles Rand, executive director of the Donald C. and Elizabeth M. Dickinson Research Center, on July 20, 1953, Chester A. Reynolds contacted a number of wealthy men associated with the cattle industry, leaders of the

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1 Will Rogers was a famed western actor throughout the 1920s and 1930s.
2 Charles Schroeder, interview by the author, March 7, 2007, National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, 1.
rodeo community, and representatives from 17 states west of the Mississippi River and invited them to form the board of trustees of the National Cowboy Hall of Fame and Museum. The board held its first meeting on January 20-21 in 1955, where at the meeting the members discussed possible locations for the institution, and compiled a list of 46 potential locations. Over the next several months, the board narrowed the list from 46 to ten, and then three cities: Dodge City, Kansas; Colorado Springs, Colorado; and Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

The Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce donated a 37-acre plot of land in the northeast section of town that sat atop Persimmon Hill. According to Don Reeves, the McCasland Chair of Cowboy Culture and the Curator of Cowboy Collections at the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, Oklahoma City seemed like a good choice for the museum, because Route 66 ran directly past the selected site. Additionally, the site lay in close proximity to the historic Chisholm Cattle Trail. At the time, Route 66 served as a main transportation route for the United States, and as a result a great deal of automobile traffic traveled directly by Persimmon Hill. As Reeves explained, this really served as the main selling point of the Oklahoma City site, because it sat directly between Route 66 from the east and west, and the newly created I-35 heading north and south.

On April 16, 1955, the board of trustees selected the Persimmon Hill site in Oklahoma City as the new home for the National Cowboy Hall of Fame and Western Heritage Museum. The dedication ceremony took place on November 11, 1955. The event included a grand banquet at the Biltmore Hotel and a parade through the city. Will Rogers Jr. served as the master of Ceremonies. Thousands of individuals, including numerous representatives, honored guests, and

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3 Charles Rand, interview by the author, March 8, 2007, National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, 1.
4 “History,” National Cowboy Hall of Fame and Western Heritage Center, June 20, 1963.
5 Don Reeves, interview by the author, March 7, 2007, National Cowboy and Western Heritage Center, 1-2.
dignitaries, attended the dedication ceremony. Additionally, the Cowboy Hall of Fame inducted its first five members: Will Rogers, Charles M. Russell, Charles Goodnight, Jake McClure, and Teddy Roosevelt.⁶

Throughout 1956, Oklahoma Governor Raymond Gary led a campaign to raise $1 million for the construction of a 70,000-square-foot institution. By April, funding efforts managed to raise three-fourths of the intended goal. The local campaign proved successful. At the same time, other fundraising efforts took place throughout the West. As planning and fundraising moved forward, on August 5, 1957, the U.S. Congress unanimously passed Senate Resolution No. 32, which declared the National Cowboy Hall of Fame and Western Heritage Museum a national memorial.⁷ Reynolds’s dream slowly evolved into a unique reality.

As Don Reeves explained, the history of the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum was unique, as it did not begin like most other museums. First, while it grew from the vision of one man, the result came together from collaborative efforts of several western states with the goal of establishing a memorial, and its funding came solely through private donations. Additionally, unlike many other museums, the National Cowboy started as an idea, not as the result of one person’s collection. In the beginning, the institution owned no collections or assets, only a vision to honor great westerners.⁸ Thus, construction plans moved forward without plans for the actual museum collections or exhibits.

In 1957, the board of trustees held a national architectural competition where over 250 architects submitted entries for the museum’s construction. The American Institute of Architects judged the competition, and ultimately selected the design submitted by the firm of Harold Jack

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⁶ “Dedication,” Dickinson Research Center, Director’s Files. For images of the event, see slide set “Dedication Ceremony,” Dickinson Research Center.
⁷ “A Brief History,” National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, Dickinson Research Center, Director’s Files.
⁸ Reeves, interview, 1-2.
Begrow and Jack N. Brown of Birmingham, Michigan. Their 70,000-square-foot design featured peaked roofs, glass walls, and numerous fountains. They intended the design to mimic and highlight the environment of the cowboy. They designed the rooflines to represent tents, the glass walls to blend into the natural landscape, and the fountains to produce the ideas of streams and springs. The proposed cost for the overall project totaled $5 million. The groundbreaking ceremony took place on June 7, 1957. The board of trustees and its chairman Chester A. Reynolds; dignitaries, including several western governors; celebrities such as Glenn Ford and Jack Lemon; and citizens of Oklahoma City all attended the event. Despite successful planning, fundraising, and overall development, the year of 1958 ended with a great loss. On December 11, 1958, Chester A. Reynolds died. He would never see his vision come to fruition.

Fundraising continued over the next several years, and the states of Oklahoma, New Mexico, and North Dakota each raised over $1 million for construction of the museum. Colorado and several other states came close to meeting their goals. In 1960, the board of trustees changed the institution’s name to the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Center. According to Charles Rand, the board of trustees argued that the term *heritage center* better fit the overall vision of Chester A. Reynolds than *museum*. That same year the board of trustees amended its original vision statement to include six goals.

No. 1 – To honor past and present cowboys, stockmen, ranchers, civic leaders, and others who have contributed to the development of the West; No. 2 – To Perpetuate the acts and deeds of these men by their erection of such buildings and monuments as may be deemed appropriate as a lasting memorial; No. 3 – To guard, cherish, and advance the heritage and romance of the West; No. 4 – To

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9 “A Brief History,” National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, Dickinson Research Center, Director’s Files.
10 Glenn W. Faris, “The History of the National Cowboy Hall of Fame and Western Heritage Center,” *National Cowboy Hall of Fame and Western Heritage Center Dedication Ceremonies and Western Heritage Awards Souvenir Program*, June 1965. Dickinson Research Center, Director’s Files.
11 “History,” National Cowboy Hall of Fame.
12 See “Groundbreaking Ceremony.” Photo Set. Dickinson Research Center.
13 “History,” National Cowboy Hall of Fame.
14 Rand, interview, 1.
maintain a museum for the personal effects, relics, and mementoes of those
honored, and other items of Western lore; No. 5 – To disseminate knowledge and
facts through the medium of lectures, discussions, motion pictures, and radio and
television programs, or other media, for continued enlightenment of the public
with respect to the purpose and operations of the organization, and to enhance the
understanding of the history of the settling of the West; and No. 6 – To cooperate
with organizations interested in similar projects.\textsuperscript{15}

Reynolds’s vision and the vision of the institution differed from that of many other museums.
While the institution planned to provide knowledge and information on the history of the
American West, it clearly planned to preserve the legacy of famed individuals throughout
western history and to serve as a shrine to western celebrities, and its historical message followed
a very Turnarian\textsuperscript{16} depiction of the American West.

Despite the fact construction continued and no structure yet existed, the board of trustees
moved forward with Reynolds’ vision. Building from the idea of the Cowboy Hall of Fame, the
board established the Western Heritage Award, which honored not only those individuals
inducted into the Cowboy Hall of Fame, but also those who made significant contributions to and
outstanding achievements in western film, television, literature, music, and other media. The
board referred to the award as the “Oscars of the West.”\textsuperscript{17} They called the award the
“Wranglers,” as each recipient received replica statues of Charles Russell’s bronze, \textit{The Horse Wrangler}. In its first year, sixty-three individuals received awards at the 1961 Western Heritage
Awards Banquet.\textsuperscript{18}

To raise public interest and inform the public on museum progress, in 1961 the board
started publication of \textit{The Wrangler}, the official publication for the National Cowboy Hall of

\textsuperscript{15} “Mission Statement,” National Cowboy and Western Heritage Center, Dickinson Research Center, Director’s
Files.
\textsuperscript{16} Referring to the historian Frederick Jackson Turner and his discussion of western history.
\textsuperscript{17} “History,” National Cowboy Hall of Fame.
\textsuperscript{18} “History,” National Cowboy Hall of Fame.
Fame and Western Heritage Center. By the fall of 1961, the board established plans for the second annual Western Heritage Awards, scheduled for January 22, 1962. Board chairman Albert K. Mitchell encouraged members to attend a special reception and dinner for the 1961 award recipients. While the event became quite popular, records indicate that fundraising efforts started to slow. The American National Cattlemen’s Association put out a call to support the construction of the museum. It urged all of its members to contribute to the construction fund. Other organizations and states made similar calls as well.

Despite these efforts, by 1962 the construction project stalled due to a lack of funding. On September 10, 1962, the board of trustees held an emergency meeting in order to discuss a plan to issue revenue bonds designed to raise the funds required to complete construction of the museum. Funding stalled until the bond issue passed. Between 1962 and 1964, the institution received a few major gifts. For example, in 1962 Mr. and Mrs. Oscar Lee Bullock bequeathed a portion of their estate to the National Cowboy Hall of Fame and Western Heritage Center, valued at over $250,000. Therefore, money came in, but not nearly at the speed or amounts needed to complete construction.

By the end of 1963, the Hall of Fame of Great Westerners included 142 members, and the fourth annual Western Heritage Awards were scheduled for January 24, 1964, yet construction of the museum remained at a standstill. Then in 1964, situations drastically improved through a final agreement on the bond issue. In August 24, 1964, the board of trustees entered into an agreement with the Oklahoma City Industrial and Cultural Facilities to form the

23 “History,” National Cowboy Hall of Fame.
Industrial and Cultural Facilities Trust. The trust arranged for the sale of $1.2 million in bonds for the completion of the museum facilities. The revenue bonds held a tax-free interest rate of 5 percent per annum. In turn, the board relinquished the title to the building and land until final restitution of the loan. Funds raised from the sale of bonds financed the construction of the main portion of the museum, roughly 70,000 square feet of space. Trustees planned to eventually complete the overall project and finance final construction through membership fees, grants, and other monetary gifts. Additionally, the museum offered charter memberships to the public up through the dedication of the museum. Membership levels ranged from $10 for a regular annual membership through the patron level at the cost of $1,000. Construction resumed by the spring of 1964 with completion scheduled for the following year.

In 1964, the board of trustees hired art historian Dean Krakel as the first executive director of the National Cowboy Hall of Fame and Western Heritage Museum. Formerly, Krakel served as the director of the Gilcrease Institute of American History and Art, in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Krakel took control of the institution in November of 1964, and immediately set out to build a professional museum staff. That year he hired art director James Baren, chief exhibits preparatory Juan Menchaca, floor manager James Phelan, exhibits specialist Richard Muno, chief of photo-sounds division Kenneth Malone, public relations chief Joe Lawhead, librarian and archivist Dorthea Williams, and institutional preparator Ray T. Pope.

With a newly hired staff, and the construction nearing completion, Krakel needed to build a museum collection. As Melissa Owens, registrar and exhibits coordinator for the National

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26 “Charter Memberships,” The National Cowboy Hall of Fame and Western Heritage Center June 20, 1963. 11.
29 “Staff,” The National Cowboy Hall of Fame and Western Heritage Center June 20, 1963. 7.
Cowboy and Western Heritage Center, explained, in its early years the museum staff was willing to accept almost any object that fit the institution’s mission or dealt with cowboy and rodeo history.³⁰ According to author David Dary, in 1964 Krakel secured the first major acquisition for the museum, “The Guadalupe,” a nine-passenger mail wagon.³¹ However, in terms of museum collections, Krakel focused heavily on art acquisitions during his first few years as director of the institution. As Richard Rattenburay explained, during his first two years, Krakel focused his energies on compiling a large collection of western fine art. He continued that Krackel’s main achievement in these early years was his construction of a “great western art collection.”³² By 1965, Krackel secured for the museum a collection of paintings by the artists Frederic Remington and Charles Russell.³³ In all, the acquisition contained over 200 pieces by the two artists, valued at over $2 million.³⁴ In addition to works by Remington and Russell, the early collection displayed pieces by the artists Thomas Moran, Albert Bierstadt, Carl Bodmer, George Catlin, Thomas Hill, Oscar Berninghaus, and Olaf Seltzer, among other well-known western artists.³⁵ In its earliest years the museum focused heavily on art, but through a series of loans, purchases, and gifts, it accumulated a collection that broadly represented the history and popular culture of the American West.

On June 25, 1967, the museum held a preview reception and officially dedicated the museum on the following day.³⁶ On the day of the dedication, Oklahoma City held a grand parade through town led by western film star John Wayne. The dedication held the spotlight

³⁰ Melissa Owens ( ), interview by the author, March 8, 2007, National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum. 1.
³² Richard Rattenbury ( ), interview by the author, March 6, 2007, National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum.
³⁴ “History,” National Cowboy Hall of Fame.
³⁵ “History,” National Cowboy Hall of Fame.
³⁶ “This Is Your Invitation,” The Wrangler 4, no. 2 (Summer 1965): 1.
throughout the nation. The event served as a feature story in the *New York Times*, and NBC *Coast to Coast* covered the event as well.\(^{37}\) The dedication ceremony included a flag-raising ceremony, where representatives of the 17 western states that assisted in the creation of the museum raised their state flags in front of the new institution in honor of their efforts in creating the National Cowboy Hall of Fame and Western Heritage Museum. After the ceremony, the museum opened its doors to the thousands of people who attended the day’s events. That evening, the museum held a dedication dinner and the Western Heritage Awards Ceremony. The following day, Oklahoma Native American Nations conducted a ceremonial blessing on the museum grounds.\(^{38}\) At the time of its opening, the museum exhibited displays on western history, pioneers and settlers, western art, rodeo stars, celebrities of western popular culture, outdoor nature gardens, and western environmental land use.\(^{39}\)

After the museum opened, the National Cowboy Hall of Fame and Western Heritage Center expanded its collections through a number of major acquisitions. In 1968, the museum acquired the James Earl Fraser statue *End of the Trail*. The museum received the original plaster statue from Tulare County Historical Society in California. The piece served as the primary exhibit for the Fraser Memorial Studio Building, which was located on the museum property.\(^{40}\)

In 1970, the museum published the first edition of its quarterly magazine, *Persimmon Hill*. The magazine replaced the museum’s former publication, *The Wrangler*, which primarily served to inform the public on museum events and happenings. While *Persimmon Hill* continued to publish museum-related events and noteworthy news, it also focused on more historical and scholarly western topics as well. In its first issue, Director Dean Krakel wrote a brief history of

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38 “Weekend Events,” *National Cowboy Hall of Fame and Western Heritage Center Grand Opening*, June 20, 1963.
39 “History,” National Cowboy Hall of Fame.
the museum titled “Mr. Reynolds’ Dream.” Other articles focused on the museum’s art collection and Charles Russell, actor Tom Mix, cattleman Charles Goodnight, the American West on Art, and the institution’s Western Heritage Awards.41

The following year, the museum acquired an additional major work of art that over time would evolve into the collection’s centerpiece. In 1971, Jasper D. Ackerman, an Oklahoma City businessman, gave the institution the work *Emigrants Crossing the Plains*, Albert Bierstadt’s 60x96 oil on canvas landscape.42 According to author David Dary, on July 1, 1972, the board of directors and trustees of the National Cowboy Hall of Fame and Western Heritage Center regained title to the land and building. Additionally, as Melissa Owens, museum registrar and exhibits coordinator, explained, it was at this time that John Wayne bequeathed to the museum his estate, which included a large collection of art, cowboy artifacts, and western memorabilia.43

The following year saw the establishment of the National Academy of Western Art. This set the precedent for the institution’s annual art show, the Prix de West, which became an annual art show for contemporary western artists and awarded cash prizes. Additionally, the museum collected and displayed pieces shown at each year’s event.44

By the late 1970s and early 1980s, the physical appearance of the institution changed through the addition of several monumental outdoor sculptures. On June 19, 1977, the National Cowboy Hall of Fame and Western Heritage Center dedicated Leonard McMurry’s 33-foot, 19-ton statue *Buffalo Bill* in the museum’s Hambrick Gardens. The statue of William F. Cody and his horse Brigham serves to dedicate the man and his role in the West. Actor Joel McCrea

41 *Persimmon Hill*, 1 no. 1 (Summer 1970).
43 Melissa Owens, interview by the author, March 8, 2007, National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, 3.
44 David Dary ed., *Cowboy Hall Timeline*, 5.
provided the inspiration for the statue for his role in the film *Buffalo Bill*, in which McCrea starred as William F. Cody. In September of 1981, the museum dedicated the monumental statue of Frederic Remington’s *Coming Through the Rye* as a centerpiece to the museum’s entrance. However, despite these early successes, by the 1980s the museum experienced massive setbacks.

According to Richard Rattenbury, the museum experienced difficult times because of many financial and managerial issues. Don Reeves explained that by the 1980s, the institution was still relatively new and lacked a major benefactor. By the 1980s, economics in that region of the West experienced a downfall, particularly in the areas of agriculture, oil, and real estate. The economic situation at the time took a heavy toll on the institution’s financial support from private donors. The museum’s administration failed to properly deal with the fiscal dilemma, and as a result fell into bankruptcy and receivership. Throughout the early 1980s, the museum faced very difficult times. The institution decided that Dean Krakel had mismanaged both the museum and its financial assets and ultimately removed him from his position. Throughout Krakel’s administration, institutional records were not well kept. Additionally, sources indicate that the administration used nineteen of the institution’s paintings as collateral against a $7 million debt, which included a $2.4 million overdue loan from the First National Bank of Oklahoma City, and a $2.2 million overdue loan from Citizens National Bank. A very messy legal battle ensued and the future of the institution remained uncertain.

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47 Rattenbury, interview, 1.
48 Reeves, interview, 4.
In 1986, the National Cowboy Hall of Fame and Western Heritage Center hired historian and museum professional Byron Price to take over as the institution’s director. Through his efforts, Price set the museum back on course and, as Rattenbury explained, really began a new period of expansion in terms of collections, vision, interpretation, and physical size.\textsuperscript{50} When he took over, Price wanted to reinterpret the museum’s message. At the time, the museum exhibits still described a very narrow view of western history, focusing on the white men who made the West. That year, Price hired Richard Rattenbury as Curator of History. According to Rattenbury, the museum still told a limited history, a Turnarian history, and one of manifest destiny. Native Americans held a limited presence throughout the institution, and so did women throughout the discussion of rodeo, but overall, their stories remained narrow.\textsuperscript{51} Price, as a trained historian, sought to expand the institution’s message.

Price wanted to tell stories of the West through multiple points of view. He wanted to see a more inclusive institution that told multiple interpretations of the West through the stories of gender and ethnic interpretations. As Rattenbury noted, through Price’s reevaluation of the institution’s story, he also raised the level of scholarship of the institution. The articles and stories in \textit{Persimmon Hill} took on a much more academic feel and focused more heavily on scholarly topics.\textsuperscript{52} Under Price’s administration, the museum completely re-envisioned itself. As Don Reeves explained, “We were starting from scratch, program-wise and presentation-wise.”\textsuperscript{53} The process forced the staff to rethink basic concepts concerning their stories. It forced the museum staff to intellectually define concepts such as “western” and “the American West,” and not only decide what these terms meant in a museum setting, but also consider what they meant

\textsuperscript{50} Rattenbury, interview, 1.
\textsuperscript{51} Rattenbury, interview, 3.
\textsuperscript{52}Rattenbury, interview, 3.
\textsuperscript{53} Reeves, interview, 4.
to the institution’s audience. It forced them to consider the geographic, cultural, and political implications of such terms.\textsuperscript{54}

In many ways, the National Cowboy Hall of Fame and Western Heritage Center planned to start from scratch. As Don Reeves explained the initial phase, the institution’s staff first examined the museum community to see what other institutions were doing at the time and which institutions worked well and were cutting-edge in terms of their operations and exhibits, such as Colonial Williamsburg, and the Children’s Museum in Boston. Additionally, the staff collaborated with leading scholars in the fields of western history and western art. Based on these early discussions, the institution defined the American West geographically, thematically, and intellectually, and then organized the stories it wanted to tell depicting the peoples of the West accordingly.\textsuperscript{55} The first signs of change came through temporary exhibits. As Richard Rattenbury explained, by the mid-1980s, the museum produced temporary exhibits exploring the topics of cowboy culture, such as making saddles and spurs. While the topics still focused on the cowboy life, it was a marked shift away from the celebrity cowboy to the working cowboy.\textsuperscript{56}

The story principally focused on the cowboy and cattle culture. They then divided this main theme into a number of sub-stories, such as the working cowboy and cowgirl, rodeo, and the entertainment aspect of the cattle culture. The next topic focused on the various forms of western entertainment, such as film and literature. Art remained a key focus of exhibition; however, rather than showcase great pieces of western art and a collection of great western artists, the museum focused on the way in which artists saw and imagined the West, and how these notions and interpretations of the West changed over time. He also noted that the institution

\textsuperscript{54} Reeves, interview, 5.
\textsuperscript{55} Reeves, interview.
\textsuperscript{56} Reeves, interview, 2.
focused more heavily on Native American History. By the early 1980s the institution’s Native American Collection began to grow, partially as a reaction to the newly created Native American Studies program at Oklahoma University.57

In 1991, the museum acquired its first significant collection, the Joe Grandee Collection, which broadened the scope of the institution. According to Rattenbury, Joe Grandee was a western illustrator and artist, as well as a collector of western artifacts. The collection contained roughly 5,000 objects, the bulk of which focused on U.S. military in the West, Native Americans, frontier history, and cowboy culture. This acquisition allowed the museum to interpret and display far more objects and histories than it had previously. It also fueled an effort to expand the museum facilities and shaped the overall mission and focus of the institution.58

With the new addition, the institution told a much broader history of the American West, no longer focusing solely on rodeo and cowboys.

The institution once again faced the problem of space. They possessed objects to tell their intended stories, but they now required a larger facility to meet their needs. The new administration influenced the institution in a very positive manner. With a new vision in hand, the National Cowboy Hall of Fame and Western Heritage Center developed a plan to construct two new wings to the institution, which would triple the size of the facility. Over the next several years, under the administration of Byron Price, the institution embarked on a fundraising campaign to not only financially stabilize itself, but also fund new construction. According to David Dary, in 1992 the museum launched a $35 million capital campaign, which saw a great deal of success. In addition to the two new wings, construction plans included a complete

57 Reeves, interview, 5.
58 Rattenbury, interview, 2.
remodel of the existing space, which increased the overall size by 140,000 square feet.\textsuperscript{59} That same year, the institution joined the Museums West Consortium.

Construction for the proposed expansion started in 1993. Throughout the institution, change occurred quite rapidly. Over the years, the \textit{End of the Trail}, James Earl Fraser’s plaster sculpture, experienced a great deal of wear and deterioration. In 1994, through the financial efforts of Kerr-McGee Corporation and the Robert S. and Grayce B. Kerr Foundation, the institution fully restored the statue and relocated it inside the museum’s main building.\textsuperscript{60} That same year, the institution opened its 5,000-square-foot, hands-on children’s museum, named the Children’s Cowboy Corral. On November 8, 1996, the museum completed its planned expansion and successfully funded the $36 million project.\textsuperscript{61} This effort led to the creation of several new galleries, including the Silberman Gallery and its collection of over 2,500 works of art, which the museum acquired in 1996. Additionally, according to Charles Rand, in 1997 the Elizabeth M. Dickinson Research Center opened.\textsuperscript{62} In a short period of time, the institution tripled its size and quadrupled its exhibition areas, and yet expansion still continued.

Amidst the expansion, Byron Price resigned as director of the National Cowboy Hall of Fame and Western Heritage Center, where he served for ten years, and accepted the position of executive director of the Buffalo Bill Historical Center. In late 1996, the board of directors hired local businessman and banker Kenneth Townsend to replace Price and take over as executive director. Townsend began his duties in January of 1997, and entered the institution at a time of great progress and prosperity. Over his career, Price set the institution on solid financial footing

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{59} David Dary, ed., \textit{Cowboy Hall Timeline}, 77.  \\
\textsuperscript{60} “End of the Trail,” Exhibit Label, National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum. Viewed March 5, 2007.  \\
\textsuperscript{61} David Dary, ed., \textit{Cowboy Hall Timeline}, 77.  \\
\textsuperscript{62} Rand, interview., 2-3.}
and expanded both its size and scope. As Townsend took over, the center celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary. That year, the institution redefined and focused its mission statement, “To preserve and interpret the Heritage of the American West for the enrichment of the public.” By the end of the year, the museum opened its Persimmon Hill Restaurant. In 1998, at the 37th Western Heritage Awards Gala event, the museum unveiled a seven-foot tall bronze statue of former American President Ronald Reagan. For the institution, as president, the former western movie star politically embodied the idea of the modern cowboy. For his efforts, the institution honored Reagan and placed the dedicated statue in his honor. The event also saw the induction of the cast of the television show *Little House on the Prairie*.

The museum continued to expand throughout 1998, adding a number of additions as part of the $35 million expansion. That year, the museum dedicated and opened both the Sutherland and Atherton Gardens. The museum also announced the construction of several new galleries, including the American Cowboy Gallery, the Arthur and Shifra Silberman Gallery, the Native American Gallery, the American Rodeo Gallery, and the Joe Grandee Museum of the Frontier West. Construction began over the summer of 1998 and the plan was to open the galleries the following year. The expansion created the Edward L. Gaylord Exhibition Wing, which honored those who made significant contributions to the American West, its presentation, and our shared experiences. Edward L. Gaylord was editor and publisher of the local newspaper, *Daily Oklahoman*. That year, the National Cowboy Hall of Fame and Western Heritage Center also

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64 *Persimmon Hill* (Spring 1997)
65 “Mission Statement,” National Cowboy and Western Heritage Center, Dickinson Research Center, Director’s Files.
created the Center for the Study of the American West, which operated as the controlling center for the institution’s educational and research opportunities and served to promote the study of the American West.67

The new design also included an immersive and interactive space modeled on a late nineteenth century cattle town. When the museum first opened, as Don Reeves noted, it contained a small exhibit of a cattle town in the downstairs level of the building where people could walk through and interact with their environment. Reeves explained that the exhibit was quite popular, and the public requested that the museum keep it. Through the new renovation, the staff created a replica nineteenth century cattle town called Prosperity Junction. They placed the concept of an outdoor setting at twilight in a 13,000-square-foot room with a thirty-eight-foot-high ceiling. The museum hired a design team from Michigan to construct an outdoor space in a completely immersive indoor setting. The staff intended to transport the visitor to a different time and space; to literally trick their audience.68 Prosperity Junction includes the Whitt Lee livery with horses and coach, the saddle shop of J. J. Garrett, a train station, Patrick O’Brien’s blacksmith shop, the Thompson House Hotel, a Union Pacific railway car, a full-size windmill, the Dispatch newspaper, the Silver Dollar Saloon, the Osborn Photo Studio, the law office of Phillip E. Daugherty, the U.S. Marshall’s office, Flemming Mercantile, the Cattlemen’s State Bank, Blake’s Feed and Seed, Piedmont Christian Church, a school house, and Edward Calhoon’s medical office. Each building contained its own furnishings and exhibits.

On September 11, 1999, the National Cowboy Hall of Fame and Western Heritage Center held the official ribbon-cutting—or in this case, a rope-cutting ceremony—for its new wing. On

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68 Reeves, interview, 5.
that day, the dedication ceremony officially opened the American Cowboy Gallery, the
American Rodeo Gallery, and Prosperity Junction. The following year brought the museum
national accreditation, and also brought the institution closer to the completion of the expansion
project. In 2000, the American Association of Museums officially recognized the National
Cowboy Hall of Fame and Western Heritage Center and granted it full accreditation after thirty-
five years of operation. For the first time since it opened, it met all of the organizational
requirements for full recognition and accreditation. On October 19, 2000, at the Annual Gala
and Western Heritage Awards, the museum celebrated the continuation of its construction plans
with the dedication of the Native American Gallery and the Joe Grandee Museum of the Frontier
West. The event celebrated the completion of a nearly six-year, $35 million expansion and
renovation project. Over that course of time, the museum increased its size from 80,000 to
220,000 square feet, and also expanded its mission, programs, and vision of the American
West. After thirty-five years, the vision of Chester A. Reynolds grew into a nationally and
internationally recognized center on the American West.

On November 16, 2000, the institution officially changed its name to the National
Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum. As Townshend explained in a press release, over the
years, the museum evolved and the former name no longer described the institution’s purpose or
vision. It grew far beyond the state of a hall of fame. The name and logo changes fit into a larger

69 “Wing Opens at Hall, Major Museum Donors Cut Rope Launching Gaylord Exhibit” The Daily Oklahoman
Heritage Museum, Dickinson Research Center, Director’s Files, 83.
71 “Cowboy Hall Gala Celebrates New Exhibit Spaces” The Daily Oklahoman October 20, 2000, in Cowboy Hall
Center, Director’s Files, 86.
plan to professionalize the institution and reach a wider audience. Shortly thereafter, Edward L. Gaylord committed $30 million to the museum for the establishment of a proposed $100 million endowment fund in order to secure and protect the institution’s economic livelihood. Over the past fifteen years, the institution grew in terms of its size, scope, and intellectual interpretations of subject matter. With the start of the endowment fund, its fiscal future now expanded as well. However, the following year the museum once again experienced loss. On August 8, 2001, Kenneth Townshend died at the age of 58.

After Townsend’s death, museum board director Martin Dickinson assumed the title of interim director and took control of the institution until the board located a qualified replacement. In January of 2002, the museum’s board of directors hired Charles P. Schroeder as the new executive director of the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum. Formerly, Schroeder served as the head of the National Cattleman’s Beef Association, and from 1993 to 1996 as the executive vice president and director of development for the University of Nebraska Foundation. Schroeder officially began his new position on March 4, 2002. From the start, Schroeder made it his mission to expand the museum’s presence and increase public awareness regarding its collections.

On April 20, 2002, the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum held its forty-first Western Heritage Awards celebration. At the event, the museum inaugurated its newest

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gallery addition, the Weitzenhoffer Fine American Firearms Gallery, a 1,000-square-foot space that featured a collection of fine arms produced by such American firearms manufacturers as Colt, Remington, Smith & Wesson, Winchester, Sharps, Marlin, and Parker Brothers. The gallery officially opened to the public the previous day on April 19, 2002, in memory of former director, Ken Townshend. The museum acquired the collection through a gift from theatrical producer A. Max Weitzenhoffer. The gallery’s construction modeled a nineteenth-century study with walnut cases and textured fabric. Unlike other encyclopedic firearms collections, the Weitzenhoffer Collection highlights the craftsmanship, design, aesthetics, and rarity of over 100 American fine firearms.

The year of 2002 brought about a great deal of change and expansion for the institution. It witnessed the recent passing of a director and the appointment of a new institutional leader. Aside from the opening of the Weitzenhoffer Gallery, the museum also expanded through an increase in special exhibitions and programming. In 2003, the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum completed construction on its most recent permanent gallery—the Western Performers Gallery. The 4,000-square-foot exhibit highlighted the role of the American cowboy throughout popular culture. The exhibit focused on the image of the cowboy in various popular media, such as literature, stage and theatrical performances, silent films, radio, television, and classic western films. It sought to explore the ways in which the notion and image of the cowboy in all of its various forms impacted society’s perception of the western experience throughout time. The exhibit displayed several hundred objects never before displayed to the public. The

gallery design mimicked the facade of a 1930s movie theater, and included a number of newer audiovisual components in its exhibits.\textsuperscript{78}

In 2005, the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum celebrated its fiftieth anniversary. Since its last major gallery opening, the institution continued to explore the history of the American West through educational and public programming, as well as temporary exhibits, exploring such topics as western arts, Native American culture and lifeways, cowboy arts, and western imagery. The institution marked the anniversary with the release of its first publication, \textit{A Western Legacy: The National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum},\textsuperscript{79} through which the museum staff, along with author David Dary, told the story of the museum’s history and its collections, and depicted the rich displays throughout the museum’s galleries.\textsuperscript{80}

Since its inception, the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum has evolved from a dream through which to honor the great individuals who contributed to the West into an internationally respected, 220,000-square-foot museum that focuses on the more specific aspects of western history and culture. From the start, the institution chose to convey all the components of western heritage; from the historic to the popular. Today, the institution continues to grow and evolve. Future plans include adding new structure to house the research center and educational programming, building an auditorium, strengthening collections, and establishing a solid financial endowment.


\textsuperscript{79} \textit{A Western Legacy: The National Cowboy and Western Heritage} contains a very accurate and detailed history of the institution and its exhibits. However, specifically pertaining to Dary’s introduction, there are a number of problems regarding sources and ethical scholarship.

\textsuperscript{80} See David Dary et al. \textit{A Western Legacy: The National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum} (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2005).
The National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum provided an alternative interpretation to the history of the American West. In many ways, its initial concept singularly focused on one small aspect of a larger western American history, that of rodeo and cattle culture. Similar to the Buffalo Bill Historical Center, the initial plan established by the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum evolved into a much broader and more inclusive telling of the American West. However, elements of western popular culture and mythology remained vital to its western narratives. In the early 1980s a similar plan began to unfold in Los Angeles, California, where western icon Gene Autry had his own vision for the preservation and exhibition of western American history.
By the 1980s many well-established western heritage museums and institutions operated throughout the United States. Each told its own unique version of western history, while at the same time provided overlap and continuity to an overall narrative. The stories these museums told resulted from a blending of historical narrative and popular culture, as seen at the Buffalo Bill Historical Center and the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum. The story of the American West and its portrayal in museums resulted in a confluence of American mythology and history. The Autry National Center in Los Angeles, California, not only embraced that confluence, but transformed it into a fundamental aspect of western American history—an aspect that would impact its future analysis and interpretation.

Located in Los Angeles’s Griffith Park, the Autry National Center is widely recognized as a premier multicultural center, dedicated to preserving and exhibiting the stories and lives of the many individuals involved in shaping the history of the American West. The institution opened in 1988 with the goal of representing not only the multicultural history the city of Los Angeles, but the greater American West as well. Since its inception, the Autry National Center has evolved into an influential force in the discourse and interpretation of western history and heritage. Despite the fact that the institution is relatively young, in recent years it has played a key role in shaping the way in which we understand the West. Additionally, although the center opened in 1988, the idea for a museum long predated the vision for the institution itself. The initial vision started with the institution’s namesake, Gene Autry.
Orvon Grover Autry, more commonly known as Gene Autry, started his career in 1928, and over thirty years rose to fame through his work in radio, film, and television, earned himself the title of “The Singing Cowboy,” and became a western icon. Among other honors and awards, both the Country Music and Nashville Songwriters halls of Fame inducted Gene Autry as a member. Additionally, he remains the only person awarded stars in all five categories of performance on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, for his contributions in music, radio, live performance, film, and television. Autry not only made a living through his depictions of the American West, but he embraced its history as well.

According to Jonathan Spaulding, vice president of exhibitions for the Autry National Center and executive director of the Museum of the American West, Autry was an avid collector of western memorabilia and material culture; he was particularly fond of items that dealt with rodeo and western performances. Throughout his life and career, Autry accumulated an enormous collection of items related to western popular culture, as well as historical objects from the American West.¹ As Michael Duchemin, senior curator at the Autry National Center, explained, over time, Autry amassed not only a large collection of artifacts, but also a great deal of property throughout greater Los Angeles, such as soundstages and recording studios, which all housed his various archives and collections.² Autry turned himself into a celebrity through America’s fascination of western popular culture, but he personally was equally fond of the historical aspect of the West. Autry really saw himself as more than a showman. As John Gray,

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¹ Jonathan Spaulding, interview by the author, November 2, 2007, Autry National Center, 1.
² Michael Duchemin, interview by the author, November 2, 2007, Autry National Center, 4.
president and CEO of the Autry National Center, explained, Autry was a philanthropic individual who wanted to share his success with the public.3

As Duchemin explained, in 1951, Autry purchased Melody Ranch, a western movie studio established by Monogram Studios in 1915.4 Autry wanted to create a tourist location where visitors could experience a Hollywood film setting and learn about the ways in which western films were made and produced. Additionally, this location allowed him to share his western collections with the public.5 He envisioned it as a museum of western film and popular culture, and he was not alone in his thinking. At the time, several movie studios and film locations had worked to transform themselves into tourist locations. Four years later, in 1955, Walt Disney opened Disneyland, providing its visitors a similar experience through its attractions of Frontierland, Adventureland, and Fantasyland.

Autry’s plan for Melody Ranch never came to fruition, though he remained in possession of the property. In 1962, the wildfires in the San Gabriel Mountains destroyed Melody Ranch, along with the majority of Autry’s collections housed within the facility. As Duchemin noted, estimates described that Autry had forty railroad carloads of artifacts and objects throughout Melody Ranch at the time of the fire. Of the fifty-four buildings throughout the property, the San Gabriel fire destroyed fifty-one, and destroyed 90 to 95 percent of the historical material on-site. Autry lost not only a significant portion of his collection, but also the possibility of a museum, at least for the time.6

4 Duchemin, interview, 2.
5 A special presentation of the NBC television program, Wide Wide World took a detailed look into Autry’s creation of Melody Ranch. See Dave Garroway. Wide Wide World: The Western (NBC Television Network, June 8, 1958).
6 Duchemin, interview, 2.
The initial concept behind the Autry national center came into being in 1984, but the story behind the institution began in the early 1970s. As Duchemin explained, in 1973 Gene Autry’s first wife, Ina May Autry, created the Autry Foundation. At the time of her death in 1980, the Autry Foundation’s value totaled roughly $10 million. In 1981, Gene Autry married Jacqueline Ellam, now Jackie Autry. In 1982, Gene and Jackie Autry sold KTLA TV, the Los Angeles television station owned by Gene Autry Enterprises. The station sold for $240 million. Duchemin noted that even though deceased, Ina Autry’s share in the sold property totaled $60 million, which was transferred to the Autry Foundation. That increased the foundation’s value to roughly $70 million, which eventually provided the backing for the future construction of the institution.

The concept for the Autry National Center emerged at this time through the efforts of Jackie Autry. According to Autry, “My husband has always wanted three things in life. He wanted a World Series Ring, he wanted an Academy Award, and he wanted a museum. I know I can’t get him the first two, but I think I can get him a museum.” Fire destroyed Gene Autry’s hopes for a museum at Melody Ranch, along with a great deal of his collections. However, as Duchemin noted, not all of his holdings were lost in 1962. He still had business records and collections scattered throughout Los Angeles. Through the remaining material holdings and the financial backing of the Autry Foundation, which Jackie Autry oversaw and controlled as the foundation’s director, the possibility for a museum emerged once again.
Gene and Jackie Autry were very close friends of western movie star Monty Hale and his wife Joanne, a successful business executive, and the idea for a museum emerged through a discussion between the four individuals. As Joanne Hale, the founding director of the Autry Museum of Western History, explained, the four spent a good deal of time together. One evening in 1984, the Autrys and the Hales went out for dinner, and a discussion arose about creating a museum.12 The group decided to follow through with Gene’s dream and build a museum. As head of the Autry Foundation, Jackie Autry utilized its funds to create an institution. Jackie Autry and Joanne Hale took control of the endeavor. As Hale said, Jackie Autry asked her to assist in the project. Hale, who recently retired and sold her company, agreed, and by 1984, the two established the initial plan and drew up the articles of incorporation for the Gene Autry Western Heritage Museum. The institutions first board of directors, founded on September 18, 1984, consisted of nine members: Gene Autry, Jackie Autry, Stanley B. Schneider, Clyde F. Tritt, Monte Hale, Joanne Hale, John Rianchi, Johnny Grant, and the Reverend Larry Stamper, with Gene Autry serving as chairman of the board.13 At the request of Jackie Autry, Joanne Hale agreed to serve as the executive director.14

Hale, came from the world of business, rather than the worlds of history and museums. In order to run a museum, she needed to educate herself. She looked to the staff at the Southwest Museum of the American Indian in the Mount Washington area of Los Angeles for guidance. Hale explained that the professional staff at the Southwest Museum became her guidance, and through lengthy discussions and mentorship from individuals such as the then director Patrick

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13 “Founding Board of Directors” in The Autry Museum of Western Heritage at the Millennium (Autry National Center, 1999), Autry National Center, Autry Institute for the Study of the American West, Institutional Archives. 7.
14 Hale, interview, 1.
Houlihan, she learned how the business of museums operated.\textsuperscript{15} She spoke with other museum professionals as well, such as Craig Black, executive director of the Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History.\textsuperscript{16} As planning continued, in 1985, Hale constructed a professional staff for the museum. She hired James Nottage as the institution’s chief curator and Mary Ellen Nottage as director of collection’s management, both formerly from the Kansas State Historical Society.\textsuperscript{17} Shortly thereafter, Hale hired Cynthia Harnisch as the museum’s directory of education,\textsuperscript{18} Robert McGriffin as the head of the museum’s conservation department,\textsuperscript{19} and Robert P. Coontz as the director of development.\textsuperscript{20} At this time, museum lacked a physical location. Later that year, the city of Los Angeles proposed that the board consider Griffith Park as a location for the museum’s construction.

From the start, planning focused on the construction of a museum that told the story of the American West in concurrence with the field of western history. As Dr. Louise Pubols, historian at the Autry National Center, explained, Gene wanted the museum to exhibit the story of the American West and the way its history affected society. He directly opposed the notion of building a shrine or vanity museum to himself.\textsuperscript{21} However, the public remained skeptical. As Michael Duchemin explained, by 1985, the museum board considered a few different locations upon which to construct the museum, including a site near the Los Angeles Zoo in Griffith Park. The Roy Rogers Museum had recently opened in Victorville, California, which the public

\textsuperscript{15} Hale, interview, 2.
\textsuperscript{16} Hale, interview, 1.
\textsuperscript{17} Hale, interview, 2.
\textsuperscript{18} “Meet the Staff,” \textit{Spur: News from the Gene Autry Western Heritage Museum} I, no. 2 (October-December 1988): 5.
\textsuperscript{19} “Conservator Oversees Care of Collections” \textit{Spur: News from the Gene Autry Western Heritage Museum} II, no. 1 (January-March 1989): 5.
\textsuperscript{21} Louise Pubols, interview by the author, November 1, 2007, Autry National Center, 1.
heavily considered a vanity museum. This decision drew concern, as some members of the public viewed the Gene Autry Museum of Western Heritage in a similar light. The public claimed that Gene Autry could build an institution anywhere he wanted, and questioned the use of public parkland for the construction of a vanity museum. Similarly, groups such as the Sierra Club objected to the use of Griffith Park for anything other than purely open green-space.22

There was a conflict in perception concerning the vision for the institution. As Joanne Hale explained, the founders saw the institution as more than just a place with exhibits. The original concept behind the museum focused on creating an educational facility—a place for families and children to visit and acquire historically correct information about the American West.23 Despite the initial conflict, the board of directors chose the Pine Meadows site in Griffith Park, directly across the street from the Los Angeles Zoo. Early in 1986 Hale met with the architectural team Windom, Wein and Cohen.24 The structural plan called for a simple design, which contained aspects similar to the Spanish mission architectural style. On November 12, 1986, workers broke ground on the construction of the new facility.25

By 1986, chief curator James Nottage set out to develop a storyline and create a plan for the museum exhibits. Pubols explained that the original storyline tended to focus on and replicate the periodization of the old West; that is, it focused on the traditional nineteenth century American West. However, it looked at this old periodization in a new light by comparing different cultures, and moving away from notions of manifest destiny.26 As John Gray, president and CEO of the Autry National Center, noted, Nottage fit the museum’s storyline into the

22 Duchemin, interview, 3.
23 Hale, interview, 3.
24 Hale, interview, 1.
26 Pubols, interview, 2.
academic trends of the time and created a theme that revolved around the topics explored throughout new western history. Gray stated that Nottage intended to design a cutting-edge and current institution. He worked closely with Disney Imagineering to design an interactive and technologically driven exhibit space, and devised a very ethnically, culturally, and gender-integrated exhibit plan.

In 1987, Nottage produced the museum’s mission statement, synthesizing the objectives and scope of the institution: “The mission of the Gene Autry Western Heritage Museum is to operate as a cultural and educational institution whose function is to acquire, preserve, and interpret information and artifacts documenting the history of the American West.” Museum staff defined the West geographically bound east and west by the Mississippi River and Pacific Ocean, and north and south by the continent. They chose a very broad temporal framework, recognizing people and experiences from prehistory to the present. Topically, the institution focused on the historical West, but also included assessment and analysis of the fictional, or popular, West as well.

As Michael Duchemin discussed, John Nottage also worked diligently to expand the museum’s collections. During its initial planning stage, the Gene Autry Western Heritage Museum acquired two major collections, the first of which came from the world-renowned leather-smith, John Bianchi, who had previously purchased the entirety of the Frontier Museum in Temecula, California. The Bianchi Collection contained artifacts dealing primarily with outlaws, lawmen, and the legendary West, and it became a main portion of the museum’s

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28 Gray, interview, 1.
30 James Nottage, “Mission Statement.”
collection. The second acquired collection, the Enron Art Foundation Collection, expanded the institution’s art holdings. This collection included works by famed western artists such as Frederick Remington, Albert Bierstadt, Charles Russell, A. F. Tait, William T. Ranney, and Thomas Moran. In July of 1988, the institution released the first issue of its museum publication: the *Gene Autry Western Heritage Museum News*. However, by the second issue they changed the title to *Spur: News from the Gene Autry Western Heritage Museum*. The first issue highlighted the building’s construction, acquisition of new collections, and the overall state of the museum. Also in that issue, the museum advertised the sale of charter memberships to the public, ranging in various levels of support and benefits.

Throughout the summer and fall of 1988, construction for the museum remained on schedule, and the staff began moving the collections into the building in order to construct the exhibits. On November 22, 1988, the Gene Autry Western Heritage Museum held its official dedication and opening ceremony. At the event, celebrities; dignitaries, including Los Angeles Mayor Tom Bradley and Councilman John Ferraro; and fans of the American West watched Gene Autry cut a rope tied across the museum entrance with a bowie knife, officially opening the museum to the public. The newly constructed institution spanned 140,000 square feet and housed seven permanent museum galleries, a restaurant, museum store, an educational center,

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31 Duchemin, interview, 4.
and meeting spaces.\textsuperscript{37} The building’s construction implemented state-of-the-art security and disaster prevention systems, and heating and cooling systems designed to properly and safely house museum art and artifacts.\textsuperscript{38} Upon the opening, the museum’s education center received a $250,000 grant from the Mary Pickford Foundation. The 6,000-square-foot Mary Pickford Education Center included classrooms and educational facilities to for the support of museum programming, which sought to not only explore the history of the West, but also “emphasize the role of women and minorities in the development of the West.”\textsuperscript{39} Additionally, the institution received a major “six-figure gift” from Paul and June Ebensteiner, which added to the museum’s capital fund for the purchase of art, and specifically directed their involvement to the museum’s Theodore Roosevelt Collection.\textsuperscript{40}

Upon its opening, the museum consisted of seven permanent galleries dedicated to various aspects of western history and myth. “The Spirit of Discovery Gallery” explored the period of pre-contact Native America and European exploration. “The Spirit of Opportunity Gallery” explored the various reasons people traveled west to settle the land. “The Spirit of Conquest Gallery” looked at the presence of the American military in the West, and the way in which its presence impacted Native lifeways, while also opening the West to expansion. “The Spirit of Community Gallery” discussed the political and economic evolution of the West through the creation of diverse new community. This gallery also exhibited the Colt Firearms collection and discussed the development of law in the West. “The Spirit of Romance Gallery”

depicted a collection of western fine art, and other documents, such as images of Buffalo Bill’s Wild West, in order to discuss the roots of popular and romantic images of the West. displayed the role played by the American West throughout popular films. Much like the Whitney Western Art Museum at the Buffalo Bill Historical Center, and the Western Performers Gallery at the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, the Spirit of Romance Gallery and the Spirit of Imagination Gallery presented popular representations of western history. The galleries highlight the tension between the history and mythology of the West. However, they do so in a conscious way. Finally, the Spirit of the Cowboy Gallery traces the history of cattle culture from its early history throughout modern working traditions and popular appeal.41

In addition to the permanent galleries, the museum housed a gallery for the exhibition of special and rotating exhibits, exploring various histories and themes of the American West. The institution’s first special exhibit, “The West Explored,” highlighted the Peters Collection, a collection of western fine art produced by notable western artists.42 The exhibition of the Peters collection began an institutional trend, whereby the special exhibits gallery constantly updated its public presentations. According to Joanne Hale, the Gene Autry Western Heritage Museum opened a new special exhibit about every three months.43 Not only did this allow the institution to provide the public with fresh material, and allow the staff to explore new aspects of western history, but as many of the special exhibits came to the museum as traveling exhibits or through loan, it also provided the museum with new exhibits at a time when institutional collections remained somewhat sparse.

43 Hale, interview, 3.
Through the efforts of Jackie Autry and Joanne Hale, along with the museum staff and numerous other contributors and donors, Gene Autry’s goal of having a museum came to fruition. Once opened, the museum explored the balance between the historical and popular aspects of the West. As John Gray explained,

> It [the museum] was formed with the idea of New Western History, which was to tell a more complicated story, and the galleries, the cases, and information reflect a high sensitivity to conquered people, minority peoples, and women. But, interestingly enough, the museum used names that were celebratory of the Old West, and promoted the museum through the celebrity of Gene and his friends. So, it became known more as a Hollywood vanity museum for Gene than it was, and I think as a result, disappointed all of Gene’s fans because it wasn’t about Gene, and confused people who didn’t come here. Once people came here, it established itself as a very rich, multi-layered, and textured museum.\(^4\)

Despite the fact that the museum focused on the history of the American West rather than the life and times of Gene Autry, it appeared that the public still saw the two as one in the same. Additionally, by focusing, at least partially on the mythical and popular aspects of the West, it naturally required that the museum include Gene’s role in the construction of a popular perception the American West. This balance drew some criticism; however, in its earliest years, the Gene Autry Western Heritage Museum saw a great deal of success.

The year of 1989 saw continued growth and expansion for the Gene Autry Western Heritage Museum. Throughout the year, the museum staff implemented a number of community activities and programs for the public, such as public lectures, musical performances, and film screenings. The Gene Autry Western Heritage museum received continued corporate and private support as well. On April 11, 1989, the Golden Spur Café, the museum’s restaurant, officially

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\(^4\) Gray, interview, 1.
opened its doors to the public. Additionally, the Security Pacific Automation Company installed state-of-the-art computer equipment and software throughout the institution.

By summer, the museum launched a new gallery through the support of a major donation. The Anheuser-Busch Company donated $500,000 to the museum, along with a number of advertisements, glasses, and other artifacts dating from the 1880s throughout the early twentieth century. In recognition of their gift, the museum renamed its exhibit on western saloons the “Anheuser-Busch Companies Gallery” on July 12, 1989. The gallery, located in the “Spirit of Community Gallery,” allowed the museum to explore the stories of saloons and gambling in the American West. On August 18, 1989, the museum received a major gift from the Security Pacific Foundation, who gave $100,000 to assist with the purchase of the Fred Rosenstock Collection for the intuition’s research library. The Rosenstock collection contained roughly 35,000 volumes related to the American West. According to Marva Felchlin, director of the Autry Library and associate director of the Institute for the Study of the American West at the Autry National Center explained, Rosenstock was a very well-known western book collector and dealer, and he donated a large portion of his personal collection to the institution. As she explained, including duplicate copies of volumes, the collection contained nearly 70,000 pieces, which the museum acquired in 1990.

By the end of 1989, the museum continued to plan for the future and announced two new special exhibits for 1990, examining the topics of Native American history and western interior

49 Marva Felchlin, interview by the author, November 9, 2007, Autry National Center, 1.
design. In November of 1989, the executive director of the Autry Museum of Western Heritage, Joanne Hale, met with the executive directors of the Amon Carter Museum, the Eiteljorg, Museum, the Buffalo Bill Historical Center, the Gilcrease Museum, and the National Cowboy Hall of Fame in order to establish a consortium of museums that all focused on topics related to the American West. The group voted to invite four other museums to join the organization, the Western Museum Consortium, later renamed the Museums West Consortium, in order to create a museum network through which the members could better collaborate on exhibits and scholarship. Amidst all the success, the museum announced its gala celebration, an annual black-tie event established as a fundraising and celebratory occasion. The museum scheduled its first gala for November 20, 1989, at the Century Plaza Hotel in Los Angeles, with appearances by Willie Nelson and Glen Campbell. Over the years, the gala evolved into one of the institution’s most important and celebrated annual events.

The year 1990 started with great momentum for the museum. On two separate occasions early in the year Ronald Regan and Chief Justice Thurgood Marshall visited the museum. By 1990, the museum established a museum advisory council in order to assist in fundraising, acquisitions, marketing, and community relations. As Jonathan Spaulding explained, the museum’s advisory committees became a vital component for the exhibition process. The institution formed the advisory council with specific purposes in mind. Over time, those

55 Jonathan Spaulding, interview by the author, November 2, 2007, Autry National Center, 10.
functions became a very important way for the museum to link itself to the community, especially at times when the institution created new exhibits that focused on specific topics and groups of people in the West. The advisory council enabled the institution to not only raise funds for the exhibition, but also receive information, donation of artifacts, and community input related to specific subject matter.56

In addition to their $100,000 grant from the previous year, the Security Pacific Foundation announced a gift of over 1,100 volumes from the bank’s corporate library. The collection’s strengths focused on California and regional Los Angeles history.57 At the same time, the museum launched its next special exhibit, “The Interior West: The Craft and Style of Thomas Molesworth.” The exhibit came to the museum through a collaborative effort with the Buffalo Bill Historical Center and the exhibit’s curators, Wally Reber and Paul Fees.58 After only one full year of operation, Joanne Hale and her staff managed to establish an institution, solely through private funding, which now collaborated with some of the nation’s most well-respected western museums. The Gene Autry Museum of Western Heritage drew not only the attention of the public, but also the professional museum world as well.

Collaborative efforts and community relationships proved fruitful for the institution, and in June of 1990, Joanne Hale announced that Wells Fargo Bank donated the generous sum of $1 million to the Gene Autry Western Heritage Museum. The Wells Fargo gift permitted the institution to update and expand the museum’s theater facilities and increase the museum’s collections. In recognition of the gift, the museum renamed its theater “The Wells Fargo

56 Spaulding, interview.
The theater. That same year, Arco, the Marriott Corporation, and Northern Trust of California each gave the museum substantial monetary gifts.

During the fall of 1990, the museum received three more major contributions. In October, actor, collector, artist, and patron of the arts George Montgomery donated a large portion of his collection of western art to the museum. In recognition of his gift, the museum renamed its special exhibits gallery “The George Montgomery Gallery” and held a formal dedication on October 26, 1990. Additionally, the descendants of Texas Ranger Colonel John C. Hays donated the John C. Hays Collection to the “Spirit of Opportunity Gallery.” The large collection contained artifacts related to the life of Hays, who throughout his careers worked as a soldier, surveyor, businessman, and Texas Ranger. Finally, the Foundation for American Indian Tribal History donated a collection of roughly 1,000 volumes on Native American history and culture to the research center.

On November 17, 1990, the museum held its second annual gala. At the event, the museum presented its first Gene Autry Western Heritage Award. The award honors an individual who made significant contributions to the legacy of the American West. Nearly 1,000 supporters attended the event, where Gene Autry honored five museum benefactors with the Western Heritage Award: Buddy Rogers for the Mary Pickford Foundation, Mike Roarty for

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64 Joanne Hale, “November is Gala Time,” *Spur: News from the Gene Autry Western Heritage Museum* III, no. 6 (October-November 1990): 5.
Anheuser-Busch, John Singleton for Security Pacific Bank, Clyde Ostler for Wells Fargo, and actor George Montgomery. As 1990 ended, the museum made a number of great strides forward throughout the year. The institution received many grants and donations, membership and visitation continued to climb, and the institution held several successful educational and community programs, public events, and live performances.

In 1991, the Gene Autry Western Heritage Museum celebrated its one-millionth visitor. The museum continued to work diligently on the expansion of its collections and programming. That year the institution broadened its inclusion of folk art through the acquisition of Spanish Colonial and contemporary religious art from New Mexico. Additionally, the museum opened its Colt Firearms Gallery after it acquired the Colt firearms collection from George A. Strichman, former chairman of the board of Colt Industries. The research center increased its holdings by securing 20,000 nineteenth century glass plate negatives to augment their collection. That year, Gene and Jackie Autry donated Thomas Moran’s painting *Mountain of the Holy Cross.*

Continuing with its tradition of exploring new topics on the West, the museum announced a series of upcoming special exhibitions examining the cowboy hero and the art of John Clymer. Despite the fact the museum opened only three years earlier, in September, museum staff temporarily closed “The Spirit of Discovery Gallery” in order to remodel the gallery and

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construct a new temporary exhibit space for rotating and traveling exhibitions, which reopened on October 18, 1991. At the same time, Hale expanded efforts to collaborate with museums and form lasting partnerships with other cultural institutions. The Gene Autry Museum of Western Heritage started working more closely with the Southwest Museum of the American Indian, and continued to expand its collaborative efforts with the Museums West Consortium, which now consisted of nine-member institutions.

In 1992, the museum scheduled five special exhibitions in the “George Montgomery Gallery.” The highlight of the series included the exhibit “Russian America: The Forgotten Frontier,” which was made possible through a large grant from the Arco Foundation. On January 5, the “Spirit of Discovery Gallery” briefly closed once again to reinterpret its exhibitions. It reopened on January 19, 1992, with a new exhibit that explored the ways in which various cultural peoples, such as the Spanish, Russians, French Canadians, and Americans, settled the West and transformed its regional landscapes, and affected the lives of peoples native to the region.

The research center, which by this point started to transform into an important facility of western American studies, received a significant acquisition in the Duran Family Papers, which documented the Duran family’s involvement in the ranching and cattle industry in the New Mexico Territory during the late 1800s. Additionally, the institution devised a new acquisitions...
program to seek donors for a number of historic quilts from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By the summer of 1992, the institution partnered with the Glendale Quilt Guild and obtained two significant pieces of American folk art.\textsuperscript{77} At the same time, the museum took in a collection of several significant pieces of western art, including \textit{American Progress}, by John Gast, \textit{The Dead Miner}, by Charles Christian Nahl, and \textit{Westward the Star of Empire Takes its Way}, by Andrew Melrose.\textsuperscript{78}

From May 15 through May 17, 1992, the museum launched a new annual event. As a tribute to “the singing cowboy” Gene Autry, the Gene Autry Western Heritage Museum, and the Western Music Association cosponsored the first Music of the West Program. The three-day event included a series of concerts, educational activities, and panel discussions.\textsuperscript{79} At the event on May 16, actor Dennis Weaver donated to the museum his costume from the television series \textit{Gunsmoke}.\textsuperscript{80} In addition to new programming, the institution once again underwent expansion. In March, the institution announced the construction of its 1,300-square-foot children’s gallery, which was made possible through a grant from the \textit{Los Angeles Times}. “The Los Angeles Times Children’s Gallery” specifically focused on creating exhibits geared toward children, and opened its first exhibit, “Portrait of a Family,” on September 15, 1992.\textsuperscript{81}

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{78} James H. Nottage, “Images of the West Highlighted in New Acquisitions,” \textit{Spur: News from the Gene Autry Western Heritage Museum} V, no. 6 (November-December 1992): 5.
\item \textsuperscript{80} “New Donation by Dennis Weaver,” \textit{Spur: News from the Gene Autry Western Heritage Museum} V, no. 4 (July-August 1992): 5.
\item \textsuperscript{81} “Los Angeles Times Children’s Discovery Gallery to Open in the Fall,” \textit{Spur: News from the Gene Autry Western Heritage Museum} V, no. 2 (March-April 1992): 7.
\end{itemize}
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To close out the year, the Gene Autry Western Heritage Museum held its annual gala on November 4, 1992, with a featured performer, Kenny Rogers. But as the year drew to a close, the museum also signaled an intellectual shift. In the year’s fourth edition of the museum’s newsletter, *Spur: News From the Gene Autry Western Heritage Museum*, the institution’s librarian and archivist Kevin Mulroy, PhD, published an article titled “What is ‘The New Western History?’” The article critically explores the works of new western historians, such as Donald Worster’s *Rivers of Empire: Water, Aridity, and the Growth of the American West*; Patricia Limerick’s work, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West*; William Cronon’s *Nature’s Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West*; and Richard White’s recent text, *It’s Your Misfortune and None of My Own: A New History of the American West*. In the article, Mulroy discussed the trends of academic western history and the state of the field. However, it also signaled an important trend that began to surface throughout the year. Not only did the institution use its publication to inform its readers on museum happenings, but it also started to use it as an arena for scholarly discourse.

By 1993, the Gene Autry Western Heritage Museum continued to grow in terms of both its interpretation and exploration of the American West. At the beginning of the year, the museum received full accreditation and recognition from the American Association of Museums. By 1993, the institution expanded its public programs and started offering features such as public classes, and trips. However, as a privately funded institution, with every new expansion, program, and exhibition, the institution continued to incur new financial costs. In

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84 Joanne Hale, “Notes From the Director” *Spur: News from the Gene Autry Western Heritage Museum* VI, no. 2 (March 1993): 2.
addition to publishing articles that examined various aspects and themes of western history, throughout 1992 and 1993, the institution’s newsletter, *Spur: News from the Gene Autry Western Heritage Museum*, also included requests for continued public support. The institution also established the first Gene Autry Western Heritage Museum Celebrity Golf Tournament in 1993, an annual fundraising event that saw large participation.85

In response, the community continued its support of the institution. In 1993 the institution received a grant from LA Water and Power to update its lighting system throughout the museum. The new system utilized fiber optic technology, which eliminated all ultraviolet and florescent light in order to minimize damage and exposure of the museum’s collections.86 The museum also received support for its collections. Early in 1993, the museum acquired an 1850s Concord stagecoach, built by the California Stage Company.87 By 1993, the museum collection totaled 28,700 objects.88 Additionally, since the institution’s opening in 1988, the museum’s art collection now contained roughly 200 works, including paintings, bronzes, and other academic works.89

Once again, in 1993, two of the museum’s permanent galleries underwent reinterpretation. Through the financial support of E. A. Gregory, chairman of the board of United Shows of America, Inc., the museum updated the “Spirit of Imagination Gallery” to expand its

presentation of western film figures and stars. At the same time, Joanne Hale and the board of directors hired Michael Duchemin as the museum’s new curator. Duchemin’s first task in his new position was to reconstruct the “Spirit of Community Gallery.” The museum wanted to reinterpret the idea of western communities, using Richard White’s text, *It’s Your Misfortune and None of My Own*, and its discussion of community as a guide. As Duchemin explained, he approached the reinstallation by examining western communities in 1890. Using census data, Duchemin selected seven groups of people: Native Americans; African American migrants; Canadian immigrants; Mormon communities; European and other white immigrants; a group he labels *Mexican*, which includes Mexican Americans and new Hispanic immigrants; and Asian Americans and immigrants. With these seven groups, Duchemin constructed a gallery that looks at the ways in which different groups of peoples settled the west and transformed its various regions. Additionally, the gallery looks at the ways in which these various groups interacted. The reinterpretation of the gallery added a cultural element to the institution’s mission at the time.

On October 28, 1993, the Gene Autry Western Heritage Museum celebrated its fifth-year anniversary at its annual gala, held at the Plaza Hotel. Leeza Gibbons served as the mistress of ceremonies, and the evening’s entertainment starred country musicians Vince Gill and Patty Loveless. After five years of operation, this institution continued it growth throughout the mid-1990s. In 1994, the museum formed a support group called the Trailblazers. This group, made up of members from the community, assisted the museum in organizing events, such as a film

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91 Duchemin, interview, 10-11.
series, public lectures, and community outings, as well as raising funds and assisting the museum in its mission of community outreach.93

After fifteen months of work, the reinstalled “Spirit of Community Gallery” opened in 1994, which now included discussions on such subjects as race, ethnicity, religion, and the interactions of the many western communities. The new exhibit increased the objects it contained from 100 to 300, including many pieces previously not available for public viewing.94 The following year, the institution met a longtime goal through the opening of its research facilities to the public. On May 18, 1995, the Gene Autry Western Heritage Museum made its research collections fully available to a public research audience.95 To celebrate its opening, the research center held an inaugural exhibition titled Imaging the West: Selections from the Research Center’s Collections, in the museum’s “Showcase Gallery” from May 20 to July 16, 1995. The special exhibit explored various popular images of the West, such as the cowboy image, images of Native Americans, and images of the landscape, focusing on issues of consumers, subjects, and producers of popular western imagery.96

On May 2, 1995, the Gene Autry Western Heritage Museum launched its new image campaign. The campaign served to not only increase museum advertisement and the institution’s profile through television, radio, and billboard advertisement, but to re-envision the institution itself as well. To reflect this new vision, the board of directors, the museum’s advisory council, and the chairman of the board Gene Autry unanimously voted to rename the institution. On May

2, 1995, the institution officially became the Autry Museum of Western Heritage. The museum and its programs moved beyond Gene Autry’s original dream for a museum of the American West and grew into a larger organization of programmatic, publication, exhibition, and intellectual discourse on the American West. The image campaign served as a means to publicize and re-envision the museum in a way that best fit with its current scope and mission.97 With the assistance of Red Herring Pictures and Western International Media, the Autry Museum of Western Heritage, more commonly referred to as the Autry, launched its image campaign on April 30, 1995. The Autry sought to increase visitation, promote special exhibitions, encourage the use of its facilities for private and special events, encourage support for the institution and its programs, and increase general awareness about the institution.98

The image campaign proved very successful, as the Autry received continued support, gifts and collections, and further expanded its programmatic schedule. By 1996, each edition of the Spur listed over three pages of events, programs, and classes held at the museum.99 At the same time, the Internal Revenue Service designated the Autry Museum of Western Heritage as a public charity as of January 1, 1996. The changes in the Autry’s nonprofit tax status simplified the process for donors and grant funding organizations to give to the institution and thus increased the Autry’s likelihood of receiving gifts and grants.100

In 1996, the city of Los Angeles celebrated the 100th anniversary of Griffith Park, which was home to several cultural institutions, including the Los Angeles Zoo, the Griffith Park

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99 For event listings from this time, see Spur: News from the Gene Autry Western Heritage Museum, Autry National Center, Autry Institute for the Study of the American West.
Observatory, and the Autry Museum of Western Heritage. As a member of the park’s cultural community, the Autry joined the city in remembering and celebrating the park’s history along with its role throughout the community. Its involvement in the community celebration, combined with the image campaign, proved very successful for the Autry. To increase public awareness and raise capital for the institution, the Autry held its first annual American Indian and Cowboy Artists Western Art Show and Sale. That year’s gala, on September 27, 1996, saw a record attendance of over 850 people. In the past, the Century Plaza Hotel hosted the event. However, that year for the first time the Autry held its annual Gala at the museum and raised nearly $500,000.

In 1996, the museum once again acquired a number of significant collections related to its areas of emphasis. To highlight a portion of its collection, 1997 began with a focus on Native Americans in part as a preview of a major exhibit scheduled to open in 1998, titled Powerful Images: Portrayals of Native America. The exhibit resulted from a collaborative effort through the Museums West Consortium that looked at portrayals of Native Americans through art and popular culture. Through a sponsorship by the Ford Motor Company, the exhibit ran from 1998 to 2000 and traveled to eight different locations throughout the United States. At the same time, the Autry began a one-year long project to restore its Concord stagecoach. Tom Tehee donated $50,000 for the purpose of cleaning and preserving the coach, which covered half of the project's overall expense.

The 1997 gala held a special importance for the institution, as it coincided with the
ninetieth birthday of Gene Autry. For the second year in a row, the museum held the annual gala,
which this year not only celebrated the history of the museum, but celebrated its founder’s
birthday as well.\textsuperscript{105} On September 29, 1997, roughly 1,240 people turned out to both honor Gene
Autry and celebrate the museum, once again setting record attendance for the institution. As
1997 came to a close, the Autry ushered in 1998, and prepared yet again for another celebration,
its ten-year anniversary.\textsuperscript{106} Throughout its years, the museum experienced a surge in popularity
and became well recognized as an authority on the history of the American West. At the same
time, it outgrew its current facilities. In 1998, the institution launched a plan to expand its
physical space, which in turn allowed itself to expand its programs and exhibitions.

At the beginning of its tenth year, Joanne Hale announced a major plan for the museum’s
expansion and growth. The plan called for the expansion of the research center, including the
construction of a new wing, which would increase the size of the reading room and improve
accessibility to the center’s collections. Additionally, the proposed expansion called for
expanded space throughout the museum’s galleries in order accommodate a growth of objects in
the permanent collections. To finance the expansion, the Autry launched a major fundraising
campaign. Through the fund drive, the museum requested financial gifts ranging from $750 to
$5,000, and in return, donors would have their name engraved on a ceramic tile located in the
museum’s main plaza surrounding a statue of Gene Autry.\textsuperscript{107} The museum launched its
campaign on November 22, 1998, the tenth year anniversary of the museum, with the goal to

\textsuperscript{105} Lois Rice, “Gala Set for Gene’s 90th Birthday,” \textit{Spur: Autry Museum of Western Heritage} X. no. 3 (July-

\textsuperscript{106} Joanne Hale, “The 1997 Autry Museum’s Celebration,” \textit{Spur: Autry Museum of Western Heritage} XI, no. 1

\textsuperscript{107} Joanne Hale, “The 1997 Autry Museum’s Celebration” \textit{Spur: Autry Museum of Western Heritage} XI, no. 1
raise $3 million over a period of two years.108 The museum also established an internet presence in 1998, through the creation of its website at www.autry-museum.org., giving the public constant access to museum events and previews of temporary exhibitions and the museum’s permanent galleries.109

Adding to its full schedule of annual event, in 1997 the Autry established its first annual Masters of the American West Fine Art Exhibition and Sale, where western contemporary artists displayed and auctioned their works to the public.110 The event raised roughly $350,000.111 At the same time, the museum announced four major temporary exhibitions exploring the history of the California Gold Rush and related topics, for 150th anniversary of the event.112 In addition to the collaborative exhibition through the Museums West Consortium, from October 18 through January 25, 1998, the Autry housed the exhibit Patterns of Progress: Quilts in the Machine Age, which highlighted the museum’s collection folk art quilts, as well as labor efforts and artistic contributions of women in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries through the incorporation of the mechanical sewing machine. Historian Barbara Brackman guest-curated the exhibit, which included 50 quilts representing both mechanical and hand sewn techniques throughout time.113 The exhibit resulted in major publication through the institution, which set a precedent for the museum to produce publications for its major exhibitions in the future.114

On November 22, 1998, the Autry Museum of Western Heritage celebrated its tenth anniversary, fondly looking back over its accomplishments, while also celebrating Gene Autry’s ninety-first birthday, and anticipating the opening of its newest temporary exhibit, Gold Fever!, an examination of the California Gold Rush. Amidst the celebrations and success, the institution experienced a great loss. On October 2, 1998, Gene Autry passed away at the age of 91. In 1999, the museum devoted the year’s first edition Spur to the remembrance of Gene Autry. Through Gene’s vision, he and a group of friends created an institution dedicated to the exploration and preservation of the American West. Since 1988, the Autry welcomed nearly five million visitors through its doors, created 75 special exhibits, and amassed an immense collection of over 45,000 artifacts, and 30,000 volumes in the research center. The edition fondly remembered Gene for not only his professional accomplishments, but also as a friend and philanthropist. Friends and family including Johnny Cash, James Garner, Willie Nelson, Monte and Joanne Hale, former President Gerald Ford, Vine Deloria Jr., and his wife Jackie Autry all expressed their sentiments and thoughts for the loss of the museum’s founder.

Despite the loss of Gene Autry, the institution continued to honor Gene’s wishes for the museum and went on with its planned expansion and vision. By October 1999, the anniversary campaign raised nearly $360,000 of its $3 million goal. Additionally, the research center announced a new exhibition that highlighted its recent acquisition of a collection of 1960s and 1970s western movie posters from Poland. The exhibit, Western Amerykanski, examined the

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depiction of western film through the lens of Polish popular culture.\textsuperscript{119} That year’s Masters of the American West Art Sale raised a staggering $625,000.\textsuperscript{120} Lastly, the prized 1850s Concord stagecoach, which in April of 1997 the Autry sent to Carlisle, Pennsylvania, for conservation and preservation efforts, returned to the museum.\textsuperscript{121} Yet, as the year 2000 approached, the Autry experienced an additional change in leadership. After 15 years of service to the institution, and the loss of the museum’s founder, Joanne Hale, the Autry’s first executive director retired and stepped down as executive director, president, and CEO of the Autry Museum of Western Heritage.\textsuperscript{122} Before she resigned, Hale searched for a qualified individual to act as her successor. She sought someone whom she could not only trust to take over museum operations, but someone who would guide the institution in the future as its founders originally intended. According to Hale, when she decided to retire and began looking for her successor, a member of the museum’s board of directors recommended John Gray. Hale found Gray to be a very dedicated individual, and as she explained, “he used a very important word when I interviewed him, and the word was passionate.”\textsuperscript{123}

Gray came from a background in finance, corporate business, and banking, formerly serving as associate deputy administrator for Capital Access and First Interstate Bank, where he served as the Executive Vice President and Manager. Gray’s passion for the West, along with his impressive fundraising record, impressed Hale. In 1999, Hale selected her successor, and the board of directors hired John Gray as executive director, president, and CEO of the Autry

\textsuperscript{122} Joanne Hale, “President’s Message,” \textit{Spur: Autry Museum of Western Heritage Museum} XII, no. 3 (July-September 1999): 2.
\textsuperscript{123} Joanne Hale, interview by the author, November 7, 2007, Autry National Center, 3.
Museum of Western Heritage, which became effective on June 1, 1999.124 According to Hale, along with Gray’s passion for the West, she trusted his ability to continue raising funds for the institution and to successfully guide both the intellectual and financial futures of the museum.125 Even while retired, Hale remained active in the museum’s operations in both serving on the museum’s board of directors and acting as personal advisor to John Gray.126

As the new millennium approached, the Autry Museum of Western Heritage held quite a successful and lengthy list of accomplishments. Since its inception, the Autry opened 53 exhibitions, produced 13 publications, established a variety of education programs, and held numerous special events over the years. In his April 2000 message, John Gray announced that the Autry Museum of Western Heritage planned to continue to expand both its exhibits and programming schedule. In his statement, he explained that the Autry planned to hold over 15 changing exhibits and to reinterpret and reconstruct three of its major galleries.127 These plans coincided with other institutional changes and additions. In 2000, The Autry received a number of new artifacts, including an 1870s Martin Guitar and case as a donation from the Trailblazers.128 At the same time, in order to honor the institution’s founding director Joanne Hale, the Autry created the Joanne D. Hale endowment fund to purchase artifacts for the museum. Through private donations the museum raised over $45,000 for the acquisition of new objects. In 2000, the endowment funded its first purchase, a guitar owned by country musician

125 Joanne Hale, interview, 3.
Patsy Montana. Additionally, the descendants of western actor Hobart Bosworth donated portions of his Native American artifacts collection to the Autry. Change occurred throughout most of the institution in 2000. The year’s “Masters of the American West” exhibit saw great success. After only three years, it became one of the top three events of its kind, along with the Prix de West at the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum. In its third year, exhibit sales raised over $850,000. To tie all of the experiences together, the museum store chose to highlight items for sale that revolved around the Autry’s ever-changing programs and exhibits. Just as the exhibits changed regularly, visitors could continuously take home a new collection of items to remind them of their experiences.

These changes reflected part of an overall new approach to the institution’s vision. In 2000, the Autry’s board of directors and national advisory council devised a new vision statement to better reflect its goals and vision. It stated,

The Autry Museum of Western Heritage provides rich learning opportunities for all people by exploring the myths and realities of the American West and its diverse populations. The museum enhances our understanding of the present by collecting, preserving, and interpreting objects and art, making connections between people today and those who have shaped the past.

The revised statement, along with the expanded use of its new *Window to the West* campaign logo, which drew off of rotating objects from the museum’s collection, signaled a shift in the institution’s interpretive plan for the history of the American West and provided a new framework, which allowed them to explore new avenues of western history. It literally connected

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the past to the present. Through this, the Autry steadily increased its programming and activities with local regional teachers and schools. At the same time, the national advisory council officially changed its title to the board of trustees, the museum now operated under the leadership of the board of directors and the board of trustees. John Gray explained this expansion not as a new direction for the museum, but rather an overall expansion of the vision originally put forth by Gene and Jackie Autry and Joanne and Monte Hale at the time of the institution’s inception.134

The institution’s plan for reinstallation included a new focus on its Native American collections and a reworking of the Children’s Discovery Gallery, which shifted focus from a Tucson Latino family’s life to that of a Chinese-American family in Los Angeles. As part of its decision to highlight its Native American collections and expand community involvement and collaboration, the Autry launched the Native American Theater Initiative. Program director Randy Reinholz led the three-year initiative, which offered Native American actors, directors, playwrights, and other performing artists an opportunity to share their works with the public.135

The plan also included changes for Spirit of Imagination Gallery to include an exhibit that highlighted the career of actor and museum founding member, Monte Hale.136 Additionally, the Autry Museum of Western Heritage announced its plan to launch a new major exhibit scheduled to open in July, On Gold Mountain: A Chinese American Experience.137 On Gold Mountain ran from July 23, 2000, through January 1, 2001. The exhibit highlighted the experiences of Chinese emigrants and the contributions of Chinese Americans during the time of the California Gold Rush.138

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Rush. The exhibit, based on the book *On Gold Mountain: A Chinese American Experience*, by Lisa See, highlighted the experiences of Chinese emigrants to California, or Gum Saan, “Land of the Gold Mountain.” See served as guest curator for the exhibit, which saw major support from the Bank of America, ARCO, and the California Arts Council. The exhibit saw tremendous success and as a result, in 2001 the Autry Museum of Western Heritage received an invitation to send the exhibit to the Smithsonian Institute for a national exhibition.

On January 20, the Autry Museum of Western Heritage celebrated the opening of the newly reinterpreted *McCormick Tribune Foundation Family Discovery Gallery*. The new exhibit featured hands-on and interactive exhibits in order to highlight the lives of the See family in 1937 Los Angeles Chinatown. At the same time, the institution announced plans to continue growth and reinterpretation, changing the physical look of the museum facilities. In 2001, the Autry Museum of Western Heritage announced a plan to move *The Spirit of Discovery Gallery* to a newly expanded location directly adjacent to *The Spirit of Opportunity Gallery*. This decision became the first phase in reinterpreting the museum’s permanent galleries. The planned move, scheduled to open in the fall of 2002, provided more space in the upstairs galleries, which currently held *The Spirit of Discovery Gallery*, for temporary exhibits, and an opportunity to reinterpret *The Spirit of Discovery* and *The Spirit of Opportunity Galleries* in a new way on the lower level. The reinterpretation of the galleries called for inclusion of new scholarship on the History of the American West. It highlighted the stories of both Native Americans as well as

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newcomers to the West. It provided the museum with a space to tell the multiple stories of the groups who came to the place of the West and the various regions they settled.\footnote{Louise Pubols, “A Preview of Coming Attractions,” \textit{Spur: Your Window into the West} XIV, no. 2 (April-June 2001): 6.}

In his July message, John Gray announced that as part of the museum’s reinterpretation, and building off of its recent advertisement campaign, the Autry Museum of Western Heritage renamed its newsletter \textit{Spur: Your Window to the West} to better incorporate the institutional message. Similarly, the research center expanded its scope and vision. In April, the research center and its advisory group began holding a series of workshops and colloquia, which brought together students, academics, and members of the community to discuss historical topics of interest. Stephen Aaron, advisory group member and professor of history at the University of California Los Angeles, directed the workshops. The research center, as part of its plan to increase both awareness and use of its collections, announced that beginning in the summer of 2001, the Autry Research Center, in collaboration with the University of California Los Angeles Department of History, began offering a summer fellowship to graduate students in order to utilize institutional collections to further the scholarship and research of the American West.\footnote{Marva Felchlin, “New Direction for the Research Center,” \textit{Spur: Your Window into the West} XIV, no. 3 (July-September 2001): 21.} University of California Los Angeles PhD candidate Lawrence Culver received the first fellowship.\footnote{Marva Felchlin, “Autry UCLA Graduate Student Summer Fellowship,” \textit{Spur: Your Window into the West} XIV, no. 4 (October-December 2001): 16.}

As the year end approached, in his quarterly message, museum director, president, and CEO John Gray announced that in the coming years the Autry Museum of Western Heritage planned to construct and then travel two in-house museum productions throughout the country: \textit{How the West Was Worn}, opening in 2001, and \textit{Jewish Life in the American West} in 2002. This 
plan built off of the momentum and success of the Smithsonian Institute’s acquisition of the exhibit *On Gold Mountain*. Gray noted that by traveling these exhibits to different locals, the Autry supported its mission by offering visitors outside of Los Angeles an opportunity to learn the stories of the various peoples and ethnicities who created the story of the American West.\(^{144}\)

At the same time, the institution continued to expand both its scope and collections. By the following year, much of the responsibility for acquiring new objects fell to two recently created groups, the Golden Spur Acquisition Committee and the Trustee Collection Committee.\(^{145}\)

As the year ended, it did so with the addition of a new event, the First Annual Autry Museum Western Music and Poetry Gathering, and the much-anticipated annual gala.\(^{146}\) On October 5, 2001, the Autry Museum of Western Heritage held its thirteenth annual gala event. At the event, singer and songwriter Johnny Cash received the Western Heritage Award for Lifetime Achievement in Country Music, and actor Robert Wagner became the recipient of the Western Heritage Award for Lifetime Achievement in Western Film. The year’s event also honored historian Patricia Nelson Limerick as the first recipient of the Autry Museum of Western Heritage Humanities Prize for her contributions to the scholarship of the American West.\(^{147}\)

In 2002, as the museum began its reinterpretation of the permanent galleries, the Autry Museum of Western Heritage hired Lisa Strauss as the new director of Collections, Exhibits, and Conservation. Since 1999, Linda served as the chief conservator for the Autry, caring for and preserving the museum collections.\(^{148}\) Additionally, on February 2, 2002, the Autry Museum of


\(^{147}\) “Save the Date: Friday October 5, 2001 Annual Gala,” *Spur: Your Window into the West* XIV, no. 4 (October-December 2001): 6.

Western Heritage received the Humanitarian Award from the First Americans in the Arts for its promotion of Native American involvement in the arts and entertainment industries through its Native Voices program.\textsuperscript{149} Through the reinterpreting process, the Autry pushed to explore both the history and myth of the American West through its permanent and rotating exhibits. With annual events such as the “Masters of the American West” planned as normal, and new events of construction and expansion, in July 2002, John Gray announced a merger between the Autry Museum of Western Heritage and the Women of the West Museum.

Founded in 1991 at the University of Colorado-Boulder, the Women of the West Museum became the first museum dedicated to preserving, interpreting, and exhibiting a multicultural history of women in the American West. As John Gray explained in his June 2002 message,

\begin{quote}
The merger reflects our [The Autry Museum of Western Heritage] core value of exploring the comprehensive history of the American West.

The Merger enhances our ability to develop new programing and publications that present women’s history as an integral part of the larger history of the American West.\textsuperscript{150}
\end{quote}

In his message, Gray explained that as part of the merger, the Autry Museum of Western Heritage at that time created a $2 million endowed curatorial position for Western Women’s History, and three members of the Women of the West Museum’s board of directors, Jane Butcher, Jerrie Hurd, and Joyce Peterson, would join the Autry Board of Trustees.\textsuperscript{151} Tish Winsor soon joined the Board of Trustees as well. As historian and chair of the women of the

\textsuperscript{150} John L. Gray, “President’s Message,” \textit{Spur: Your Window into the West} XV, no. 3 (July-September 2002): 3.
\textsuperscript{151} John L. Gray, “President’s Message,” \textit{Spur: Your Window into the West} XV, no. 3 (July-September 2002): 3.
West Museum explained, the endowment actually resulted in the creation of two positions, the Women of the West Museum Chair and a Curator of Women’s History.152

On December 2, 2002, the museum closed *Spirit of Opportunity Gallery* in order to begin construction on two new exhibits *Encounters* and *Journey*, which explore the history of the American West from the point of European and Native American contact through overland migration to western regions.153 At the same time, the Autry began a three year, $600,000 digital cataloguing project, made possible by the Getty Grant Program, in order to digitize, manage, and catalogue the museum’s collections.154 By the end of 2002, the Autry’s new interpretive vision took shape as a reality. The education department partnered with “Mervyn’s Moving Mission, a 72-foot tractor trailer filled with historical replicas and hands-on activities for exploring California’s missions and Native American cultures” in order to better reach and educate children without access to museums.155 The research center became a destination for an increasing number of scholars. That year, historian Richard White received the Autry Museum of Western Heritage Humanities Prize at the annual gala.156

In his first message of 2003, John Gray announced the formation of the Autry Institute for the Study of the American West. The newly created institute operated under the leadership of University of California Los Angeles history professor Stephen Aaron and housed the Autry’s research center, library, and publications department. It served as the institutional research and

152 Virginia Scharff, interview by the author, November 8, 2007, Autry National Center, 1.
scholarship unit for the Autry. At the time, this announcement came as part of a continuation of the overall institutional mission. However, soon the Autry took steps to not only continue and build off of previous initiatives, but to completely redevelop itself.

Back in December of 2002, the Autry Museum of Western Heritage announced a plan to merge with the Southwest Museum of the American Indian, the oldest museum in Los Angeles, located in the Mount Washington neighborhood. Museum staff and administration from both institutions, along with representatives of Native American communities, community members, and civic leaders collaborated and planned the merger of the two institutions. These efforts resulted in the creation of an entirely new institution, the Autry National Center of the American West, which included the former Autry Museum of Western Heritage, the Southwest Museum of the American Indian, and the Autry Institute for the Study of the American West.

To celebrate the merger, in July 2003, the Autry National Center announced its plans for the exhibit Glorious Treasures: 100 Years of Collecting by the Southwest Museum, which opened on October 11, 2003. The exhibit featured over 150 artifacts and works of art from the Southwest Museum of the American Indian collections. The exhibit, which opened in the Showcase Gallery, displayed highlights from the Southwest Museum’s collection, including a headdress that belonged to White Swan, a Nez Perce quill-wrapped horsehair shirt, a selection of California baskets, and examples of Pueblo pottery. From a financial stance, the Southwest Museum immediately benefited from its merger with the Autry. In addition to the financial

161 White Swan was a crow scout for the U.S. Army at the Battle of Little Big Horn.
162 Steven Grafe, “Glorious Treasures: 100 Years of Collecting by the Southwest Museum,” Spur: Your Window into the West XVI, no. 3 (July-September 2003): 12.
undertaking it put towards caring for and preserving artifacts, the Autry National Center heavily publicized the collections of the Southwest Museum. For the Autry, the newly incorporated collections allowed the institution to explore new historical arenas. However, others questioned the merger. The Southwest Museum of the American Indian’s history long pre-dated that of the Autry. Some viewed the merger as a modern example of western conquest and imperialism. It provided a symbolic representation of the historic tension in the American West, and a vivid example of that tension’s modern continuation.

In July of 2003, the Autry National Center announced the appointment of Virginia Scharff, professor of history at the University of New Mexico, as the chair of the Women of the West Museum. As chair, Scharff became the overseer for programs, exhibits, and publications within the Women of the West Museum at the Autry National Center. Additionally, the Autry National Center appointed Carolyn Brucken to the position of curator of the Women of the West Museum. For their first project, Scharff developed the exhibit concept, *Home on the Range*, which examined the place and myth of home in the West.

In 2004, the Autry National Center launched a new magazine, *Convergence*. In its inaugural issue, president and CEO John Gray wrote that Dr. Stephen Aron would serve as editor-in-chief of the publication and guide the center’s intellectual vision regarding the recent creation of the Autry National Center. The term *convergence* encapsulated the idea behind the Autry’s recent activities. According to Aron, the term got to the heart of the multiethnic history of the American West. The West was an integrated community, a scene of multicultural

163 This concept eventually evolved into the exhibit *Homelands: How Women Made the West.*
164 “Institute Announces Appointment of Women of the West Chair,” *Spur: Your Window into the West* XVI, no. 4 (October-December 2003): 11.
perspectives, and the term really highlighted this nation that the American West served as a place where the numerous ethnicities, perspectives, and cultures all converged in one place—a community. The same idea held true for the current situation surrounding the Autry National Center. Much of its staff viewed the center as a new place of convergence, where local institutions, museum professionals, and western historians now converged under one institution, the Autry National Center. Aron contextualized the concept of convergence as

…a lens, a point of view. It is a way of seeing the large evolving story of the American West as an interwoven tapestry of cultures and peoples, and a way of understanding how their stories are connected to one another. Unlike the lens of fusion, which implies that differences disappear, convergence sees the strands in this complex tapestry as strong and autonomous. In the act of coming together, the convergent threads create images and experiences that are new and different without getting lost in the weave. Respect the strands. Respect the whole. Convergence is the metaphor for the Autry National Center.

Thus, the concept enabled the Autry National Center to not only define itself, it provided a new framework or lens through which its staff envisioned a broader and more inclusive view of the American West. In this explanation, John Gray defined the mission of the Autry National Center. He states, “The Autry National Center explores the experiences and perceptions of the diverse people of the American West, connecting the past to the present to inform our shared future.”

The inaugural edition of Convergence offered readers an opportunity to meet through transcribed interviews with key staff members of the Autry National Center, including John Gray, Duane King, Alicia Gonzalez, Stephen Aron, Linda Strauss, Kim Hayden, and Kim Walters. It gave readers a glimpse of the Autry Institute and the Braun Library, as well as highlights of the museum’s collections. It also signaled an effort to focus on activities and artistic

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endeavors throughout greater Los Angeles’s multiethnic communities. The Autry’s staff saw the idea of convergence as a current and pressing issue, not just a facet of history. The Autry National Center viewed itself as a place of convergence for the greater Los Angeles community. In the summer of 2004, John L. Gray announced four key initiatives that would guide the Autry’s vision in the years to come: Voices of Native America, Whose West?, Violence and Justice in the West, and Western Resources. Yet, not everyone shared this vision. For example, in the follow-up to the inaugural issue of *Convergence*, Jo Anne Sadler of Glendale, California, wrote, “As a longtime member of the Southwest Museum and the Autry Museum, I am totally taken aback by the pompous, condescending, esoteric bunch of total claptrap put forth in your ‘new’ Magazine. The new look of the magazine does not depict any relationship to the museum(s) or the West.” She continues, “Rich pseudo-intellectuals are only a very small part of your audience. Come down to earth, please.”

In the summer of 2004, The Autry National Center tackled this issue of convergence head-on by reexamining the often-ignored aspects of the history of the American West, as well as the mythos of the American West. On June 19, the Autry National Center hosted a live discussion on the topic and myth of western violence titled, “The Wild, Wild West: Experiences and Perceptions of Violence in America.” At the event, Warren Olney moderated a discussion between Mike Barnes, Chuck Michel, David Milch, and Richard Maxwell Brown. The event intended, as Aron noted, “...to connect the histories and myths of Western violence to the

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174 Mike Barnes is the president of the Brady Campaign for the Prevention of Gun Violence. Chuck Michel serves as the chief attorney for the National Rifle Association in California. David Milch created and produced the HBO series *Deadwood*. Richard Maxwell Brown is a scholar of violence in the American West.
debates over guns and violence today.” The controversial discussion served as the first move made by the Autry to tell a more inclusive and poignant tale of the American West. From there, the Autry moved to explore other often forgotten aspects of the West. In the fall issue of *Convergence* Stephen Aron explained,

> For too long we have subscribed to a romanticized view of the history of Spanish and Mexican California. But now a new generation of scholarship is stripping away the whitewash to reveal *El Norte*: the American West that was – and for many still is – the Spanish and Mexican North.\(^{176}\)

In its fall issue, the Autry announced a new exhibition titled, *Encounters: El Norte – The Spanish and Mexican North*. The interactive exhibit focused on both the inclusion and exclusion of Los Angeles’s Mexican community within the history of the American West.\(^{177}\) Lastly, the third effort examined natural resources and the idea of wilderness through an exploration of Yellowstone.\(^{178}\)

By 2005, the merger between the Southwest Museum of the American Indian and the Autry Museum of Western Heritage occupied much of the Autry National Center’s attention.\(^{179}\) Over the past year the institution initiated its efforts to conserve the collections at the Southwest Museum. Consequently, Native history occupied a large portion of the Autry’s agenda. In early 2005 the majority of the institution’s public programs, exhibit themes, and publications focused on indigenous peoples and Native community activity.\(^{180}\) As Stephen Aron explained, the Autry

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\(^{178}\) In addition to the merger between the Southwest Museum of the American Indian and the Autry Museum of Western Heritage, the National Museum of the American Indian opened on September 21, 2004. In many ways this event only further added to the focus on Native American History, Native communities, and the larger role of Native Americans within museums.

\(^{179}\) See *Convergence: The Autry National Center Magazine* (Winter 2005).
“...endeavored to make the collection speak, particularly in the voices of Native peoples.” In many ways this focus on Native voice drew different, if not new, attention to the Autry National Center’s expansive collections.

That year, the Autry National Center added four new members to its professional staff: Dr. Jonathan Spaulding, executive director and chief curator of the Autry’s Museum of the American West; B. Byron Price, the Institute for the Study of the American’s West’s Chair of Cowboy and Ranch Culture; Inez C. Wolins, senior director of Education and Visitor Experience at the Autry National Center; and Dr. Steven M. Karr, curator of the Southwest Museum of the American Indian. As previously discussed, in 2001 the Autry announced its plan to relocate and reinterpret its permanent galleries in order to present a more contemporary and inclusive discussion of the history of the American West. As Stephen Aron explained, the Autry National Center started a push to explore larger questions surrounding both the historical and contemporary issues regarding the American West. From a theoretical and practical standpoint, the Autry initiated a framework to explore the ways in which people came together and lived side-by-side in a multiethnic region. The institution concerned itself with the problem of environmental sustainability over time, and questioned how people continue to sustain life in the West. In this sense, the Autry continued its previous goal of exploring diversity in the West, yet also broadened this precedent by placing these stories at the forefront of an American historical narrative, tackling not only the multifaceted nature of the history, but also the important intersection between history and mythology. In doing so, the institution continued to

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operate within its original concept to produce story-driven rather than object-driven exhibitions and programs.

In the spring and summer of 2005, the Autry National Center approached this inclusive intersection between history and myth through two exhibits. The first, *Encounters: The Fur Trade*, explored the interactions and outcomes of an economic relationship between Native Americans and Euro-American trappers. As Stephen Aron explained in his introduction to the spring/summer edition of *Convergence*, “Specifically, as the exhibit’s curator Louise Pubols explained, the trade in animal pelts linked the pre-American West to a ‘global marketplace,’ initiating profound cultural and ecological changes that reverberated across both ‘New’ and ‘Old’ worlds.” The second exhibit, *Once Upon a Time in Italy... The Westerns of Sergio Leone*, was an in-depth exploration of not only the mythological and popular representation of the American West, but also an exploration of how those outside of the United States constructed a vision of the American West. The exhibit, which was conceptualized in 2001, included artifacts and objects from around the world related to Leone’s work, and a discussion covering the importance and impact of his work on the western film genre. That fall, the Autry highlighted the recent appointments of Virginia Scharff and Carolyn Brucken of the Women of the West Museum and its upcoming exhibit, *Homelands: How Women Made the West*. The

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fall issue of *Convergence* solely focused on the role of women in the making of the west, both from a historical and popular point of departure.\(^{189}\)

2006 marked the final year of the bicentennial of the 1804 Corps of Discovery, better known as the Lewis and Clark expedition.\(^{190}\) That year the Autry continued its focus on western diversity with an examination of the Native experience in regards to Lewis and Clark. The Autry offered several events ranging from theatrical plays and public panels to exhibits, all presented from a Native voice.\(^{191}\) At the same time, the institution announced its upcoming exhibit, *Cowboys and Presidents*, which, as Jonathan Spaulding explained, “look[s] at the influence of the cowboy image in American politics, both foreign and domestic. So much of what happens at a political (domestic) or international level has to do with symbolism and people’s assumptions, both internal and external.” He continued with an example, “When George Bush swaggered across the stage and says ‘We’re going to smoke ’em out,’ the myth has now moved into the realm of policy and the way the world operates.”\(^{192}\) The exhibit focused on the relationship between the heroic cowboy image and the American president, beginning with Theodore Roosevelt and continuing to the present. Michael Duchemin argued that the image of the cowboy hero is ingrained in American mythology. He explained that it emerges in the early 1950s, begins to decline by the early 1970s, and virtually disappears with the Watergate scandal. However, he explained that the cowboy image experienced a revival through the Reagan and Bush administrations. According to Duchemin, “This image of the cowboy is the image of America; especially in U.S. foreign policy, is one that is not going to go away…”\(^{193}\) *Cowboys and...*

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\(^{189}\) See *Convergence: The Autry National Center Magazine* (Fall 2005).

\(^{190}\) The years 2004-2006 saw the creation of a multitude of texts, public programs, museum exhibits, and documentaries exploring the Lewis and Clark experience.


\(^{192}\) Spaulding, interview, 13.

\(^{193}\) Duchemin, interview, 13.
Presidents comprised a portion of an overall examination of the American cowboy. Additional programs explored the origins, culture, economics, and contemporary issues of the American cowboy.194

Having explored the themes of violence in the West, Native voices, and the multifaceted natures of western American history, in the fall of 2006 the Autry National Center tackled the final topic of its recently conceptualized approach to the history of the American West: western resources and the natural environment. That fall, through an exploration of Yosemite National Park, the Autry’s staff looked at the West through the lens of America’s western landscapes. That fall, a two-part exhibit titled Yosemite: Art of an American Icon depicted the history of Yosemite National Park through both historic and recent paintings and photographs, with the work of photographer Ansel Adams serving as the exhibit’s centerpiece. The exhibit highlighted the interaction between humans and the natural environment, and influence each had throughout the course of history.195

As the Autry National Center prepared for the twentieth anniversary of its dedication and public opening as an institution, 2007 additionally marked the centennial of Gene Autry’s birth. As the institution prepared for celebration, it also wrestled with its recent merger with the Southwest Museum of the American Indian, as well its reconceptualized approach to the exhibition and public discourse of western American history. The winter/spring issue of Convergence, titled “Breaking the Glass,” wonderfully encapsulated the current state and vision of the Autry National Center. The issue attempted to remove the traditional object/visitor boundaries imposed by traditional museums and approach the Autry’s collections from a point

195 See Convergence: The Autry National Center Magazine (Fall 2006).
more in line with their current theoretical framework and ways of thinking. In the issue Stephen Aron writes,

What happens when all the barriers are removed and we are free to touch the objects that touch us? In this issue, we break the glass of convention, stepping outside the lines that exhibit designers plot, to explore the personal relationship between individual and artifact.

Convergence asked friends and staff of the Autry National Center to tell us which object among the collection’s hundreds of thousands of pieces connects them most to the lives and stories of the past. Using personal experience as the organizing principle, what follows is an exhibition in three virtual rooms.196

Throughout the edition, former and current staff members, along with friends of the Autry National Center, discussed their favorite and most important pieces from throughout the collection.

Each individual discussed his or her chosen piece within the greater context of the complex history of the American West. The many objects included Theodore Roosevelt’s Model 1876 rifle, Elizabeth Bacon Custer’s blue and white cotton dress, a Navajo Grando-style blanket c. 1895-1910, William F. Cody’s double-rigged Western stock saddle, an 1850s Concord stagecoach, Patsy Montana’s guitar, Sunset on the Plains by Albert Bierstadt, the Fremont “Pathfinder” flag, a 1948 Indian Roadmaster motorcycle, and the original handwritten pilot teleplay from the television show Bonanza.197 Each individual, through his or her chosen object, told a vivid yet wildly different story about the American West. The stories stemmed from a multitude of peoples and backgrounds, and covered the span of hundreds of years. Similarly, the individuals who chose the objects possessed diverse backgrounds and stories.

“Breaking the Glass,” the award-winning edition of *Convergence,*¹⁹⁸ really encapsulated the Autry’s approach to the telling and retelling of the stories of western American history. Each of the objects contained within the issue played a role in shaping the regional and cultural history of the West throughout various points in time. Yet, as the Autry National Center strove to point out, the same objects continued to live on, play a vital role in Western history, and take on new meaning for contemporary peoples living in the region. Those objects served as a point of convergence, where the people and places of the past meet up with the people and places of the present. As Stephen Aron explained,

> What I think I’m pushing, or we’re (the Autry) pushing is to move beyond that, simply the multicultural perspective and move to the intercultural dimensions of western history, and that’s again the lens of convergence.

> I think the next step in terms of changes and scholarship in my own vision of how western history works is to break down those walls in a sense. That is to break the glass, and to provide a more immediate experience for the visitor with the artifact, but also in terms of culture to recognize how they are entwined and how peoples are entwined with one another; how our fates are entwined with one another.¹⁹⁹

Aron noted that the Autry needed to work toward connecting people in the present to not only their regional history, but also to a sense of place itself. Just as the West was a place of diversity in the past, the same situation remains in the present. He explained that, in the future the institution needed to expand its focus to include sustainability and continued environmental issues in its agenda to not only foster a connection between the past and the present, but preserve that connection for the future.²⁰⁰ The institute for the study of the American West in many ways fills that role through collaboration, focusing on contemporary issues, interpretation of

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¹⁹⁸ The Fall 2006 and Winter/Spring 2007 issues of *Convergence* received second prize awards for excellence in design from the American Association of Museums.

¹⁹⁹ Stephen Aron, interview, 4.

²⁰⁰ Stephen Aron, interview, 5.
In preparation for its twentieth anniversary and the centennial celebration of Gene Autry’s birth, the Autry National Center announced its upcoming exhibition, *Gene Autry and the Twentieth Century West*. The exhibition, which opened in June 2007, highlighted “the many ways in which Autry, as an entertainer and entrepreneur, shaped the development of American culture and society in the hundred years since his birth.” The exhibit served as both a retrospective of Gene Autry’s life and a commemoration to his continued legacy. It highlighted his early career in the music, radio, and film industries, while also exploring his influence on both local and national levels.

As 2007 came to a close, the Autry announced a continued exploration of the topic of western violence and justice through collaboration between the Autry National Center and Yale University’s Howard Lamar Center for the Study of Frontiers and Boarders, directed by Dr. John Mack Faragher. The partnership focused on western films and violence, the evolution of American popular culture and its perception of violence, and the continued problem of different aspects of violence in the contemporary West. This new collaboration existed as one of many partnerships the Autry National Center established by 2007. The Autry continued to explore issues of environmental sustainability and Native voice as well.

In 2007, the Autry continued its restoration and conservation efforts for the Southwest Museum. The staff at Casa de Adobe worked to catalogue and pack the Southwest’s extensive collections for transportation and relocation. At the same time, the recently revived Southwest Society helped raise funds for renovation efforts at the Southwest Museum campus. Yet there

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still existed a disconnect between the Autry National Center and the communities of Mount Washington and Highland Park. In an article from the Boulevard Sentinel, the Members of the Friends of the Southwest Museum Coalition expressed continued frustration with the Autry National Center, its decisions, and policies for the Southwest Museum of the American Indian. The article explained that the Coalition was not made aware of many of the recent decisions made by the Autry National Center, and that the process lacked any transparency. The Coalition argued that they would continue to push to “Retain and create a world class Southwest Museum as the primary exhibition location of the original Southwest collection in its original location, and ensure that there is a viable future museum use for both the Southwest and Casa de Adobe.” Additionally, the article attacked the revival of the revived Southwest Society for existing as merely a funding organization to “…convert the Southwest Museum to a cultural center, rather than a full museum…” The Coalition also questioned the purpose and viability of the Southwest Society. The article continued to raise other questions regarding the future of the Southwest campus, such as access to the collections for local school children, the apparent need to change the Southwest Museum’s name, and the Autry’s overall commitment. The level of debate and frustration led to a complete stall in the project throughout 2008 and 2009. Today, restorative and preservative efforts are still underway. The Southwest Museum Campus continues to house the conservation efforts and is only accessible to the public on Saturdays.

203 The Friends of the Southwest Museum Coalition served as a local organization through which communities members organized to work towards an amiable solution for the preservation of the Southwest Museum of the American Indian, the conservation of its collections, community access to the Mount Washington campus and its exhibits, and timely completion of the Autry National Center’s proposed plans.

204 “To Individuals and Organizational Members of Friends of the Southwest Museum Coalition,” Boulevard Sentinel XI, no. 7 (November 2007): 8.

205 “To Individuals and Organizational Members of Friends of the Southwest Museum Coalition,” Boulevard Sentinel XI, no. 7 (November 2007): 8.

206 “To Individuals and Organizational Members of Friends of the Southwest Museum Coalition,” Boulevard Sentinel XI, no. 7 (November 2007): 8.
2015, the Braun Research Center closed to the public in order to prepare for its relocation to the Autry Institute.

In 1988, Gene Autry’s longtime dream for a museum of the American West became a reality. Through the efforts of his wife, Jackie, Joanne Hale, and a dedicated staff, the museum evolved into one of the world’s premier multicultural centers, dedicated to preserving and exhibiting the stories and lives of the many individuals involved in shaping the history of the American West. Since its inception, the Autry not only produced some of the most innovative and cutting-edge exhibits on the American West, but it also shaped the intellectual direction of its scholarship and discourse. Additionally, despite some disagreement, the Autry in many ways defined the role of western museums as a vital institution throughout communities. Throughout its history, it actively engaged, collaborated, and partnered with members of the academic and museum communities, and it sought to include local peoples and their voices as well. Today, the Autry National Center continues to explore through public programming and exhibition the people and history of the American West, from the past to the present.
CHAPTER VI

LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA: THE SOUTHWEST MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN

The history of the Southwest Museum of the American Indian dates back to February 1, 1885, when its founder, Charles Fletcher Lummis, arrived in Los Angeles, California, to begin work at the Los Angeles Daily Times. Lummis was an author, editor, librarian, and collector who in 1884 hiked 3,507 miles from Cincinnati, Ohio, to Los Angeles. During the last eleven miles of his journey, his new employer, Harrison Gray Otis of the Los Angeles Daily Times, accompanied him on his journey. Throughout his life, Lummis avidly collected Native American cultural objects. It was Lummis who founded the Southwest Museum of the American Indian, and upon his death bequeathed his entire personal collection to the institution.\(^1\)

Charles Fletcher Lummis was born on March 1, 1859. He entered Harvard in 1878 and married Dorthea Roads in 1880. The following year, Lummis established himself as a journalist and began publishing. In 1884, at the age of 25 Lummis began his trek across the country.\(^2\) He arrived in Los Angeles in 1885 and immediately began employment at the Los Angeles Daily Times. In 1886, the Times sent Lummis to Arizona as a war correspondent to cover the Apache wars.\(^3\) From there, he traveled to New Mexico and later Peru.\(^4\) He eventually returned to Los Angeles in 1894 and became the editor of a regional magazine named, Land of Sunshine, which in 1902 changed its name to Out West. Throughout his travels and encounters, Lummis

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\(^1\) Jane Apostol, Museums Along the Arroyo: A History and Guide. (Los Angeles, California: The Historical Society of Southern California, 1996), 23.
\(^2\) Daniela P. Moneta, Chas. F. Lummis: The Centennial Exhibition Commemorating his Tramp across the Continent. (Los Angeles, California: The Southwest Museum, 1985), 11.
\(^3\) Daniela P. Moneta, Cas. F. Lummis: The Centennial Exhibition Commemorating His Tramp across the Continent. (Los Angeles, California: The Southwest Museum, 1985), 11.
\(^4\) In 1891, Lummis divorced Dorthea, and married Eve Douglas on March 12.
subjectively collected artifacts and information related to Native Peoples. He kept detailed notes in his journal, recording his journeys and the people he met, notably highlighting aspects of Native art and aesthetics. Through his ethnographic and archeological work, Lummis amassed volumes of records depicting the lifeways of Native Americans of the Southwest. Politically, Lummis also proved to a fierce and loyal ally for Native Americans.

In 1895, Lummis campaigned for the creation of a museum that would exhibit and preserve the history of Native Peoples. “The vital point,” he wrote, “is that there should be a museum here – and before it shall be too late to acquire the best that such a museum will ever get.” In 1903 Lummis formed the Southwest Society, the founding board of directors of the Southwest Museum, on which Lummis served as secretary. On December 31, 1907, the Southwest Society incorporated the Southwest Museum of the American Indian. On February 28, 1910, Lummis bequeathed his entire collection of Native American material to the Southwest Museum. Museum construction broke ground in 1911, and the Southwest Museum of the American Indian Casa de Adobe opened on August 3, 1914. In 1915, Lummis resigned as board secretary, but remained on the museum’s board of trustees for the next four years.

After Lummis donated his collections to the museum, construction of a permanent collection began on November 16, 1912. Aside from Lummis’s personal collections, the

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9 During this time, the city of Los Angeles appointed Lummis to the position of Los Angeles City Librarian in 1905. He held this position until 1910. Lummis also separated from his wife Eve in 1909. Lummis married Gertrude Redit in 1915. He died from cancer in 1928.
Southwest Museum of the American Indian housed two collections, mostly related to early California Native American material. In 1977, the Southwest Museum of the American Indian opened the Braun Research Library. Initially the Braun began from two major gifts from Dr. Joseph Amasa: a large collection documents relating to Native Americans of Arizona, and a second collection of material related to Charles Lummis. Today, the collections of the Southwest Museum of the American Indian systematically collect and display artifacts and objects associated with Native Americans in the western regions of the Northwest Coast, the Southwest, California, and the Great Plains.

Kim Walters, associate director of the Institute at the Autry National Center and director of the Braun Research Library, stated that the Braun began as a research library, intended to support the collections and mission of the Southwest Museum. Its collections cover broad scope of Native North American history to South and Central America and Mexico. Walters explained that strengths of the Braun’s collections lie in the early history of anthropology and archeology of the United States. In addition to Lummis’s library, the body of the collection came from two other primary collections of papers and manuscripts, the Frank Hamilton Cushing Collection and the George Bird Grinnell manuscript collections. In 1908, the Braun acquired the Monk Library of Arizona. According to Walters, Dr. Joseph A. Monk began collecting Arizona territorial documents, books, maps, ephemera, and other Arizona-related material in 1874. Dr. Monk donated his collection to the Southwest Museum, and before he died, Dr. Monk established an endowment for the future growth of the collection. In 1914, the Southwest Museum published its first work, a bibliography of Arizona, which drew heavily from the Monk

11 Apostol, *Museums Along the Arroyo*.
12 Kim Walters, interview by the author, November 9, 2007, Southwest Museum of the American Indian, 1.
13 Cushing was a nineteenth-century ethnologist who lived among the Zuni.
14 Grinnell was a nineteenth-century anthropologist, scientist, and naturalist.
Library. Walters also noted that the Monk collection serves as a wonderful compliment to the Autry’s Rosenstock Collection. Since its founding, the Braun research library grew to contain over 50,000 volumes, 150,000 historical photographs, and roughly 800 manuscript collections.

Pamela Hannah, director of operations at the Southwest Museum for the American Indian, explained that the Southwest Museum’s first exhibition of cultural artifacts was located in the top floor of the Hamburger Building in downtown Los Angeles. Hannah noted that the articles of incorporation for the Southwest Museum were signed on December 31, 1907, but the museum itself was actually founded four years earlier, in 1903. That year, Lummis funded the Southwest Society, the southwestern branch of the Archeological Institute of America. Thus, even before the Southwest Museum functioned as an institution, Lummis desired to exhibit artifacts and educate the public on the rich indigenous history of the region.

Additionally, Hannah noted that Lummis was a key figure in the physical construction of the Southwest Museum. Hannah explained that,

…he (Lummis) selected this site specifically for two reasons as far as I can see. First is, he spent some time at Isleta Pueblo, and he came to have a great deal of respect for, an interest in, and friendship with the people of Isleta. He stayed there for some time to recuperate after a very stressful time in his life, and so basically took, basically a sabbatical there for some time.

She continues that,

So, he loved the whole concept of the pueblos built on top of mesas. So, he, when he chose the site for the Southwest Museum, he loved the whole idea that this hilltop would hold this building on top of this hilltop, and when you came to the museum you would walk up this hill, just like you were walking up the steps of a mesa. He also at first encouraged the designers and architects not to build an elevator or any sort of driveway [or] parking lot. He wanted everyone to ascend to the Southwest Museum by these very rocky stone steps, just like they were trying to navigate the very steep and cracky steps of a mesa. So that was the first thing. He liked to replicate experience. And secondly, I’ve been told that he felt that

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15 Walters, interview, 7.
17 Hannah, interview.
when you came to the Southwest Museum, it was if you were raising your consciousness; that you were going to this educational experience; that you needed to leave the city behind you and rise to this oasis of education. So, you were in a different place of an open mind, and more inspired by what you were going to see. So that’s why he chose this spot, and he actually turned down the opportunity to build the museum on a parcel of land at what is now San Marino, because his friend was Huntington (Henry E. Huntington), and Huntington offered him a free parcel of land to build the museum. And he (Lummis) said, “No, I really like this community.” And I guess I should say, there’s a third reason why he chose this location, and that is there’s development in downtown LA. There’s activity in downtown LA. There was Bunker Hill and other residences, but Highland Park here was known as LA’s suburb, so he wanted to build it here where there was access to folks. It was along the Arroyo Seco River, which is sort of an older version of a thoroughfare in Los Angeles, and there is a fledgling community. And, let’s say there’s a fourth reason why he chose this location, because he made it known that he was aware of the artistic community that lived in Mount Washington and Highland Park. It is said that the center of the Southern California arts and crafts movement [was] here in Mount Washington/Highland Park; that a lot of people who drove artistic expression of the arts and crafts movement were here, and so he felt that this would be a good community, and in a neighborhood. 18

Hannah explained that not only did Lummis play a role in choosing the location for the museum building, but that he influenced the design process as well. 19

Hannah explained that, throughout his life, Lummis was interested in the process of historic preservation. Through this interest, Lummis created the Landmark Club. As Kim Walters explained, the Landmark Club was one of the first preservation organizations in California. The idea originated with Tessa Kelso, a Los Angeles public librarian. Lummis liked the idea and began raising funds, and in 1895 founded the organization in order to preserve California landmarks, primarily missions. 20 Hannah continued that, through his concern with preservation, Lummis believed that the region was losing its historic structure, particularly its adobe structures or Mission Revival Spanish Colonial Architecture. Thus, Lummis decided the

18 Hannah, interview, 1-2.
19 Hannah, interview, 2.
20 Walters, interview, 9.
architectural design for the Southwest Museum of the American Indian should be based off this particular style. Hannah noted that Lummis worked with the architects Hunt and Burns of the building’s design. They drew off of Alhambra in Grenada, Spain. They referenced Spanish colonial architecture in Peru. Lummis drew on his travels to the Yucatan in Mexico as well.\textsuperscript{21}

Hannah noted that, originally, the Southwest Museum covered thirty acres of land. Over time, the museum sold off some acreage and now possesses twelve of the original thirty acres.

The caracole stairway and tower serve as the building’s most prominent feature, which is a seven-level caracole tower, roughly 110 feet high.\textsuperscript{22} Hannah explained that,

This is a seven-level tower that’s about 110 feet high, and there are probably four different ceiling heights within each floor of the tower. The top two have super-heights with the tall mezzanine. Two others have regular-sized mezzanine and there are other storage levels below, which have lower heights. He incorporated the caracole stair, which is basically, what’s essentially a spiral staircase. And he felt that you would save space within such a small footprint. The tower is 30 by 30. The stairwell is 10 by 10. You’d save space, because with the conventional type of stair design you have a stair, a landing, and a stair, a landing, and a stair, and you have to tier your way up. And that takes a lot of space for the landings. Spiral staircases are such that you could break out into a landing at any one step, and so it’s a very compact way of vertical movement, transportation of people. And he saw that specific design at St. Paul’s Cathedral at London. He liked it, and so there’s Spanish Colonial architecture, but particularly I’ve been told that the nunnery at Chichen Itza, which is the observatory, had one of these great stone stairwells. His son Jordon loved it, fell in love with; probably played on it when he traveled with his father there. And so, they incorporated that in this museum. So, he was very much a part of the design of this museum, to the dismay of the architects, probably some of the time. So, the building was a reflection of the archeological style at that time. It was a reflection of the trends at that time. We Americans have always followed trends. And, it was a reflection of his desire to make that kind of a cultural imprint in this community.\textsuperscript{23}

Thus, Casa de Adobe reflected the indigenous regional history of Los Angeles. Lummis made it his goal to tell numerous stories, but to also always promote the rich and vibrant cultures of the Southwest.

\textsuperscript{21} Hannah, interview, 2.
\textsuperscript{22} Hannah, interview, 9.
\textsuperscript{23} Hannah, interview, 2.
Over the years, the museum narrowed the scope of its collections, but originally the Southwest Museum of the American Indian collected a wide variety of material. Today it exists as one of the finest American Indian collections in the world. As Hannah explained, the bulk of the collection focuses on Native American peoples with the borders of the United States; mostly west of the Mississippi River. The collections center on five major geographic regions: the Plains, the Prairies, the Plateau, the Northwest Coast, and the Southwest and California. Hannah continued that, originally, the collection centered on natural history. The institution even funded expeditions to Alaska and other regions to obtain certain animal specimens and objects.

However, as Hannah noted, over the years the Southwest Museum shifted its emphasis away from natural history and focused on the cultures of the Native Americans. Hannah estimated that the collection contains roughly 225,000 objects. The collections range geographically from the Arctic Circle to the tip of South America. The bulk of the collection, however, centers on America and Mexico.24

Since its foundation, the Southwest Museum of the American Indian operated as a premier institution of Native American cultural history. However, Hannah noted that, historically, the museum was underfunded. She explained that the museum saw modest funding from endowments, but survived on earned income, grants, and minor endowment dividends. As years went by, financial constraints created operational difficulties for the staff at the Southwest Museum. Additionally, by the 1990s the museum facilities required renovation and repair. Additionally, it became difficult for the museum staff to properly care for its collections.25 According to Duane King, executive director of the Southwest Museum of the American Indian, by 2000 the museum realized that it could not survive in its current state. Efforts over the

24 Hannah, interview, 4.
25 Hannah, interview, 6-8.
previous ten years to increase resources and the museum’s reach fell short. Internally, the museum board and staff decided that the only way to continue was to partner with an additional institution.26 As Hannah noted, she and Duane King began a two-year process to search for potential partners. She explained that at first there was no specific plan for a merger. They explored possibilities of partnering with universities, Native American tribal groups, and other museums. She also noted,

So, we did this with great heart, because no one who was with the Southwest Museum before the merger was here for the money, the job, the paycheck. We all have a great heartfelt interest in the museum, its history, its future, and its purpose or its need to reach the Indian community and bring about more understanding. So, we were a small museum; a very heartfelt museum. The Autry is [larger], more corporate. So, up to that time, we realized that we needed to save the museum; we needed to partner. So, internally we were very hopeful that this would bring the resources to bear, so that we could take care of the collection the way it needed to be, and it deserved to be cared for. Or, this building could be stabilized and repaired, and restored to its original beauty and design intent. So, we were hopeful and are still grateful for the opportunity to care for the building and the collections, because in museums that’s what you are. You are a caretaker. No one owns anything. You are a caretaker.27

After lengthy discussion and debate, the Autry emerged as a logical partner for the Southwest Museum of the American Indian. Without a merger, the Southwest Museum’s collections remained in danger, and a merger with the Autry seemed the best way in which to save the collection. Plans for the merger solidified in 2002, and the merger ultimately led to the creation of the Autry National Center.

May 27, 2003, marked the birth of the Autry National Center. The new institution combined the Southwest Museum of the American Indian, the Autry Museum of Western Heritage, and the Autry Institute into one entity.28 Through this, the Autry National Center

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26 Hannah, interview, 4.
27 Hannah, interview, 9.
entered into a new phase of expansion. According to Jonathan Spaulding, the new plan included 140,000 square feet of renovation and an additional 70,000 square feet of new construction at the Griffith Park site. The new plan included exhibit space on the west side of the building, while the Southwest Museum’s galleries, and the Museum of the American West’s would be located galleries on the east side of the building. The plan incorporated a center gallery called Convergence Canyon. This gallery served to both introduce the Autry National Center and connect the galleries of the Museum of the American West and the Southwest Museum of the American Indian.29

The merger immediately impacted the Southwest Museum of the American Indian. Through partnering with the Autry, the Southwest Museum staff now possessed the funds with which they could properly care for and conserve the collections. Pamela Hannah explained that the museum staff meticulously examined each piece of the collection. Over the next several years the staff photographed, catalogued, cleaned, and evaluated each piece of the collection. The merger also called for the bulk of the Southwest’s collections to be transported to the Griffith Park location. The Autry National Center’s expansion also included plans to renovate the Southwest Museum facility.30

However, not everyone viewed the merger as a positive move. Throughout both the various institutions of the newly established Autry National Center and the greater Los Angeles community there were mixed feelings and perceptions regarding the merger. As Kim Walters explained, the merger proved difficult in the beginning. A great deal of confusion and uncertainty surrounded the transition. For some, especially the staff at the Southwest Museum, it remained unclear as to what their role within the Autry National Center would be, or if they even

30 Hannah, interview, 8.
had a future role at all. John Grey, the Autry’s president and CEO, explained that, some at the Southwest Museum initially believed they were not receiving enough support, while others at the Autry believed they were giving away valuable resources. Grey stated, “I wouldn’t say that anybody was satisfied with the way resources had to be reallocated. Clearly, the Southwest never got enough; the Autry had to be robbed.”

Public perception of the merger scrutinized the Autry as well. As talks took place between the Southwest Museum and the Autry, rumors of the merger spread throughout the community. On May 4, 2001, Christopher Knight, the art critic for the Los Angeles Times wrote an article, A Call to Keep the Southwest, Autry Separate. In his piece, Knight lambasted the Autry for continuing what he referred to as “opportunistic conquest.” He wrote,

In March, when word spread that the Autry Museum of Western Heritage might take over the Southwest Museum, dissolving them both into a National Center for Western Heritage, the awful symbolism was hard to miss. The cowboys were conquering the Indians. Again.

Knight argued that, yes, the Autry did in fact have a very large endowment, and with that endowment the Southwest Museum’s very valuable collection could be saved. Yet, Knight described the proposition as being heavily flawed. He continued,

There are good reasons the Autry is without much credibility as a serious cultural history museum, and one of them goes straight to that image of cowboys conquering Indians. The joys of opportunistic conquest have been enshrined at the Autry since the day the museum opened, making for more than idle symbolism.

The museum's roster of permanent displays includes large galleries enthusiastically devoted to "The Spirit of Opportunity" and "The Spirit of Conquest," as white settlers from the East pushed west into vast continental

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31 Walters, interview, 8.
34 Knight, “A Call.”
territories occupied for thousands of years by indigenous tribal civilizations. Whose opportunity? And whose conquest? Needless to say, the settlers, not the indigenous tribes, are the ones whose "spirit" is being proclaimed as a conceptual framework.

Yes, the Autry does plan to scrap these gruesome displays and wants to liberalize its outlook. ("Out of the Mists," a modest but pleasant current temporary exhibition of traditional Indian art from the Pacific Northwest, is one example.) But there's a big difference between plans and accomplishments, hopes for the future and an established record. If you're an American Indian--and even if you're not--you'll be forgiven for worrying about an institution founded on celebrating social and cultural subjugation as a vital principle.

In fact, a takeover of the Southwest by the Autry is a very bad idea, regardless of the Autry's past deeds or future plans. It's hardly radical to note that America's culturally diverse history has almost always been told from the point of view of the conquerors. What's at stake now is a singular chance to reverse part of that standard polarity. For if the Southwest Museum loses its independence through a merger, what also vanishes is the potential for American Indians themselves to take charge of this extraordinary portion of their own patrimony.35

Knight reasoned that the Southwest Museum would better serve itself by seeking financial support from tribal institutions. By merging with the Autry, the Southwest Museum ran the risk of losing its autonomy, its independence, and having its message altered.

In a merger the Autry would control the Southwest, regardless of the composition of any joint governing board, and despite the proposed establishment of an umbrella organization--a National Center for Western Heritage--concocted to unite the two. Ask yourself a question: If one partner in a union is bringing mostly money to the table, and the other is bringing cultural credibility, which partner will be in charge? The one wrapped in the stunning array of Navajo blankets, or the one who holds the purse strings?36

Furthermore, Knight posited that the Southwest Museum held the unique position of spearheading a new movement for museums; rather than partner with the Autry, the museum could establish a culturally innovative partnership, with Native Americans and by Native Americans. He concludes,

35 Knight, “A Call.”
36 Knight, “A Call.”
The unprecedented, untapped potential for Indian involvement in the Southwest Museum makes it unthinkable. Today, even though Los Angeles has the largest urban Indian population in the nation, only three Indians serve on the Southwest's 30-member board. Philanthropy would change that.

American Indian philanthropy directed toward a great independent museum of American Indian art is finally about autonomy, not assimilation. So, when it comes to the symbolic image of cowboys conquering Indians that inevitably arises in an Autry takeover of the Southwest, let's turn the tables for a moment. Picture the awesome struggle currently underway. Imagine what it could mean if, this time, the Indians were to ride triumphantly to the rescue, rather than the cavalry.37

In fact, shortly after Knight published his piece in the *Los Angeles Times*, the Pechanga band of Luiseno Indians approached the Southwest Museum regarding the possibility of forming an alliance.38 However, in May of 2002 tribal members backed away from a deal.39 Ultimately, after the back-and-forth negotiations between the Southwest Museum and the Autry, on November 21, 2002, the two intuitions reached an agreement to merge.40

As Pamela Hannah explained, the local Mount Washington and Highland Park communities reacted quite negatively to news of the merger. The community feared a loss of the Southwest Museum and its cultural resources. When discussing public opinion on the matter, Hannah noted, “They don’t want a shell of a museum left here. They want an important, viable property here; and that is to say, of course, they want this to be cultural. One of the local groups says that there is an emerald necklace among the Arroyo Seco River.”41 Thus, there existed mixed emotions surrounding the perceived merger and creation of the Autry National Center.

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37 Knight, “A Call.”
41 Hannah, interview, 10.
According to Hannah, the Arroyo Seco region of Los Angeles served as the center of the city’s indigenous arts and crafts movement. Today, the community of the Arroyo Seco refers to the region as “the Emerald Necklace,” a region filled with cultural institutions and extremely important historical properties along the river. For the residents of the community, the Southwest Museum of the American Indian exists as the cornerstone of local culture. As Hannah explained, local residents consider the Southwest museum to be the “the largest and most beautiful emerald on that necklace.” Community members feared the loss of a cultural resource, and some at the Autry saw this as opposition to the institution’s future plans. Yet overall, the city of Los Angeles viewed the merger as a positive event. The partnership fostered an effort to simultaneously save valuable resources and collections and increase accessibility.

Beginning in 2006 the Southwest Museum of the American Indian limited its programs and access to the public in order to begin renovation of the Mount Washington Structure, and conservation of the museum’s collections. The initial plan called for the relocation of the collections by 2009, structural preservation of the site to be completed by 2010, and an overall goal to have the Southwest Museum operational by 2011. Additionally, the plan included a priority to update the collection database and catalogue all of the objects. According to the Autry National Center, the project required several years for completion. While conducting preservation and conservation efforts for the Southwest Museum’s collections and the Casa de Adobe site, the Autry National Center planned to construct a state of the art building in its Griffith Park location that would serve as a permanent location for the Southwest’s collections.

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42 The Arroyo Seco is a dry riverbed in Los Angeles that connects with Pasadena, California.
43 Hannah, interview, 10.
44 Despite the fact that opinions on the merger changed over time, and there remained a general consensus that the merger was a positive act to save and restore valuable local resources, many residents of the Mount Washington and Highland Park neighborhoods still held bitter feelings about the event.
Again, this action, despite its intentions, was met with a great deal of scrutiny. As Kim Walters explained, many people from the Mount Washington and Highland Park regions believed they were being stripped of their cultural and regional heritage.46

Through the efforts of Charles Fletcher Lumis, the Southwest Museum of the American Indian exhibited and preserved the history of Native Peoples of the American Southwest. Since its opening in 1907, museum’s collections grew to be one of the finest in the world. The oldest museum in Los Angeles, the Southwest Museum of the American Indian became a cultural and community feature in the Mount Washington and Highland Park regions. In order to financially rescue the Institution, the Autry National Center moved to merge with the institution. The merger of the two museums fostered yet another point of tension as many perceived the event as a cultural take-over, and a continuation of manifest destiny, and cultural imperialism.

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46 Walters, interview, 8.
THE WEST AS HISTORY
CHAPTER VII

THE MUSEUM OF WESTWARD EXPANSION

The Museum of Westward Expansion, located in St. Louis, Missouri, stands as a portion of the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial. Completed in 1965, the memorial dedicates itself to the memory of “Western Pioneers,” and the opening of the American West. Located near the starting point of Lewis and Clark’s historical 1804 Corps of Discovery, the museum itself lies directly beneath the memorial Gateway Arch, the main feature of the ninety-one-acre memorial park. As visitors walk underground through the museum’s gates, they enter into a large lobby that houses the museum theater, gift shop, and tram, which ferries visitors to the top of the Arch. Directly in front of the lobby lies the entrance to the museum exhibition space. Upon entering the exhibit space, visitors immediately confront the life-size statue of President Thomas Jefferson. Directly next to the statue rests a panel that explains Jefferson’s role within westward expansion. The panel notes that after the purchase of the Louisiana Territory from Napoleon Bonaparte and France in 1803, the United States nearly doubled its size. Jefferson felt the need to explore the newly acquired territory and petitioned to Congress for the funding of such an undertaking. With Congressional approval, in 1804 Jefferson established the Corps of Discovery, sending Meriwether Lewis, William Clark, and company to the far Northwest to explore the land for purposes of trade, travel, and discovery.

Directly beyond the statue of Jefferson lies the circular exhibit room. Four exhibits comprise the Museum of Westward Expansion, each with its own emphasis: the travels of Lewis and Clark, exploration, and those individuals involved with American expansion, the ways in

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1 Jefferson National Expansion Memorial, St. Louis, Missouri. Personal visit, March 5, 2008.
2 Jefferson National Expansion Memorial, St. Louis, Missouri. Personal visit, March 5, 2008.
which westward expansion affected settlers and pioneers, and Native Americans. Three of the four exhibits run along the room’s wall, while the exhibit dealing with settlers and pioneers occupies the room’s center space.

The museum’s open floor-plan allows the visitor to wander in and out of the various exhibits. It blurs the line between a start and end point. Yet, the original design also favored that the visitor begin with the Lewis and Clark exhibit titled *The Lewis and Clark Expedition: 1804-1806*. The exhibit begins with the phrase “Go West” inscribed on the first panel. Thomas Jefferson gave these orders to Lewis and Clark in 1803. He stated,

> The Object of your mission is to explore the Missouri River, and such principle stream of it, as, by its course and communication with the waters of the Pacific Ocean, may offer the most direct and practical water communication across this continent, for the purposes of commerce. ³

The exhibit chronologically traces the travels of Lewis and Clark, beginning with their departure from Camp Dubois, near St. Louis on May 14, 1804.⁴ The entire exhibit, composed of a series of visual and textual panels, follows the Corps of Discovery from its point of departure in St. Louis through its return in 1806. The first exhibit panel includes a list of the individuals who comprised the 1804 Corps of Discovery. From there, additional panels provide brief excerpts from the *Diaries of Lewis and Clark*, describing the events and encounters the group experienced along the expedition, such as Clark’s birthday on August 1, 1804, the first sighting of the Rocky Mountains on May 26, 1804, and the death of Sergeant Floyd on August 20, 1804. For example, on September 20, 1804, the group arrived at Medicine Creek on the Missouri River. William Clark states,

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I walked on Shore with a view of examining this bend…the bend is a beautiful place through which I walked, saw a number of buffalo and goats, I saw a Hare & believe he run into a hole in the side of a hill…I joined the boat in the evening…R. Fields killed 1 deer &2 goats one of them a female – She Differs from the mail as to Size being Smaller, with Small Horns, Straight with a Small prong without any black about the neck – None of those Goats has any Beard, they are all Keenly Made and it is beautiful.

William Clark  

Upon arriving at the confluence of the Heart and Missouri Rivers, near a village of the Mandan Sioux, William Clark noted,

We Camped…Short distanc below the 1st mandan village…many men women & Children flocked down to See us – Capt Lewis walked to the Village with the Chief and interpreters, my Rheumatism increasing prevented me from going also, and we had Determined that both would not leave the boat at the Same time until we Knew the Desposition of the Nativs, Some Chief visited me & I Smoked with them – the appeared delighted…with my black Servent [York], Capt Lewis returned late –

William Clark

Behind each panel of text, the visitor confronts large, mega-graphic murals of geographical landscapes. As the diary entries of the expeditionary force progress through time, the scenery behind the entries changes, providing visitors with the illusion that they are traveling west along with the Corp of Discovery.

While the exhibit itself provides visitors with a great deal of information concerning the group’s experiences and encounters, such as meetings with Natives like the Nez Pearce, or dealings with the fur trade, the exhibit depicts very little hardship on the part of the explorers. For example, throughout their journeys, Lewis and Clark entered into several altercations with

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5 Jefferson National Expansion Memorial, St. Louis, Missouri. Personal visit, March, 5, 2008. March, 5, 2008. Quote taken directly from the panel. Check Journal entry to see if it’s a direct quote or typos by NPS.
the Blackfeet. On July 27, 1806, the company encountered a group of Blackfeet who attempted to attack the party, resulting in the deaths of two Native Americans.8

This morning at day light the indians got up and crouded around the fire, J. Fields who was on post had carelessly laid his gun down behid him near where his brother was sleeping, one of the indians the fellow to whom I had given the medal last evening sliped behind him and took his gun and that of his brothers unperceivied by him, at the same instant two others advanced and seized the guns of Drewyer and myself, J. Fields seing this turned about to look for his gun and saw the fellow just runing off with her and his brothers he called to his brother who instantly jumped up and pursued the indian with him whom they overtook at the distance of 50 or 60 paces from the camp sized their guns and rested them from him and R Fields as he seized his gun stabel the indian to the heart with his knife the fellow ran about 15 steps and fell dead; of this I did not know untill afterwards, having recovered their guns they ran back instantly to the camp; Drewyer who was awake saw the indian take hold of his gun and instantly jumped up and sized her and rested her from him but the indian still retained his pouch, his jumping up and crying damn you let go my gun awakened me I jumped up and asked what was the matter which I quickly learned when I saw Drewyer in a scuffle with the indian for his gun. I reached to seize my gun but found her gone, I then drew a pistol from my holster and turning myself about saw the indian making off with my gun I ran at him with my pistol and bid him lay down my gun (at the instant) which he was in the act of doing when the Fieldses returned and drew up their guns to shoot him which I forbid as he did not appear to be about to make any resistance or commit any offensive act, he dropped the gun and walked slowly off, I picked her up instantly, Drewyer having about this time recovered his gun and pouch asked me if he might not kill the fellow which I also forbid as the indian did not appear to wish to kill us, as soon as they found us all in possession of our arms they ran and indeavored to drive off all the horses I now hollowed to the men and told them to fire on them if they attempted to drive off our horses, they accordingly pursued the main party who were driving the horses up the river and I pursued the man who had taken my gun who with another was driving off a part of the horses which were to the left of the camp, I pursued them so closely that they could not take twelve of their own horses but continued to drive one of mine with some others; at the distance of three hundred paces they entered one of those steep nitches in the bluff with the horses before them being nearly out of breath I could pursue no further, I called to them as I had done several times before that I would shoot them if they did not give me my horse and raised my gun, one of them jumped behind a rock and spoke to the other who turned around and stoped at the distance of 30 steps from me and I shot him through the belly, he fell to his knees and on his wright elbow from which position he partly raised himself up and fired at me, and turning himself about crawled in behind a rock which was a few feet from him, he overshot me, being bearheaded I felt the wind of his bullet very distinctly. not having my shotpouch I

could not reload my peice and as there were two of them behind good shelters from me I did not think it prudent to rush on them with my pistol which had I discharged I had not the means of reloading untill I reached camp; I therefore returned leasurely towards camp, on my way I met with Drewyer who having heared the report of the guns had returned in surch of me and left the Fieldes to pursue the indians, I desired him to haisten to the camp with me and assist in catching as many of the indian horses as were necessary and to call to the Fieldes if he could make them hear to come back that we still had a sufficient number of horses, this he did but they were too far to hear him. we reached the camp and began to catch the horses and saddle them and put on the packs. the reason I had not my pouch with me was that I had not time to return about 50 yards to camp after geting my gun before I was obliged to pursue the indians or suffer them to collect and drive off all the horses. we had caught and saddled the horses and began to arrange the packs when the Fieldses returned with four of our horses; we left one of our horses and took four of the best of those of the indian's; while the men were preparing the horses I put four sheilds and two bows and quivers of arrows which had been left on the fire, with sundry other articles; they left all their baggage at our mercy. they had but 2 guns and one of them they left the others were armed with bows and arrows and eyedaggs. the gun we took with us. I also retook the flagg but left the medal about the neck of the dead man that they might be informed who we were. we took some of their buffaloe meat and set out ascending the bluffs by the same rout we had decended last evening leaving the ballance of nine of their horses which we did not want. the Feildses told me that three of the indians whom they pursued swam the river one of them on my horse. and that two others ascended the hill and escaped from them with a part of their horses, two I had pursued into the nitch one lay dead near the camp and the eighth we could not account for but suppose that he ran off early in the contest. having ascended the hill we took our course through a beatiful level plain a little to the S of East. my design was to hasten to the entrance of Maria's river as quick as possible in the hope of meeting with the canoes and party at that place having no doubt but that they would pursue us with a large party and as there was a band near the broken mountains or probably between them and the mouth of that river we might expect them to receive inteligence from us and arrive at that place nearly as soon as we could, no time was therefore to be lost and we pushed our horses as hard as they would bear. at 8 miles we passed a large branch 40 yds. wide which I called battle river. at 3 P. M. we arrived at rose river about 5 miles above where we had passed it as we went out, having traveled by my estimate compared with our former distances and couses about 63 ms. here we halted an hour and a half took some refreshment and suffered our horses to graize; the day proved warm but the late rains had supplyed the little reservors in the plains with water and had put them in fine order for traveling, our whole rout so far was as level as a bowling green with but little stone and few prickly pears. after dinner we pursued the bottoms of rose river but finding inconvenient to pass the river so often we again ascended the hills on the S. W. side and took the open plains; by dark we had traveled about 17 miles further, we now halted to rest ourselves and horses about 2 hours, we killed a buffaloe cow and took a small quantity of the
meat. after refreshing ourselves we again set out by moon light and traveled
leasurely, heavy thunderclouds lowered arround us on every quarter but that from
which the moon gave us light. we contineud to pass immence herds of buffaloe all
night as we had done in the latter part of the day. we traveled untill 2 OCK in the
morning having come by my estimate after dark about 20 ms. we now turned out
our horses and laid ourselves down to rest in the plain very much fatiegued as
may be readily conceived. my indian horse carried me very well in short much
better than my own would have done and leaves me with but little reason to
complain of the robery.9

The exhibit discusses major events, such as viewing mountains for the first time, and their travels
with the Shoshone woman, Sacagawea, who served as a guide and interpreter for the group.10
However, the exhibit provides little attention, aside from personal reactions, to the group’s
encounters with the landscape and natural environment. For many Americans, the expedition
provided evidence and descriptions of wildlife unknown at the time to modern science.11 The
Corps of Discovery took part in an exploration of territory unknown to virtually all Americans
save those Natives to the regions. I would argue that this point gets lost or ignored throughout the
exhibit.

The second exhibit, The United States and the West: 1800-1900, examines exploration,
the United States, and the American West. In my opinion, this section of the museum seems
most out of place. The exhibit begins with a focus on explorers preceding the 1804 Corps of
Discovery, such as Christopher Columbus and the members of the Mayflower Compact, and
those who came after the travels of Lewis and Clark, such as John Stevens, who led the first
successful steamboat voyage when he traveled from New York City to Philadelphia in 1809.12
However, the use of the “explorers is problematic at best, as is the exhibit’s overall organization.

194, 227, 327.
The exhibit consists of a chronological timeline, composed of a series of images and narratives describing 100 years of American history, from 1800 to 1900. However, in addition to the topics of exploration, the exhibit also includes other events of American history, such as America’s declaration of war against the British in 1812. The exhibit lacks context and comes across as a disjointed list of historical events spanning 100 years of American history. The general themes chosen for the entire museum encompass the topics of westward expansion, yet the timeline includes events seemingly unrelated to the museum’s overall organization scheme.¹³

As mentioned by Lubar and Kendrick, exhibitions by their very nature tell stories; they tie together objects and narratives.¹⁴ In order for a cohesive and clear story to exist, so must exist a context through which to tell the story. The main period of westward expansion in the United States occurred throughout the nineteenth century. With this in mind, individuals such as Hernando de Soto seem out of context within the museum’s main theme. The exhibit does discuss individuals responsible for exploring the Louisiana Territory and opening the American West, but the exhibit’s focus is lost throughout the immense amount of unorganized information.¹⁵ Had the exhibit specifically focused on the Louisiana Territory and the lands to its west, a more concise and conceptualized narrative would exist.

Bob Moore, historian for the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial, notes that the plan was to show continuity, the fact that events that occurred prior to 1800 impacted the Louisiana Purchase and the 1804 Corps of Discovery. Similarly, events such as the Louisiana Purchase and the explorations of Lewis and Clark had a profound impact on the future of the United States. As

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Moore explained, it was the intent of Aram Mardirosian to connect the past to the present through the topic of the American West by creating a constant or consistent timeline. However, Moore also recognized that this section of the museum is problematic. He explained that the exhibit not only confuses visitors, but that it also contains inaccuracies, such as inaccurate dates. Even some of the concepts and threads that they [referring to the exhibit design team] talked about in there either didn’t have anything to do with westward expansion, or sometimes they placed things in the completely wrong years. There were just a lot of bizarre things that were thrown in there. Some of them were very interesting, but a historian might not have thought to include them, and then others were just things that needed to get out.16

According to Moore, the NPS revised this exhibit in 2007, but even after the exhibit was redone it still lacked context and included a number of historical inaccuracies.17

The third exhibit, *The Way West*, focuses on the opening and settlement of the West. After the 1804 Corps of Discovery, the United States experienced waves of immigration to and settlement of the American West. From roughly 1820 to 1870, large numbers of settlers traveled the Santa Fe (Taos), Overland (Oregon), and other trails in order to venture west. As enterprise, immigrants, and industry opened the western landscapes, Americans brought along values and identities, which played vital roles in transforming the territories west of the Mississippi River into a place of home. As previously discussed, this process of moving frontiers and borders and creating a sense of home and place was not an anomaly of American history. The process that occurred in the West mirrored similar processes that occurred two centuries prior as settlers in the East laid claim to land. Individuals established themselves in the West in a fashion similar to their ancestors from the East.18 However, landscapes change with individual needs and

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17 Moore, interview.
encounters. Therefore, the process of establishing a sense of home typically follows a similar path, regardless of the situation. Yet, depending on individual needs and circumstances, the end result of building a home will inevitably look quite different depending on one’s location, situation, and intent. Not surprisingly then, a boomtown looks quite different from a fish shanty or a logging camp.

As previously discussed, numerous entities transformed the nineteenth century American West. Various enterprises expanded their economic interests westward in order to seek profit by commodifying the landscape and its natural features. These enterprises took many forms, as it was not one single economic endeavor that opened the West. The fur trade, agriculture, fishing, logging, mining, ranching, railroad, and petroleum industries all played crucial roles in the history of the American West. At the same time, human agency aided in the creation and transformation of the American West. Just as industry transformed the West into a place of possible profit from resource extraction, people adopted the West and altered its place as a center of home. These entities and their various agents both supported and hindered one another. They existed as both sources of cooperation and conflict. Ultimately, this conglomeration of activity, enterprise, and settlement resulted in the establishment of new communities and senses of place. As settlers associated and identified with specific endeavors and occupations, such as agriculture, ranching, and mining for example, communities grew around these specific industries.

The third exhibit focuses on such motivating industries as the fur trade, agriculture, mining, and ranching, and the ways in which each contributed to the flourishing economy of St. Louis river trade; each topic has its own individual displays as well. Additionally, the exhibit

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19 In her work *Lower Eastside Memories: The Jewish Place in America*, Hasia Diner discusses this notion of the creation of identity through place.
separates each display by a coordinated color scheme to provide some semblance of order to the exhibit’s open design. The first display of the exhibit focuses on the fur trade. In the nineteenth century, St. Louis served as the hub for the Rocky Mountain fur trade. The primary commodity of the industry was the beaver pelt, which, as the exhibit mentions, ranged in value from six to nine dollars per pelt. The display itself focuses on the lives of the mountain men and the dangers they faced while working in the fur trade, such as wild animal attacks, as represented by the taxidermied bear, and raids by Native Americans. It also shows the material culture utilized by trappers throughout their trade, such as traps, knives, and trade goods, along with the taxidermied beaver.

As the exhibit explained, the annual trade gathering, known as the rendezvous, formed the highlight of a trapper’s life.

The only contact they [the mountain men] had with society was at a rendezvous for an annual trade event. St. Louis merchants would meet with the trappers at a midway point and exchange goods for pelts. The prices were often marked up anywhere between 200 and 1000 percent. The trappers needed salt, sugar, tobacco, traps, and liquor. The Indians were also invited to trade and wanted knives, guns and blankets. The rendezvous was also a party that included drinking, gambling, fighting, and mayhem. The rendezvous could last for two weeks or until all trading was accomplished.

While the display discusses such famous trappers as Kit Carson and James Beckwourth, I would argue that it fails to discuss one of the most influential figures involved with both St. Louis history and the history of the fur trade, John Jacob Astor. Astor served as president of the American Fur Company, which was headquartered in St. Louis. He, along with his partner

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26 There is also no mention of the fact that James Beckwourth was one of the few African Americans to work in the fur trade. Additionally, John Jacob Astor is mentioned in the earlier historical timeline exhibit, but there is little information provided to connect him to the larger event of the fur trade.
William Sublette, established the idea of the rendezvous, and was responsible for its implementation. As a result, Astor and Sublette took control of the fur trade and made substantial profits. When Astor died in 1848, he was the wealthiest man in America, with assets valued over $20 million.27

The fourth exhibit examines agricultural settlement. It notes that many immigrants, mostly young men, who chose to farm the Great Plains were lured West by the Homestead Act of 1862. However, as the large display depicts, families often moved their belongings in wagons to the plains, where they built their homes and attempted farming. The display includes a wagon, representative of those typically used by American settlers during the time of westward migration, and an image of a windmill. The display also includes a variety of artifacts associated with frontier agricultural homesteads, such as farm implements, bridles, barbed wire; household items, such as a butter churn; an image of a windmill; and a glass case housing a kettle, plates, and a woman’s bonnet, shoes, and fabric.28 This particular display describes the hardships experienced by settlers, including women. In her narrative, novelist Willa Cather describes the home of a settler.

The houses on the Divide were small and were usually tucked away in low places; you did not see them until you came directly upon them. Most of them were built of sod itself, and were only unescapable ground in another form. The roads were but faint tracks in the grass, and the fields were scarcely noticeable. The record of the plow was insignificant, like the feeble scratches on stone left by prehistoric races, so indeterminate that they may, after all, be only the markings of glaciers, and not a record of human strivings.29

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28 Jefferson National Expansion Memorial, St. Louis, Missouri. Personal visit, March 5, 2008.
29 Statement by Willa Cather, taken from Jefferson National Expansion Memorial, St. Louis, Missouri, Personal visit, March 5, 2008.
Throughout her diaries, Cather describes the hardships experienced throughout farming in the Great Plains, such as inclement weather and crop failure.\(^{30}\) One panel quoting The Farmer’s Wife states, “Born an’ scrubbed, suffered and died. That’s all you need to say, elder; never mind sayin’ ‘made a bride’, nor when her hair got gray. Jes’ say, ‘born’ in worked t’ death, that fits it – save y’r breath.”\(^{31}\) Thus, the display incorporates the fact that numerous women traveled west with their husbands in order to create a home.

The farming display also represents the African American experience of agricultural settlement in the West. As the display states, by 1880 a group of African Americans known as “Exodusters” traveled to Kansas to start a home. As the panel indicates,

The Exodusters, a large, spontaneous migration of African-Americans, were also beckoned to start a new life in the Great Plains after the Civil War. They were not specifically led by a charismatic leader, but rather by a small group of men who encouraged movement to Kansas. By 1880 the black population of Kansas increased from 16,000 to 43,000. It was thought that Paradise could be found in Kansas, the place where John Brown, the famous abolitionist, had lived. Nicodemus, an all-black settlement in Kansas, became a thriving community until financial depression hit the nation, poor weather conditions hurt farming, and a white-run railroad intentionally chose not to pass through the town but six miles to its south. Nicodemus fell into financial ruin and today houses but fifty inhabitants.\(^{32}\)

This portion of the exhibit does a remarkable job at clarifying the fact that settlement was not an event unique to white men. African Americans, women, children, and people from all walks of life traveled west in order to establish a home and take advantage of opportunities for a prosperous life west of the Mississippi.


The display covering the topic of mining, much like that on farming and settlement, is fairly representative as well. With the discovery of gold at Sutter’s Mill in 1848, thousands of hopeful prospectors traveled west in order to seek their riches.

By 1849, there was a mad rush to California. These gold seekers, who were generally young, single men, became known as forty-niners. People traveled by land and sea to reach California. A sea voyage from the eastern United States around Cape Horn to the West was approximately 15,000-17,000 miles and took six months. Some travelers sailed to Panama, crossed the isthmus on land and then sailed on to San Francisco, a shorter but more disease-ridden route.

A second panel explains,

By 1850, tens of thousands of people flowed into the California gold camps. Among the diverse groups were many African Americans, American Indians, Europeans, Mexicans, Chinese, and South Americans. Many groups were resented by the forty-niners because of simple physical differences. The Chinese in particular were held in contempt because of their hard work ethics and serious attitude they projected. By 1852 California had become a state and over 225,000 people settled there.33

While many individuals traveled west to attempt mining, others sought their fortunes through supplying established miners. Numerous merchants, such as Levi Strauss, supplied towns with goods such as clothing and tools.34 The diverse ethnic representation of the gold rush only further increased the stratification of labor present in the mining camps.

Through photographs, personal narratives, and a few objects such as a miner’s pick and pan, the display provides a glimpse into the lives of those who became known as forty-niners and alludes that those lives were quite difficult, but there was hope of achieving enormous wealth.

An unidentified statement from Monterey, California, indicates that,

…Mechanics, Lawyers and Doctors have all left for the gold region. Soldiers run from their camps, sailors from their decks, and women from their nurseries; their cradles answer for machines to wash out gold…I know a little boy only twelve

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years of age who washes out his ounce of gold a day, while his mother makes root beer and sells it at a dollar a bottle....

A second panel provides an account by E. G. Buffum, which explains, “Latecomers... found that was only to be obtained by the most severe toil. Prying and breaking up rocks, shoveling dirt, washing it with wet feet all day.”

The failure of the display lies in its omission of gender. Women from all ethnic backgrounds actively participated in various aspects of the gold rush. In a letter written to her daughter in 1849, Mary Jane Megquier notes how women played a vital role in California.

Women’s help is so scare that I am in hopes to get a chance by hook or crook to pay my way...A woman that can work will make more money than a man, and I think that I shall do that...For the quicker the money is made, the sooner we shall meet.

As the next display notes, expansion led settlers and workers alike to the far western regions of Texas where the cattle industry flourished. After the Civil War, the cattle industry reached its peak through the process of expansion. While the display mentions the importance of the cattle drives, known as the Long Haul, there is little mention of those individuals involved with the operation. The display argues that the cattle industry, along with the cowboys who took part in the Long Haul, were primarily responsible for establishing the myth of the Wild West. However, the display and its larger exhibit offer little references as to who the cowboys actually were or what the myth of the Wild West entails. There exists no reference to the fact that many of the cowboys who took part in the cattle drives were African Americans and Hispanics. The

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37 Statement by Mary Jane Megquire, taken from Schlissel, Western Women’s Reader, 53.
majority of whites who operated within the cattle industry owned and operated the numerous cattle ranches scattered throughout the West.\textsuperscript{39}

Much like the other sections of this exhibit, using images, objects, and narratives, the display on cowboys discusses a brief history of American cattle culture. Objects such as riding chaps, horse blankets, a saddle, and the cast bronze statue \textit{The Bronco Buster} by Frederic Remington attempt to tell the story of the American Cowboy. The majority of the display focuses on the longhorn steer and horse.\textsuperscript{40} Additionally, brief narratives hint at the experiences of those who worked within the industry. For example, one panel provides a brief narrative from cattleman Joseph McCoy, who states,

\begin{quote}
Give a Southerner with inbred equestrianism a saddle a man could stick to, a lariat, and a double-cinched mustang, who knew as much about a Longhorn as his rider, and you had the tools for an industry, the tools to work and mold the resource, the Texas Longhorn.\textsuperscript{41}
\end{quote}

In many ways, this display provides little discussion of the overall history of cattle culture or its place in American western history. The display lacks context and comes off as a disjointed collection of objects, loosely held together by a taxidermied longhorn.

The exhibit then moves to examine the story of Buffalo Hunters. This display presents its audience with very little information. With a handful of objects such as a rifle, hat, cartridge belt, and a saddle, along with a series of images depicting buffalo hunts, the exhibit suggests that hunting existed at least as an activity in the West.\textsuperscript{42} Once again, the exhibit design and its lack of discussion and copy label provide the viewer with no explanation of buffalo hunting in the West.

\textsuperscript{40} Jefferson National Expansion Memorial, St. Louis, Missouri. Personal visit, March, 5, 2008.
\textsuperscript{41} Jefferson National Expansion Memorial, St. Louis, Missouri. Personal visit, March, 5, 2008.
\textsuperscript{42} Jefferson National Expansion Memorial, St. Louis, Missouri. Personal visit, March, 5, 2008.
The exhibit fails to discuss the motivations and economics behind buffalo hunting, and the environmental consequences that resulted from the activity.

The next portion of the exhibit examines soldier and military conflict in the West. Again, through a small collection of objects, images, and narratives, the display alludes to the fact that conflict existed in the West. For example, the text panels indicate that battles took place between Native Americans and the American military, and that conflict was a frequent occurrence. A statement given by Private H. S. Bryan at the Battle of Rosebud indicates that “All the Indians in the world seemed gathered right there in front of our troops… I saw enough Indians to last me the rest of my life…” Similarly, a statement from William Tecumseh Sherman explains, “I am tired and sick of war. Its glory is all moonshine. War is hell.” Images of military leaders and battle scenes, along with objects such as a pistol, a rifle, a bugle, a military sabre, a cavalry saddle, and a bronze statue of an American soldier give a sense of the material culture possessed by the American Army stationed in the West. However, the display lacks a real discussion of conflict, neither of the Indian Wars nor any battles. The display presents the idea of war and conflict but provides visitors with no background information or explanation as to why conflict came about. Additionally, the discussion of conflict only gives voice and agency to the American military.

The final portion of the exhibit broadly examines Native Americans, or “Indians,” in the West. As one moves through the display the viewer confronts a large tipi and an assortment of Native American material culture, such as moccasins, a catlinite pipe, and a beaded quiver. The

display identifies these objects as Native American, but it lacks any mention from which
Native American cultures these objects originated. In the journals of Lewis and Clark, the entries
mention encounters with several Native American cultures such as the Mandan Sioux, Nez
Pierce, Blackfeet, Arapaho, Assiniboine, and Cheyenne, all of whom possessed different cultural
traits, material culture, and living patterns. To claim the objects possessed within the display
represent all of these various Native American cultures is simply deceiving and inaccurate. Not
all Natives in the West lived in tipis, nor did their artwork and material culture mirror each
other’s. As noted by Lubar and Kendrick, the provenance, or origin of an object, is a vital portion
of a clear and informative narrative. Without proper context, description, and representation,
these displays provide very little historical information, do not fulfill the task of educating
visitors, and only further reinforce preconceived myths of the American West.

Much like the narratives found in the previous displays, the narratives within the Native
American display do very little to help connect the exhibit as a whole. For example, one panel
provides a statement from Tonkahaska (Tall Bull), a Cheyenne, discussing the decimation of
their game and the lack of available food. He says, “The buffalo are diminishing fast. The
antelope that were plenty a few years ago, they are now thin. When they shall die, we shall be
hungry.” A separate panel provides a statement from the Treaty of Fort Laramie. It states, “No
white person or persons shall be permitted to settle upon or occupy any portion of the (Black
Hills) territory or without consent or without the consent of the Indian to pass through the
same.” Despite the fact that the exhibit discusses the same, or similar, themes throughout its

48 Steven Lubar and Kathleen M. Kendrick, *Legacies: Collecting America’s History at the Smithsonian* (Washington
D.C.: Smithsonian Institute Press in Association with the National Museum of American History, Bering Center,
2001), 233-6.
various displays, it lacks a framework to connect the various events and activities of the nineteenth century West to the state and conditions of western Native. The exhibit explores themes such as settlement and hunting but fails to highlight that those events led to the displacement of Natives and shortages of their food supplies. Similarly, a panel providing a statement given by the Nez Pierce leader, Heinmot Tooyalanket (Chief Joseph), discusses the hardships and impacts of conflicts between Natives and Americans in the West. “Hear me, my Chiefs! I am tired: my heart is sick and sad. From where the sun now stands, I will fight no more forever.” Again, the exhibit discusses soldiers and western conflict but does very little to connect that theme to Natives in the West. This display flows into the last exhibit of the museum.

The final exhibit of the Museum of Westward Expansion deals with the relationship between Native Americans and the American federal government. The first portion of the exhibit contains the largest display of peace medallions in the world, and comprises the most recent addition to the museum. As American settlement and industry expanded beyond the Mississippi River, the United States government became increasingly interested in claiming lands in the American West, lands that were occupied by Native American societies. The federal government sent officials west in order to sign treaties with Native Americans, and upon completion, Natives received peace medallions. The practice of giving peace medallions began with the French, English, and Spanish, all of whom gave medallions to Native American leaders as a sign of allegiance.

The United States adopted a similar practice, adorning its medallions with the profiles of American presidents, minted by either the U.S. Mint or the U.S. Indian Office. Native leaders

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51 Jefferson National Expansion Memorial, St. Louis, Missouri. Personal visit, March 5, 2008.
52 Jefferson National Expansion Memorial, St. Louis, Missouri. Personal visit, March 5, 2008.
53 Jefferson National Expansion Memorial, St. Louis, Missouri. Personal visit, March 5, 2008.
received the medallions upon the signing of treaties, official visits, or for acts of service. Most commonly in the instance of a treaty signing, the medallion served as a physical symbol of friendship and peace. For Native Americans, the medallions served as a symbol of great prestige and honor, for they were only given to the most powerful and respected individuals, and typically were presented with great ceremony. The medallions served as physical tokens of political significance; they existed as “rewards for good deeds.”

After the Civil War, the importance of peace medallions diminished in the eyes of the federal government. Without completion between England and the United States, as during the Revolutionary Wars, there no longer existed a need to reward Natives for their loyalty and allegiance. For the government, the importance of and meaning behind the medallions decreased. However, Native Americans still valued the medallions as symbols of pride, honor, and prestige. As Francis Paul Prucha explained in his history of peace medallions, “But there was a diminished feeling of the sacredness of the medals, for now the Indians themselves often requested medals – indeed sometimes begged for them quite insistently – and they were occasionally asked to pay for those received.” As Prucha explained, the treaty process was not always honest, and the exhibit fails to mention this fact.

The final portion of the exhibit consists of four large motorized displays, very delicately examining the topic of Indian removal. The display begins with Charles Barber, chief engraver for the U.S. Mint. His narrative explains how his father taught him the trade, and that his occupation involves the construction of peace medallions. This display begins the discussion of the process of Indian removal through the context of a peace medallion.

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54 See Francis Paul Prucha, Indian Peace Medals in American History (State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1971).
55 Prucha, Indian Peace Medals, 15.
My father taught me this trade as his father taught him. I use many of their tools as I carve the dies that stamp out silver medals. Our craft has not changed much, but our medals have. Compare the symbols on this medal to those of the past...What do they tell you? A century ago, we awarded these medals to Indians when we signed treaties with them. Now that the frontier has been settled, treaties are a thing of the past, and we give these medals as 'rewards' to the Indian farmer.57

Next, the visitor arrives upon William Clark in his role as Indian Agent for the United States in 1832.58 Clark describes the early process of gift exchange and the signing of treaties.

Fruitful diplomacy with the Indians required the exchange of gifts. We brought peace medals to the Western Territory with that in mind. Now, when we sign treaties, many chief’s request them of me. A silver medal symbolizes a covenant between two nations. We agree to live in peace. We agree that some places will be set aside for Indians, and other places given to settlers.59

The first two portions of the display depict the process of Indian removal under the guise of friendship and peace; however, Clark’s statement alludes to the idea of the reservation system and the inevitable relocation of Native Americans.

The next two interactive displays vaguely hint at the harsh events experienced by Native Americans throughout the signing of land treaties, resulting in the forced relocation of entire Native cultures. The third display depicts Chief Red Cloud in 1870 as he and his people reside in the Dakota Territory.60 The chief states,

In 1868, men came out and brought me papers. We could not read them, and they did not tell us what was truly in them...When I reached Washington, the Great Father explained to me what the treaty was, and showed me that the Interpreters had deceived me. All I want is right and just. I have tried to get from the Great Father what is right and just. I have not altogether succeeded.61

Throughout his statement, the visitor becomes aware of the fact that U.S. policy of regarding treaties was not entirely honest, and oftentimes deceptive. With the final motorized display, the
Museum of Westward Expansion ends its exhibit with the relocation of Native Americans. The fourth display depicts Sergeant Robert Banks, an Arizona Territory Buffalo Soldier in 1886. Through this display, the visitor learns that U.S. Indian policy relocated Natives to the American West. Banks’s narrative provides only a hint at the cruelty and brutality behind the forced relocation.

I remember in the winter of 1870, we had six thousand Indians to feed at Camp Supply. We were herding cattle for their beef and I often had to ride the line alone at night. I felt wind and cold the likes of which I never had before. At least there was enough food that winter. It wasn’t like that in Arizona. The Indian agent wasn’t supplying the Apache and they were starving. Now we are here to keep them from leaving the reservation. Can’t say I blame them for wanting to go.

The exhibit depicts the process of Indian removal, and the audience receives the idea that the United States committed an atrocity. However, I would argue that the display depicts a comfortable, watered-down version of history.

Lubar and Kendrick explain that there exists a need within museums to “tell the whole story.” American history, and the history of the American West, contains issues of violence and brutality. However, these events are, in fact, the history of a people, and there exists a need to tell these stories. Museums have a responsibility to the community to tell history as it occurred, regardless of whether the history is pleasant or cruel. The Museum of Westward Expansion’s exhibit portraying Indian policy and removal fails to discuss such topics as murder, smallpox blankets, the reservation system, alcoholism, or even the Trail of Tears.

When I first began this project in 2005, I contacted Bob Moore, historian for the National Park Service and the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial. As Moore explained in 2005, the

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exhibits housed underneath the Gateway Arch experienced little change over past ten years. I would argue that there exists a need for revision within the museum’s exhibits. While the museum does succeed in representing the importance of Westward Expansion for the United States, as well as for the city of St. Louis, the exhibits remains static. As time progresses, the interpretations of historical events change as well. Today, historians accept the importance of histories that include the experiences of women, children, minorities, technology, and material culture. Today, historians place equal importance upon these stories as historians of the past gave to the histories of great men. Museums owe the communities they serve the same accurate representations provided by academic historians.

While the Museum of Westward Expansion sufficiently depicts the process of settlement and expansion throughout the nineteenth century, I would argue that its portrayal of the American experience is inadequate. The process of expansion involved not only structures and industries such as the fur trade, cattle industry, and agriculture, it involved diverse people as well. The experience of expansion included people from all walks of life: women, children, men, Asians, African Americans, Native Americans, Hispanics, and whites. Without the inclusion of their stories, the history of the American West remains incomplete; only to further promote the myths and misconceptions of the American West.

However, the exhibits displayed throughout the museum of Westward Expansion resulted as the products of designers, rather than museum professionals. As argued by Eric Barnett, director of the University Museum at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, the Museum of Westward Expansion serves more so as a holding area for waiting to ride to the top of the St. Louis Arch rather than as a space of historical narrative. Additionally, Barnett notes that the

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66 Personal discussion with Bob Moore, March 31, 2005.
exhibits lack depth due to the fact the institution really lacks collections. Thus, the museum lacks interpretation and instead explores the history of the West through its displays. The museum and its exhibits exist as an aesthetic space rather than a site of contextualization and explanation. With this in mind, the Museum of Westward Expansion serves a very different function and provides a very different account of the West than the other museums examined throughout this work. Whereas the Autry National Center, the Buffalo Bill Historical Center, and the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum each have a broader mission to collect, interpret, and present the history of the American West, the Museum of Westward Expansion follows a significantly different mission. As Barnett states, “We should look at their museum the same way they look at the Arch. It’s a gateway. So maybe we should look at their museum as being a gateway to other museums. Just like the Arch is a gateway to the West, the museum should be a gateway to museums about the West.”

In 2016, the National Parks Service celebrated its centennial anniversary. As part of the celebration, Jefferson National Expansion Memorial implemented a plan to re-envision Eero Saarinen’s plan for the complex, including a reinterpretation of the Museum of Westward Expansion. The museum closed its doors on February 17, 2015, in order to remove the nearly forty-year-old exhibits and begin the process of installing a series of reconceptualized, interactive exhibits. According to the National Park Service, the plan for the new treatment, created by the British design firm Haley Sharpe Design, focuses on six thematic areas: colonial St. Louis, Thomas Jefferson’s vision of the American West, the St. Louis riverfront and its economic impact, manifest destiny, new frontiers in the American West, and finally the design

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and construction of the Gateway Arch. Plans include a recreation of William Clark’s Indian Museum, Thomas Jefferson’s library, and a creole village. The plan intends to highlight key dates and events in western history, but also focus on the people who established St. Louis and settled the West. In addition to creating new exhibits, the new treatment includes a plan to remodel the museum’s gallery space, entrances, and waiting areas.

The renovation plan seeks to provide a more critical, compelling story of the West. Originally, the National Park Service planned to complete the $380 million renovation by 2015. However, the National Park Service now plans to open the renovated museum in 2017. While many see the reinstallation of the museum as a much needed and welcomed event, the plan is not without opposition and controversy. For example, St. Louis resident Jonathan Snyder argued in his letter to the editor that, “One of the three original, iconic, elements of the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial are soon to be lost, unnecessarily and tragically, namely the Museum of Westward Expansion. The Gateway Arch and its grounds seem to be sacrosanct, but the museum seems to be expendable.” He continues to explain that,

Planners claim that a new museum will be an improvement, but the replacement looks to be driven by the axial plan to the new entrance, and by incorporating interactive computers. But there could still be a way to re-create within new construction the original museum. That museum, by Aram Mardirosian, is as timeless and relevant a design as Eero Saarinen's Arch and Dan Kiley's landscape. Mardirosian's revolutionary design, with concentric rings, interpenetrating areas, and differing levels, allows the visitor to move back and forth in time and subject. The form and contents work wonderfully as a unified whole.

New planners admit that Mardirosian's museum is "a gem," and they want to "continue to tell the stories ... in modern, engaging and compelling ways." But the

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original was so compelling, it inspired a whole new direction in museum design. Why not try to keep it?

A solution would be to re-create the museum below the aisle of new exhibits, with an intermediate lobby level if need be. The concentric circles could be expanded to accommodate a few discreet computer screens.

Other prominent projects have been altered at the last minute, like the abandoned reconfiguration of the New York Public Library. Or locally, the restoration of the International Fur Exchange Building after partial destruction, or the abandonment of the Meramec Dam project after construction had begun.

Can't we pause to re-create the already "engaging," "compelling" "gem" that we have, and mix the old with the new?71

Despite the debate, the National Park Service’s plan offers the public a fresh interpretation of westward expansion and seeks to ameliorate the criticism aimed at the museum’s previous installations.

Since its opening, the Museum of Westward Expansion sought to provide audiences a broad presentation of the history of the American West, and St. Louis’s role in western expansion and settlement. Through exhibits focusing on Lewis and Clark, the place of the West in American history, Native Americans, and those individuals who opened and settled the West, the museum strove to contextualize the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial within a larger historical narrative by providing a broad survey of the West. Unlike the Autry National Center, the Buffalo Bill Historical Center, and the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, as discussed in the following chapters, the Museum of Westward Expansion provides its visitors with a very general picture of western American history. Today, through a new interpretive plan, the museum intends to conceptualize its presentation. In the future, the museum intends for its exhibits to reflect a thoughtful, critical examination of the West, one on par with the presentations of museums like the Autry, Buffalo Bill, and the nation.

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71 Snyder, “Plan to Eliminate.”
Located in downtown Cody, Wyoming, the Buffalo Bill Historical Center collectively houses five thematic museums: the Buffalo Bill Museum, the Whitney Gallery of Western Art, the Cody Firearms Museum, the Plains Indian Museum, and the Draper Natural History Museum. Unlike the Museum of Westward expansion in St. Louis, Missouri, which seeks to offer visitors a broad representation of western American history, the Buffalo Bill Historical Center began as an effort to memorialize William F. Cody. Since its inception, the institution broadened its scope to topically explore western history and heritage.

The Buffalo Bill Historical Center complex sits on a seven-acre campus. At the front entrance, Robert Macfie Scriver’s bronze statue, *Buffalo Bill - Plainsman*, greets visitors as they enter the front doors. The institution’s main lobby provides visitors with a broad overview of the collections and themes found within the five museums. In the center of the room sits a large display of taxidermied buffalo, with an explanation of what the institution presents throughout its various museums. It states,

The American West is a land of legends, symbols, and lore, and there exists no greater emblem of the West than the American Bison, commonly known as the buffalo. As you visit the five museums of the Buffalo Bill Historical Center you will discover stories related to the buffalo and be introduced to others that illustrate the diversity of peoples, landscapes, artistic expression, and technological advances that encompass the West. Explore these ideas with us now through the remarkable collections of the Buffalo Bill Museum, the Whitney Gallery of Western Art, the Plains Indian Museum, the Cody Firearms Museum, the Draper Museum of Natural History, and the McCracken Research Library. We are the West!

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1 Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 8, 2008.
2 Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 8, 2008.
The lobby provides access to the various museums and other locations housed within the institution.

One of the lobby’s corridors leads visitors to the Buffalo Bill Museum, the McCracken Research Center, and the Special Exhibits Gallery. As John Rumm, acting curator of the Buffalo Bill Museum explained, the Buffalo Bill Museum first opened in 1927 through the efforts of Mary Jester Allen and the Buffalo Bill Memorial Association. Initially housed in a log cabin, which today lies across the street from the Buffalo Bill Historical Center, the Buffalo Bill Museum exhibited artifacts related to the life of William F. Cody and artifacts from the region’s early frontier period. In 1961, the Buffalo Bill Historical Center relocated the museum to its current location, reinterpreting and reinstalling the collections into what Rumm described as a state-of-the-art exhibit for its time. As he described, the exhibit presentation was “…kind of like a 1960s version of a cabinet of Buffalo Bill Cody’s life.” Similar with the Whitney Gallery of Western Art, under the leadership of Peter Hassrick, the Buffalo Bill Historical Center’s museums underwent a period of reinterpretation. In 1986, Paul Fees, the curator of the Buffalo Bill Museum modernized the museum’s exhibits, providing greater context and analysis. As Rumm explained, aside from the removal of an exhibit on the history of Cody, which was replaced by the exhibit of Cody High Style, the museum remained, for the most part, relatively static since its reinstallation in the 1980s.

As Rumm continued to explain, the Buffalo Bill Museum’s mission aims to interpret and shed light on the life and times, accomplishments, and contributions of William F. Cody, by exploring his history, his Wild West Show, his employment as a fur trade and teamster, his time

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5 Rumm, interview, 2.
6 Rumm, interview, 2.
with the Pony Express, his service as a scout for the U.S. Army, his involvement Indian Wars, and his place as well as the city of Cody’s role in the American West. Additionally, the museum displays broader collections, such as the Deadwood Coach used in the Wild West show, Victor Alexander’s tool collection and saddle shop, collections and artifacts from the Cody family’s personal history, saddles, wagons, and other material culture associated with the Cody’s greater regional and frontier history.7

As Rumm explained, as the institution’s flagship, the Buffalo Bill Museum, attracts a large number of visitors looking to connect with stories from the Wild West show, and other popular depictions of Buffalo Bill’s life. He noted, “People like seeing the scratchy, jumpy, original footage of the Wild West show. I think people enjoy seeing things that are associated with Cody, the real artifacts; the buffalo skin coat for example, Lucretia Borgia, his needle-nose gun; seeing the Deadwood coach.”8

Upon entering the Buffalo Bill Museum, visitors first see a marble bust of William F. “Buffalo Bill” Cody. On the walls hang an 1826 map of the American West, along with several timelines that contextualize the life of Buffalo Bill within U.S. and world history. The museums consist of a long series of hallways, displaying exhibits related to the life and times of Buffalo Bill, for whom the museum is named. Directly beyond the entrance sit two large taxidermied buffalo. From there, the museum explores the history of Buffalo Bill in both a topical and chronological manner.9

The first exhibit explores the history of the Pony Express, for which William F. Cody worked early in his life. As the exhibit explains, Cody holds the record for “…one of the longest

7 Rumm, interview, 3.
8 Rumm, interview, 5.
9 Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 8, 2008.
rides in the short history of the Pony Express – 322 miles in just over twenty-one hours using twenty-one horses.” The exhibit continues to explain that through his Wild West show, Cody recreated the idea and memory of the Pony Express. Through a series of photographs and objects, such as rifles, the next exhibit discusses some of the many famous western friends and acquaintances of Buffalo Bill, including people such as “Wild Bill” Hickok and Sitting Bull. Additionally, these early exhibits highlighted Cody’s early life, working for the Pony express, as a hunter and a guide. The exhibits display numerous objects owned by Cody, including his buffalo robe coat. While the exhibits focus on the history of Buffalo Bill, presentations continuously contextualize the personal history within the broader histories of the West and United States. The museum’s collection consists of roughly 8,000 objects, the vast majority of them directly associated with Cody’s life, such as memorabilia and personal artifacts.10

From there the museum exhibits move to an exploration of Cody as an actor and entertainer. The exhibit’s text panel notes that, “In December 1872, Cody was persuaded by Ned Buntline to reenact his adventures on the stage in a play called The Scouts of the Prairie.”11 The panel continued to explain that during the following year Cody, along with other western figures such as Wild Bill Hickok, formed a group and toured the United States, acting out their adventures on stage. As the panel noted, “Audiences and newspapermen saw Buffalo Bill (and Wild Bill and Texas Jack) as the real thing, not play actors. Therefore, the image of western life they saw in the theater seemed real to them as well. The melodramas provided a foundation for wild west myth.”12 From the start, the exhibits found in the Buffalo Bill Museum successfully tackle the history and myth of both the American West and the life of Buffalo Bill Cody. As

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10 Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 8, 2008.
11 Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 8, 2008.
12 Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 8, 2008.
previously discussed, Cody saw himself as both an educator and showman. In that light, Cody himself played a vital role in not only stressing the history of the American West, but also mythologizing the West and its history at the same time.

The next section of the museum looks at Cody’s career as a military scout and guide. According to the exhibit, from 1868 to 1872 he served as a military scout “…most notably as chief of scouts for the 5th Cavalry.”13 He then returned to serve as a scout in 1874 and 1876. Just as with earlier exhibits, the displays depicting Cody’s military career present the topic through a variety of artifacts owned by Cody during this time, including letters he wrote, rifles and pistols, articles of clothing he was said to have worn during this period, and his medal of honor, which was awarded to him by the U.S. Congress in 1872. Again, while the exhibit’s focus rests on Cody’s involvement, it also explores a larger narrative of military history and the West by discussing conflict with Native Americans and General George Armstrong Custer.14

Cody’s diverse experiences throughout his early life propelled him to fame. As the Buffalo Bill Museum continues, its next series of exhibits explore the fame and mythology of Cody. The exhibit explains that in 1869 the first dime novel about Buffalo Bill was printed, *King of the Border Men*. While the tale discusses Cody, the Civil War story was actually about Wild Bill Hickok. This example of historical myth was not unique. As the exhibit explains, “By 1900 more than one billion words had been printed about Cody. In the days before television, weekly “pulp” magazines printed fictional adventure stories that used his face and name but little else was true.”15 This portion of the museum contains a large display of numerous writings on Buffalo Bill, ranging from historical writings to novels and comics.

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13 Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 8, 2008.
14 Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 8, 2008.
15 Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 8, 2008.
In addition to his international celebrity, Cody served as an influential force at a local level as well. As the founder of the city, the Buffalo Bill Museum dedicates a large amount of exhibit space to discussions of Cody’s personal life, his family, and their importance within the town and surrounding regions. The exhibit highlights his role in the establishment of the city of Cody, Wyoming, and the place his family held in the area. The museum displays several personal items belonging to the Cody family. Objects including family portraits, clothing, fine china, furniture, and a carriage explore the lesser-known, more personal side of Cody’s life. The exhibit, designed to look like the interior of a home, highlights not only the Cody family’s local importance but their personal lives as well. Through the examination of local history, the museum highlights the process of western settlement. The exhibit ends by contextualizing his local and personal life with Cody’s national and international importance through newspaper publications and announcements of his death in 1917.\\n
While the Buffalo Bill Museum dedicates most of its space to a discussion of the life of its namesake, not all of the displays and exhibits solely focus on Cody. Throughout the museum several exhibits explore broader, more general topics related to the American West. For example, on one of the outer walls, a large exhibit within glass cases examines the history of cattle raising. Similar to the exhibit found within the Museum of Westward Expansion in St. Louis, Missouri, through a series of saddles, bridles, branding irons, lassos, and text panels, the exhibit discusses a brief history of ranching and cattle culture in the American West. Beginning with the Spanish origins of the cattle culture, the exhibit provides a brief history throughout the open-range period, which ended in the late 1880s. The exhibit then moves to an examination of several topics and affiliated industries within the history of ranching, all related to the American cowboy. Included

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16 Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 8, 2008.
17 Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 8, 2008.
in this exhibit, visitors see a display of the Victor Alexander saddle shop. As with previous cases, the exhibit on American cattle culture juxtaposes historical fact with popular mythos of the American West. Through displays of saddle-making, discussions of working ranches, and large exhibits of wagons packed with tools utilized by ranch-hands, the working cowboy is presented alongside displays exploring the mythical cowboy of American dude ranches and popular culture. At the center of this discussion, the exhibit returns to the role played by Buffalo Bill Cody in popularizing the mythical western hero while simultaneously striving to educate the public on western American history through his Wild West show.\[18\]

As the exhibits progress, visitors are led to the back of the hall, where discussion focuses on Buffalo Bill’s Wild West show. The exhibit successfully blends together the various themes and events discussed up to this point in an examination of Cody’s most popular contribution to western history and lore. Through a series of posters, banners, and lithographs, visitors are drawn into the spectacle of Cody’s Wild West. An 1840 Concord stagecoach used by Buffalo Bill in his Wild West show sits in the middle of the exhibit space. The exhibit explains that Cody established his Wild West show in 1883 as a popular depiction of historical events. Part show, part fact, Buffalo Bill’s Wild West gave audiences a glimpse at events such as the Battle of Little Big Horn, and introduced audiences to figures such as William M. “Bill” Picket, the African American and Cherokee cowboy; sharpshooter and performer Annie Oakley; and Sitting Bull, member of the Lakota Sioux.\[19\]

The exhibit notes that Buffalo Bill’s Wild West show inspired similar performances as well, such as Col. Tim McCoy’s Real Wild West, and Cody’s business partner Pawnee Bill’s

\[18\] Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 8, 2008.
\[19\] Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 8, 2008.
Wild West show.\(^{20}\) As the exhibit continues, visitors confront numerous cases filled with images and objects representing the spectacle of Cody’s shows. The exhibit stresses Cody’s relationship with Native Americans. As part of western history, Cody intentionally incorporated Native Americans in his show. One text panel notes that,

As early as 1878, Cody was quoted as saying, “every Indian outbreak that I have ever known has resulted from broken promises and broken treaties by the government.” When asked for his solution to the Indian “problem,” he replied, “never make a single promise to the Indians that is not fulfilled.”

Indians of his day considered Cody a good friend, and his relationship with them was characterized by mutual respect. America, Cody stressed, was the Indian’s heritage. He had only fought for what was his and should expect to be treated with fairness and justice. Most of the Indians who toured with the Wild West were veterans of the wars, and many had known Cody on the Plains.

According to Black Elk, Luther Standing Bear, and others, the Indians were treated as equals in the arena and behind the scenes. As many as 80 Indians at a time, mostly Sioux, were allowed by the government to travel with the Wild West.\(^{21}\)

At a time when the federal government worked toward allotment and removal of Native Americans, and referred to the situation as the Indian problem, Cody used his show as a means through which to not only provide employment to Native people, but once again to educate the public as well.

The Buffalo Bill’s Wild West show came to an end in 1913. Throughout its existence, it evolved into an international sensation and propelled Cody to stardom. The exhibit directly links the popularity of Cody’s performances to the rise of western popular culture. The final exhibit displays parallel objects associated with Buffalo Bill to twentieth-century toys and games, stressing the fact that Cody’s Wild West show established a popular genre in American culture, which continued to persist long after the show’s final performance.

\(^{20}\) Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 8, 2008.
\(^{21}\) Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 8, 2008.
From the back of the Buffalo Bill Museum, visitors are directed down a flight of stairs to the institution’s lower level, which houses a special exhibits area. At the time of my visit, the gallery housed a large exhibit titled *Best of Our West*, which showcased Cody-style decorative arts. As the exhibit explains,

>The contemporary decorative pieces assembled here are from the [Buffalo Bill Historical] Center’s fledgling Special Collection of Decorative Arts. They have been assembled through the generosity of the Switchback Ranch that provides an annual purchase award at the Western design Conference held in Cody, Wyoming, each September.

Activities of the Center’s Special Collection of Western Decorative Arts are funded in part through the kind auspices of Mrs. Silas Carthcart. Priorities of the Special Collections are directed towards collecting – for display and study – regional decorative art forms that depict the highest levels of creative endeavor, inspired use of materials, quality of construction, and resonance with the West.22

Exhibit pieces range from clothing and furniture to a foosball table designed to mimic a battle between Native Americans and cavalry troops. Its objects highlight the regional and decorative styles of the area, stressing local arts and regional aesthetics.

The exhibit explains that the Cody style draws its inspiration from the aesthetics of furniture designers such as Thomas C. Molesworth and Edward Bohlin.23 When discussing the popularity of the style, the exhibit notes that,

>Unlike the immediate popularity of saddlery and silver, unmistakable western style was slow to develop. Earlier in the 20th century, western homes were furnished in mission oak or by mail order. Many homes had one or two pieces that quietly reflected a deeper sense of place…an antlered chair here, a sturdy sofa there, draped in animal hide.

The birth of true western style awaited a catalyst. Not until Thomas Canada Molesworth (1890-1977) a craftsman, a designer, a producer as well as a promoter whose reverence for the past was tempered by his stylish sense of fun would western furniture find not just a catalyst but a creator.

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22 Text panel, Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 8, 2008.
23 The designs of Thomas Molesworth led to the creation and popularity of western style furniture and design. The designs of Jonas Bohlin incorporate a modernist functionality in their construction.
Molesworth found inspiration in the Arts and Crafts movement as well as the rustic traditions of the Adirondacks and the American Southwest. He in turn lent inspiration and enthusiasm to a movement of his own. He and a growing group of contemporary “followers”, using local labor and western materials transformed seating and the space in which their clients sit.24

The Swedish-born designer Edward Bohlin focused his craft on silver-smithing and saddle making. In 1910, Bohlin sailed to America, where he worked for a brief time on Montana ranches, and ultimately Cody, Wyoming. Years later, he moved to Hollywood, California, “where his artistry in leather and silver soon made him ‘saddlemaker to the stars’”25 The special exhibit stresses a connection between the popularity of western culture with the artistic endeavors of regional artists and craftspeople.26

As John Rumm indicated, there was a consensus throughout the Buffalo Bill Historical Center that the exhibits within the Buffalo Bill Museum appeared outdated. For example, through our conversation, Rumm and I discussed the nature of the Buffalo Bill Museum. He noted that since its inception the museum transitioned away a physical shrine to Buffalo Bill. However, he explained that the museum and overall institution lacks discussion of numerous subjects, such as transportation. After I mentioned that the Buffalo Bill lacked a western gallery, Rumm noted,

We don’t have a western gallery. We don’t talk about the West in a real way, and what the West was or is in terms of orientation space, absolutely. People come here and say that we’re the voice of the West. Well, that assumes you know, number one, what voice is speaking, and number two, what it is they’re talking about. We really don’t get that. I, however, am not one of those that thinks that’s necessarily a bad thing, because I don’t think you can define the West for people. Instead, I think you can and should invite them to be more forthcoming about what their vision or view of the West is. The West is a place, but it’s also like an ever-shifting point in time, and I can be living in Pittsburg, and for me the West is anything past the Ohio State line. Or, I can be in California, and for me the West is anything east of Sacramento, and I’m in kind of like my own little bicoastal

24 Text panel, Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 8, 2008.
25 Text panel, Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 8, 2008.
26 Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 8, 2008.
world there. You know, the West is always going to be, and I think that’s one of the wonderful things about the West, that it’s so vast, and horizons are so limitless that it can encompass a multiplicity of views, and I think we should be open to that, receptive to that.  

Recent discussions highlight a need to reinstall and reinterpret the museum’s exhibit space. As of 2008, the Buffalo Bill Historical Center raised roughly $1.5 million in funding for the purposes of renovating the Buffalo Bill Museum. While at the time planning efforts remained largely in the planning stage, Rumm indicated that the institution planned to move forward with the reinstallation by 2011.  

The Buffalo Bill Museum exists as the first established and most popular museum throughout the Buffalo Bill Historical Center. The museum’s initial concept dates back to 1917, when local citizens sought to preserve the memory of William F. Cody and his legacy. Over the course of its existence, the Buffalo Bill Historical Center grew into something much greater than a museum of celebrity. It evolved into an institution dedicated to the preservation and study of the American West, its peoples, and its place within American history. The first step in this process came in 1959, when the Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney Gallery of Art opened and marked the beginning of the Buffalo Bill Historical Center.  

Through the efforts of Mary Jester Allen, niece of Buffalo Bill, the Wyoming state legislature appropriated funds for the purpose of establishing a memorial to the legacy of William F. Cody. The Buffalo Bill Memorial Association hired the artist and art patron Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney to create a suitable memorial. As previously discussed in Chapter Three, Whitney eventually donated her sculpture, *Buffalo Bill – The Scout*, in addition to 40 acres of land upon which the Buffalo Bill Historical Center currently resides. In 1954, Cornelius

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27 Rumm, interview, 16.
28 Rumm, interview, 2.
Vanderbilt Whitney, son of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, donated $250,000 to the Buffalo Bill Memorial Association in memory of his mother. The Buffalo Bill Memorial Association’s board of directors decided the funds would be best spent by creating a museum of western art in memory to Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney. Additionally, in 1955 William Coe donated $456,319.36 in trust to the Buffalo Bill Memorial Association. These funds provided a foundation upon which to establish the Buffalo Bill Historical Center. According to Mindy Besaw, curator of the Whitney Gallery of Art, the original museum collection, which was established in 1917, contained art but it was never separated from the overall collection. Over the years, the institution’s art collection continued to expand. By 1957, through the efforts of the Coe Foundation, the Buffalo Bill Historical Center acquired the Remington Studio Collection. This, along with other pieces acquired through the financial assistance of Cornelius Vanderbilt Whitney, formed the initial collection of the Whitney Gallery of Western Art.\(^{29}\)

The Whitney Gallery of Western Art opened its doors to the public on April 25, 1959. At that point, the museum existed as the only occupant of the newly established institution, as the Buffalo Bill Museum still resided across the street in its original location. At that time, most of the Whitney’s exhibit space contained objects and pieces on loan to the institution, as its collections still remained quite small. At the time, most of the Whitney’s objects, including those from the Remington Collection, sat within glass cases, while the two-dimensional art hung on the walls. According to Mindy Besaw, the gallery had a very contemporary feel. The gallery walls consisted of wood paneling and had a very 1950s aesthetic to the space.\(^{30}\) Over the years, the Whitney’s collection continued to grow. In 1976, the Buffalo Bill Historical Center appointed Peter Hassrick as the new director. Under Hassrick’s leadership, the Whitney Gallery of Western

\(^{29}\) Mindy Besaw, interview by the author, August 8, 2008, Buffalo Bill Historical Center, 2.

\(^{30}\) Besaw, interview, 14.
Art underwent a total reinstallation of its exhibition space. Hassrick took down all of the art and completely redesign the gallery. In 1978, the Whitney installed and dedicated the W. H. D. Koerner studio and collection as a complete recreation of his studio. Following this, in 1986, the Whitney installed linen-lined walls, recreated the Remington Studio as a complete exhibit, much like the Koerner studio, rather than objects behind glass cases, and then reinstalled the gallery. According to Besaw, the Whitney Gallery of Art experienced very little change over the next twenty years after Hassrick’s plan for a reinstallation. Thus, most of the objects on display during my time at the Buffalo Bill Historical Center reflected the 1986 reinstallation under the leadership of Peter Hassrick.

The Whitney Gallery of Western Art houses and displays a collection of traditional art, created by individuals who interpreted, documented, and defined the American West. As Mindy Besaw explains, the Whitney Museum of Western Art oversees all of the fine arts held by the Buffalo Bill Historical Center. Thus, even if the object relates to Buffalo Bill, or was created by a Native American artist, if the object is defined as traditional art, it falls under the care of the Whitney. At the same time, the Whitney’s collections remain present throughout all of the museums within the Buffalo Bill Historical Center. The Whitney oversees all of the artwork located in the various museums, but if pieces add to the overall exhibit of another museum, the Whitney will locate objects throughout the other various museums of the Buffalo Bill Historical Center to add to the exhibit’s context. In terms of curation, conservation, and even acquisition of objects, this might seem problematic, but as Besaw explained, regardless of which museum cares for and possesses the objects, everything remains under the control of the Buffalo Bill Historical Center. Thus, there is a process of negotiation of objects between the various museums within

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31 Besaw, interview.
32 Besaw, interview, 1.
the Buffalo Bill Historical Center in order to present the best possible exhibit and historical representation of a narrative exhibit.\textsuperscript{33}

The Whitney’s collection consists of traditional arts from the early nineteenth century through the present. As Besaw explained, “we have art beginning in the 1830s up to the present, and our earliest [art] is of Henry Inman portraits of Indians, and others [artists] who painted or depicted the Indians; all the way landscapes, depictions of wildlife and cowboys, Remington and Russell, and then on up to artists working today.”\textsuperscript{34} She continues,

> We have very few [pieces] that even approach the direction of abstract. It [the collection] tends to be pretty traditional, visually. But our additional strength is in art studio collections. We have four collections of artist studios. We have Frederick Remington’s Joseph Henry Sharp’s, W. H. D. Koerner’s, and our newest is the Alexander Phimister Procter studio. I think that is a little unique for us to have. If museums do have studio collections, it tends to be one or maybe two; we have four, and we have extensive archives that go along with all of those, that the [McCracken] Research Library takes care of for us.\textsuperscript{35}

As Besaw explained, the Whitney’s installation of art is largely chronological. The museum displays the majority of its art in the main museum gallery. Additionally, the museum displays its contemporary art collection in the H. Peter and Jeannette Kriendler Gallery of Contemporary Western Art, located on the second floor of the Buffalo Bill Historical Center’s main lobby in the vicinity of the administrative offices.\textsuperscript{36} In discussing the organizational plan for the Whitney’s exhibits, she explained that,

> The installation of the Whitney is largely chronological. It’s a march through the history of western art, and impressively, we cover almost every aspect of western American art if you don’t include Southwestern art. So, you go from the left [in the Whitney] all the way around and then upstairs [to the Kriendler Gallery], and you get the full history; 1830 to the present…

Besaw continues,

\textsuperscript{33} Besaw, interview, 17.
\textsuperscript{34} Besaw, interview, 2.
\textsuperscript{35} Besaw, interview.
\textsuperscript{36} Text panel.
…we tell stories within that [chronology]. The subcategories are wildlife, people of the West, and the people of the West are certainly Indians as well as pioneers and cowboys; well largely cowboys, rarely cowgirls although we have some, and the how the West is interpreted today. With the studios and landscape, certainly lands of the West.37

Besaw noted that while the layout of the Whitney’s 15,000-square-foot exhibition space remained fairly static since the 1986 installation, the interpretation of its roughly 350 works on view has changed. She explained that the curatorial staff over time updated object texts, and paintings were reinterpreted and recontextualized, but that the Whitney at the time had not kept up with changes in scholarship of the American West.38

Additionally, Besaw explained that while the Whitney Gallery of Western Art displays a chronological history of western American art, it also tells a vivid story of western myth. She notes that the city of Cody was partially founded on the myth of Buffalo Bill, and that myth remains present throughout the collections and displays of the museums within the Buffalo Bill Historical Center, including the Whitney. When I asked her how the Whitney dealt with the idea of a mythical and romantic West, she explained that,

We embrace it with open arms, and again, I don’t think that’s terrible because it’s how western art was built. But we do I think have to start, not necessarily say a right or wrong, but just ask questions, and ask ourselves, ask questions of the artwork, also ask questions of the visitor, to try to [realize] that even Charlie Russell was painting a romantic West during his time. He wasn’t painting exactly what was happening necessarily in Great Falls at the turn of the century. He was looking back forty years probably as well. And I don’t think people realize that, because we never stop anyone and say, “You know, think about this for a minute. Place yourself in this context.” We just sort of let it happen, and so I think we end up perpetuating it. Not intentionally, but just because, in my opinion that’s what probably what visitors do. What visitors do is just go, “Oh wow, this is exactly what it was like. It was beautiful, it was serene. It was, you know, everyone got along.” And I don’t think we say, “Wait one minute. Let’s think about this.” The old West was like forty years, and we have a history of art that’s now close to 200 years old, and a lot of other things happened in that 200-year timespan.39

37 Besaw, interview, 3.
38 Besaw, interview.
39 Besaw, interview, 6.
Thus, the Whitney Gallery of Western Art presents a chronological history of western art, as well as a mythical and romantic survey of the American West. She notes that the Whitney’s exhibits are object-driven, and that the art tells the various stories throughout the museum. Yet, because of this, there exists almost a lack of narrative and interpretation. Rather, visitors takes away from their visit what they want to interpret. While this encourages visitors to think about the objects, it also runs the risk of reinforcing any preconceived beliefs and myths held by the visitor.

Upon entering the Whitney Gallery of Western Art, visitors confront the massive landscape painting by Albert Bierstadt, *The Last Buffalo*; his representation of the disappearing wildlife from the West. Just past the Bierstadt piece, signs guide visitors to begin their journey through the left entrance of the museum in order to experience a chronological presentation of western art. As visitors follow the left entrance they first encounter a series of plaques recognizing major benefactors of and contributors to the museum, followed by a brief explanation of the Whitney’s history. The museum displays begin with a series of early paintings by artists such as Henry Inman, George Catlin, Karl Bodmer, Thomas Mickell Burnham, John Mix Stanley, Karl Giradet, William Jacob Hays, and Alfred Jacob Miller. These early nineteenth century paintings describe the landscape and peoples of the West, depicting Native American lifeways, wilderness landscapes, and early exploration. Located among the Inman pieces, a display of peace medallions explores the interaction between Native Americans and the U.S. government, while explaining the role played by Inman in the eventual publication of the *History of the Indian Tribes of North America*.43

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40 Besaw, interview.
41 Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 10, 2008.
42 Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 10, 2008.
43 Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 10, 2008.
As visitors continue throughout the museum, the displays next focus on art from the mid-nineteenth century. Works by artists such as William Ranney explore the events of life in the American West during the period of westward expansion. Additionally, the paintings of William Holbrook Beard, John Frederick Kensett, Worthington Whittredge, Albert Bierstadt, and Thomas Moran highlight western landscapes through a large collection of Hudson River School pieces. One highlight of this area of the museum presents Albert Bierstadt’s depictions of Yellowstone National Park through pieces such as *Yellowstone Falls* and *Geysers in Yellowstone*. Bierstadt created these landscapes after his visit to the region in 1881. Equally, the museum showcases the landscape paintings of Thomas Moran, which depict landscapes from Yellowstone National Park and the Grand Canyon. Following the Hudson River School works, the exhibit leads visitors to a collection of history and trompe-l’oeil paintings.

As discussed through a text panel, historical events frequently provided artistic inspiration. After the period of the Renaissance, such works of art became known as “history paintings.” The panel continues, stating that,

> In America during the latter part of the nineteenth century, narratives of national history provided artists with significant subjects to portray heroism, action, drama, and color. To depict these historical events, the artist needed to be knowledgeable about the circumstances and context, either through first-hand experience or research.

The Whitney displays several history paintings, as well as sculptures by artists Charles Schreyvogel and Irving R. Bacon, and trompe-l’oeil paintings by such artists as A. D. M Cooper, including *Relics of the Past*, which was once owned by Buffalo Bill Cody. Additionally, the

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44 Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 10, 2008.
45 Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 10, 2008.
46 Trompe-l’oeil (French for “deception of the eye”) were still-life paintings, which utilized an optical technique of forced perspective to make the painting’s subject matter appear three-dimensional.
49 Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 10, 2008.
section includes Native American products of historical representation. For example, in Sitting Bull Killing a Crow Indian, the Lakota leader Sitting Bull records his own historical account of battle.\textsuperscript{50} The historical narrative exhibit also highlights the sculpture work of Alexander Phimister Procter. As the exhibit explains, the bronze sculptor depicted his Native American subjects in historical, heroic, and noble poses. He conducted his research by spending time amongst the Blackfeet in Montana.\textsuperscript{51} The examination of history painting centers on Edgar S. Paxson’s piece, Custer’s Last Stand. As the exhibit explains, Paxson spent several years researching the work, and in both the exhibition of the original piece and later reproductions, the artist prepared a detailed explanation providing information on the subject, and a key, which identified the major historical figures involved with the event.\textsuperscript{52}

Following the Procter exhibit, the museum ushers visitors toward the Frederic Remington collection and studio. Just as with the Procter exhibit, the museum provides audiences with an overview of the life and career of Frederic Remington. It explains that, as both a painter and bronze sculptor, Remington highlighted the action of the West, emphasizing Native Americans, cowboys, and the American military, focusing on dramatic and sometimes mythical conflict as a result of expansion and contact.\textsuperscript{53} The exhibit consists of numerous paintings and sculptures produced by Remington throughout his career. Amid his pieces, visitors encounter Native Americans and cowboys, scouts and explorers, hunting parties, cattle drives, stagecoaches, and other iconic images of the American West.\textsuperscript{54} Additionally, the collection contains Frederick

\textsuperscript{50} Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 10, 2008.
\textsuperscript{51} Text panel. Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 10, 2008.
\textsuperscript{52} Text panel. Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 10, 2008.
\textsuperscript{53} Text panel. Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 10, 2008.
\textsuperscript{54} Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 10, 2008.
Remington’s studio collection of oil studies—a large collection of color oil studies of portraits, landscapes, and other images that he used in his studio as memory aids when creating his art.\textsuperscript{55}

The exhibit contains one of the largest collections of Remington bronzes, paintings, and sketches.\textsuperscript{56} Scattered throughout the exhibit lie Native American cultural objects, including a pair of moccasins, a bow case, quiver and arrows, and a vest. Similarly, we see a set of spurs and a Caballero jacket housed in a display case. Remington collected objects of western material culture throughout his travels. Just as the oil studies, these objects served as memory aids for his artistic works. Recontextualized throughout the exhibit, these objects provide visitors with a deeper sense of place, setting, contact, and conflict.\textsuperscript{57} The recreated Remington Studio lies at the heart of the exhibit. Acquired in 1959 through a donation by the W. R. Coe Foundation, the collection was reconstructed in its entirety in 1981 to historically replicate Remington’s studio space.\textsuperscript{58} The Remington Studio contains images of Remington’s home and studio in New Rochelle, New York, along with personal letters and artifacts. At the back of the wing lies a complete reconstruction of the studio. Foregrounded against a large fireplace, filled with Remington’s art and personal objects, the reconstructed space provides visitors a glimpse of the space in which the artist produced a monumental body of work that in many ways defined the American West for audiences.

Situated adjacent to the Remington Studio Collection, visitors encounter the works and collections of the Charles M. Russell studio. Situated adjacent to a photograph of Russell, taken by the artist Dorothea Lange, a text panel explains that Russell became known as the “Cowboy Artist.” He both lived a life of and produced art depicting the West. While the topic of his work

\textsuperscript{55} Text panel. Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 10, 2008.
\textsuperscript{56} Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 10, 2008.
\textsuperscript{57} Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 10, 2008.
\textsuperscript{58} Text panel. Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 10, 2008.
centered on cowboys and Native Americans, unlike Remington, Russell focused more on community, coexistence, amiable and often humorous scenes rather than images of conflict.\(^{59}\)

Through a vast display of oil paintings, watercolors, pen and ink drawings, and bronze sculptures, the Whitney’s Russel exhibit depicts such themes as Native American lifeways, frontier settlements, wildlife and landscapes, cowboys, and borderlands.\(^{60}\) As with the examination of the life and works of Frederic Remington, the Russell exhibit includes letters written by the artist, as well as personal objects he owned throughout his life. The Whitney Gallery of Western Art closes its discussing on Charles M. Russell with the oil painting *Trails End*, the last work of Charles Russell, which remained unfinished at the time of his death.

From the Remington and Russell collections, visitors continue an exploration of western art through three-dimensional bronze sculptures. The exhibit explains that sculpture work appeared later in than two-dimensional painting in the history of western art. The exhibit argues that bronze work developed later because of a lack of resources and studios from which to produce the art, and early nineteenth century American art lacked a tradition of three-dimensional creations. Additionally, as a medium of artistic production, bronze proved far less portable than other media. Thus, bronze sculptures appeared later in the artistic history of the American West.\(^{61}\) In addition to a continued exhibition of Remington pieces, such as his well-known sculptures *Coming Through the Rye* and *The Bronco Buster*, throughout the back of the museum the Whitney exhibits the works of such artists as Solon H. Borglun, William Davis, Cyrus E. Dallin, Herman Atkins MacNeil, Avard T. Fairbanks, Alexander Phimster Procter, and Sally James Farnham.\(^{62}\)

\(^{59}\) Text panel. Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 10, 2008.

\(^{60}\) Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 10, 2008.


\(^{62}\) Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 10, 2008.
The back wall of the museum consists of a large window, granting visitors a picturesque view of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney’s sculpture *Buffalo Bill – The Scout*. Next to the window stands a display containing the plaster model Whitney utilized in order to create the larger bronze work. Adjacent to the window in the back, right corner of the room rests the large T. D. Kelsey sculpture *High ‘N’ Dry*. Throughout the back room of the museum, the Whitney displays several large bronze sculptures by contemporary artist Harry Jackson. Throughout his career, Jackson created several paintings, including two murals for the Whitney. However, Jackson earned his reputation for and recognition as an artist primarily from his work in bronze sculpture. The Whitney highlights several of his most well-known pieces, such as *Cowboy Meditation*, and the more contemporary, abstract piece, *Cosmos*. However, what grabs the visitors’ attention upon entering the room are the large sculptures and corresponding murals, *The Stampede*, and *The Range Burial*. In both cases, Jackson cast the sculptures to serve as visual aids for the creation of the larger, two-dimensional murals. *The Stampede* depicts powerful scene of a cattle stampede amidst a violent storm, while the related work, *The Range Burial*, depicts the aftermath of the fallen cowboy.

As visitors round the bend and move back toward the museum’s entrance, the Whitney’s displays chronologically enter the twentieth century. The works of Charles Cary Rumsey, Maynard Dixon, Olaf C. Seltzer, Edward Borein, and William Gollings built off the works of previous artists such as Remington and Russell to create art depicting traditional subject matter in a more modernist style, specifically, continuing a cowboy tradition of western art. Additionally, many artists embraced the techniques of earlier history painters and situated

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63 Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 10, 2008.  
64 Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 10, 2008.  
65 Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 10, 2008.
themselves amongst the people and places depicted through their art.\textsuperscript{66} W. R. Leigh’s \textit{The Buffalo Drive} typifies this continuation of historically influenced narrative paintings as it depicts a group of Native hunters driving a heard of buffalo over the edge of a cliff.\textsuperscript{67} Other artists such as Alexander Pope continued the trompe-l’oeil style as seen in his piece, \textit{Weapons of War}, while Joe De Yong, William R. Leigh, Carl Runigus, and Frank Tenney Johnson chose to reinterpret western landscapes and wildlife in a more modernist style.\textsuperscript{68} At the same time, artists also continued the tradition of depicting Native Americans through their art, as seen through the works of Winold Reiss and Paul Manship.\textsuperscript{69}

In establishing a new tradition of western art, the artists W. H. D. Koerner and N. C. Wyeth became known as the great illustrators of western art both in capturing its history and establishing its mythos. As discussed in the exhibit text,

The West has been an important setting for popular fiction since the rise of the dime novel in the late nineteenth century. The conflict and romance of the West continued to provide material for the publishing industry in the early twentieth century. Books and magazines, such as \textit{Schribner’s, Century} and \textit{Saturday Evening Post}, featured fiction by popular writers and the stories were enhanced by illustrations done specifically to make these stories appealing.

Artists such as N. C. Wyeth and W. H. D. Koerner were trained to paint works which could effectively visualize written narrative. Their works featured an emphasis on human drama, and the composition of their works usually focus on large central figures to bring forward the important elements in the story.

This type of art has sometimes been criticized as “merely” illustration, implying a lack of creativity on the part of the artist because he did not necessarily originate the subject matter. Yet the best illustrations can stand on their own as works of art. Their artists use the elements of art to make strong visual statements while following a long tradition of storytelling through painting.\textsuperscript{70}

\textsuperscript{66} Text Panel. Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 10, 2008.
\textsuperscript{67} Text Panel. Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 10, 2008.
\textsuperscript{68} Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 10, 2008.
\textsuperscript{69} Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 10, 2008.
\textsuperscript{70} Text Panel. Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 10, 2008.
This section of the museum exhibits a large collection of illustrative oil paintings produced by Koerner and Wyeth, each accompanied by texts, material objects, and printed material in order to contextualize the art within the larger realm of western popular culture.  

Commanding visitors’ attention, a reconstruction of W. H. D. Koerner’s studio visually transports audiences to the artist’s workspace. As with the Remington studio, this exhibit contains a reinstallation of Koerner’s actual studio filled with his art, photographs, memory aids, and personal effects. Hanging on the walls, we see a number of Koerner oil paintings, while resting on the easel lies the piece Breezy Riding, offering a glimpse of the artist’s creative process. The exhibit provides audiences with an in-depth history of Koerner and his works, emphasizing his impact on both western art and popular portrayals of the American West.

As visitors move beyond the works of Wyeth and Koerner, the Whitney’s exhibition continues its journey through modern art. Through the work of Adolf Dehn, we see modernist interpretations of cowboys and Native Americans. The artist Carl Preussl continues the familiar tradition of painting the American landscape, while the works of William Herbert Dunton adhere to a strong tradition of history painting. Additionally, we see an influence of the southwest on the artist William R. Leigh. Continuing from the Native and southwestern influences, the exhibit then flows into the Joseph Henry Sharp Studio Collection. As explained through a series of narrative text panels, Sharp was both a painter and printmaker, specializing in portrait work who resided in both the northern plains of Montana and the Southwest in New Mexico. Sharp dedicated his art to capturing the imagery, customs, and place of regional Native Americans, which he feared were rapidly vanishing.

72 Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 10, 2008.
73 Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 10, 2008.
The exhibit features a large body of Sharp’s work, including etchings, prints, and oil paintings of Native American portraits and figurative scenes.\textsuperscript{75} The collection also contains works produced by colleagues of Sharp, such as Bert Phillips, whom Sharp met while studying in Paris.\textsuperscript{76} The Sharp exhibit also includes the Whitney’s final studio reproduction. Unlike the Remington and Koerner studios, the Sharp studio exhibit consists of the artist’s Absarokee hut, his studio cabin from Montana.\textsuperscript{77} In this case, the Whitney Gallery of Western Art reinstalled Sharp’s studio cabin as a recreation of his working space during his time in the Great Plains. In order to accommodate the structure’s size, the museum located the cabin on the grounds of the Sharp Garden between the Whitney Gallery of Western Art and the Cody Firearms Museum. Several of Sharp’s paintings line the hallway leading toward the garden.\textsuperscript{78} Immediately before the garden’s entrance, several detailed text panels and photographs provide background information on Sharp’s life and career, as well as information on his cabin, the Absarokee Hut.

As the exhibit states,

\begin{quote}
By building a log cabin on the Montana plains, Joseph Henry Sharp departed from the working pattern of earlier western artists who traveled who traveled to the frontier but returned east to paint their works.
\end{quote}

Sharp first began visiting Crow Agency, Montana, in 1899, staying at the Server Hotel. After a few years, however, he wanted a permanent residence near his subjects. Among the Crow, Sharp found excellent models for his Indian portraits. The Agency site, which is adjacent to the site of the Battle of Little Big Horn, about 125 miles northeast of Cody, served as a base for trips to the Blackfeet and Northern Cheyenne reservations.

Sharp became friends with the Indian agent at the Crow Reservation, Samuel Guilford Reynolds, who encouraged the artist to settle in Montana. In 1905, Sharp designed a one-room log cabin (with a “lean-to” added). In the spirit of the arts and crafts movement at the turn of the century, Sharp wanted a residence built for comfort and simplicity, with good design that would influence the life of the

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\textsuperscript{75} Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 10, 2008.
\textsuperscript{76} Text Panels. Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 10, 2008.
\textsuperscript{77} Text Panels. Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 10, 2008.
\textsuperscript{78} Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 10, 2008.
artist. Under the artist’s direction and with supervision from the Agency
carpenter, the cabin was built by Indians from the Agency. Sharp described it as
“plain outside, comfortable within, near the work of our life, almost the essence of
it.” He called his cabin Absarokee Hut, derived from the Crow people’s word for
themselves. The general preferred spelling no is Apsaalooka.79

As the exhibit continues to explain, Sharp resided in the cabin from 1905 through 1910.
Throughout the 1920s, Sharp continued to visit the structure, but he sold the cabin in 1935.
Throughout the next several decades, Absarokee Hut transferred hands a number of times,
ultimately coming into the possession of Mr. and Mrs. Forest Fenn, who in 1986 donated the
structure to the Buffalo Bill Historical Center. Through the financial support of Mr. and Mrs.
Joseph F. Sample, Mr. Thomas J. Watson Jr., and the IBM Corporation, the Buffalo Bill
Historical Center restored the cabin and integrated it into the Whitney’s Sharp Collection as a
contextual and educational component to the overall museum exhibits.80

Much like the Remington and Koerner studios, the Sharp cabin contains personal
collections, artifacts, letters, and other artifacts from Sharp’s original cabin. Based on
photographic evidence and donations from Mr. and Mrs. Forest Fenn, the Buffalo Bill Historical
Center reconstructed the cabin to its original 1906 condition.81 Unlike the Remington and
Koerner exhibits, however, the Sharp cabin lacks a large studio space. The Absarokee Hut served
Sharp more as a domicile rather than a space of work and creation. As the exhibit indicates,
Sharp used a wagon as a traveling studio and moved his supplies from one location to another.
Thus, Sharp created the majority of his works outdoors and in the locations represented
throughout his art.82

Following the works of Sharp and other western illustrators, the Whitney’s collection then moves toward the examination of one specific historical event and its various representations through western art. The exhibit, titled *The Battle of Many Names: June 25-26, 1876*, explores the history, interpretation, and representation of the Battle of Little Big Horn. According to the exhibit,

The Battle known variously as Custer’s Last Stand, The Battle of Greasy Grass, The Battle of Little Big Horn or the Custer Fight has been an artistic and intellectual challenge to those who have pursued its elusive truths. Regardless of how it is or was identified, the two-day battle between soldiers of the U.S. Army and Sioux and Cheyenne warriors on June 25-26, 1876 near the Little Bighorn River (known as the Greasy Grass River to the Indians) resulted in the death of over 260 soldiers and unknown Indian casualties.

The battle has been scrutinized from the moment it ended in an attempt to reconstruct a historically accurate account. Artists, authors, and filmmakers have recreated the battle in their respective media, presenting the battle through vastly different viewpoints and interpretations. Representations of the battle often attempt to highlight the victorious, the defeated, heroes, and cowards. The purpose of this exhibition is not to judge which interpretation of the battle is correct, but to introduce ways in which it was seen and preserved for remembrance.83

Situated opposite from Edgar Paxson’s *Custer’s Last Stand*, the exhibit offers a wide variety of interpretations on the June 25-26 battle, including several more contemporary Native representations.84

In its final exhibit, the Whitney display’s its collection of contemporary art in H. Peter and Jeannette Kriendler Gallery of Contemporary Western Art, located near the administrative offices on the second floor of the Buffalo Bill Historical Center. Although somewhat isolated from the other museums and difficult to find, the collections within the Kriendler showcase western art of the late twentieth century through the present. The art exhibited throughout the

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84 Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 10, 2008.
gallery showcases a variety of contemporary approaches, styles, and interpretations of the ongoing examination and representation of the American West.

The exhibit contains contemporary sculpture work by artists such as Doug Hyde, Linda Raynolds, Deborha Butterfield, Leonard Baskin, Sherry Sander, Rudy Autio, Dan Ostermiller, Brad Rude, Oreland C. Joe, Dave McGary, Harry Jackson, Bob Scriver, Steve Kestrel, John Mortensen, William Davis, and Audrey Roll-Preissler, all of whom examine Native American and environmental themes through more contemporary and abstract interpretations of the West. Additionally, the exhibit showcases the two-dimensional works of James Bama, Fritz Scholder, Paul Dyck, Theodore Waddell, Reid Christie, Robert Pummill, Kevin Red Star, Russell Chatham, Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, Charles Fritz, James Reynolds, Wilson Hurley, Nelson Boren, Bruce Graham, Anne Coe, M. C. Poulsen, Donna Howell-Sickles, George Gogas, Robert William Meyers, Buckeye Blake, Howard Post, and Larry Pirnie. The exhibit highlights a continuation of traditional styles and representations of the West, while simultaneously exploring new concepts and stylistic interpretations of contemporary issues and themes.

As previously mentioned, the Whitney Gallery of Western Art displays its collections throughout the entirety of the Buffalo Bill Historical Center. Scattered throughout its grounds, the Buffalo Bill Historical Center contains several outdoor gardens and park-like spaces that showcase the Whitney’s collection of ornamental sculpture work, focusing on the themes of Buffalo Bill, the Plains Indians, the American cowboy, and the western landscape. In addition to the previously mentioned Bob Scriver piece, *Buffalo Bill – Plainsman*, and Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney’s *Buffalo Bill – The Scout*, several other sculptures greet visitors on the grounds surrounding the Buffalo Bill Historical Center. These sculptures include a second Scriver piece,

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85 Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 10, 2008.
86 Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 10, 2008.
a cast bronze medallion depicting Cody’s image, titled Colonel William F. “Buffalo Bill” Cody. Other sculptures include Michael Coleman’s cast bronze bull moose pieces, September, Testing the Air, and Swamp Donkey, a bronze sculpture of two elk in head-to-head competition titled, Royal Challenge, and Texas Gold, an image of a scene from a cattle drive T. D. Kelsey’s adult moose, Daddy Long Legs and his , Michael Coleman’s, Big Hal, which depicts a grizzly sitting atop a beaver dam, Charles Ringer’s cast bronze cactus, Prickly Pear, a piece by Herb Mignery depicting two cowboys, titled Code of the West, and two Native American sculptures by R. V. Greeves; Washakie, and Bird Woman (Sacajawea).87

The Buffalo Bill Historical Center houses two other gardens in addition to the Sharp Garden; the Braun and Cashman Greever Gardens. Down the hallway leading to the two gardens, the Whitney displays a large exhibit of bronze work created by local Cody artist, T.D. Kelsey.88 Under the care of the Whitney Gallery of Western Art, the Braun Garden contains four pieces of outdoor ornamental sculpture. Set among a tranquil, outdoor botanical garden, the Whitney displays the bronze sculptures Crazy Horse and The Unknown, by R. V. Greeves; Buffalo Prayer, by James Earl Fraser; and Change of Seasons, by T. D. Kelsey.89 Located in the vicinity of the museum restaurant and opposite the Braun, the Cashman Greever Garden contains three pieces of sculpture: Harry Jackson’s Sacagawea; Spirit of Wyoming, a cast sculpture of cowboys and horses by Edward Fraughton; and a large bronze buffalo by Michael Coleman titled Dimming Trails of Other Days.90

In addition to ornamental sculpture work, the Cashman Greever Garden also houses the boyhood home of Buffalo Bill. Through a series of text panels and accompanying photographs,
the Buffalo Bill Historical Center depicts the history of the structure. The exhibit text indicates that in 1849, the Cody family quit farming and moved into the two-story, post and beam folk vernacular structure. The Cody family lived in the home until they left LeClaire, Iowa, for the Kansas Territory in 1853. In 1933, the Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy Railroad purchased the Isaac Cody home for $150 and moved it to Cody, Wyoming, where it served as a local museum. In 1948, the Buffalo Bill Museum acquired the structure from the city of Cody and displayed the home on various sites over the years. The institution plans to restore two of the structure’s rooms to reflect the space occupied by the Codys when they lived there during the early 1950s.  

In 2009, The Whitney Gallery of Western Art celebrated its fiftieth anniversary. As Mindy Besaw explained, the Buffalo Bill Historical Center planned a complete renovation and reinstallation for the Whitney’s anniversary. The $1.25 million project includes a complete renovation of the museum’s interior space in addition to the construction of a more contemporary exhibition of the Whitney’s collection. According to Besaw, the Whitney plans to remove the Koerner studio exhibit and install the Procter studio in its place. The reinstallation plans call for more interactive and interpretive materials throughout the entire museum. The exhibit concept includes a heavy thematic and narrative focus, which the current display lacks. As a result, the Whitney intends to move away from a chronologically driven survey of western art and focus on a number of themes, telling a series of smaller, contextualized stories. The re-envisioned plan for the Whitney calls for the inclusion of ten thematic based areas focusing on the topics of the western experience, wildlife, horses, the Procter Studio, landscapes, Native Americans, heroes and legends, historic events, the Remington Studio, and the artistic process of creation. Thus,

92 Besaw, interview, 14-16.
through the Whitney’s reinstallation, the museum plans to tell much more in-depth and contextualized stories, including elements from the Buffalo Bill Historical Center’s four other museums. Besaw explained that, while other museums across the country, including art museums, have focused on thematic exhibitions in recent years, the reinstallation of the Whitney Gallery of Western Art provides a radically different approach to exhibition.94

The Whitney Gallery of Western Art contains an impressive series of exhibits, showcasing western art and artists from the early nineteenth century through the present. The museum provides audiences with a visible chronology of American western art history. Aside from a handful of text panels and contextual statements, the Whitney relies on the objects to provide visitors with content. The lack of a programmatic narrative allows visitors to interpret their own meaning from the art and then reconcile that meaning with the provided context statements. Through this framework, the Whitney’s exhibits guide the visitor to meaning and conclusion rather than dictate an ultimate historical narrative.

In 1979, the Plains Indian Museum opened its doors to the public. According to Emma Hansen, senior curator, the concept for the Plains Indian Museum originated in 1969. At the time, it consisted of little more than a small display in the lower level of what is now the special exhibition area. In 1979, the institution constructed a new wing of the building to provide a permanent site for the Plains Indian Museum.95 As discussed in Chapter Three, the Buffalo Bill Historical Center collected Native American artifacts from the beginning of its history; however, following the retirement of Harold McCracken in 1974, the institution named Peter Hassrick as its new executive director, and he was responsible for much of the institution’s expansion and

94 Besaw, interview, 14-16.
95 Emma Hansen, interview by the author, Buffalo Bill Historical Center, August 12, 2008, 1.
Hassrick wanted to construct an exhibit space for the Buffalo Bill’s collection of Indian artifacts, primarily Lakota material at the time, but also to add new material to the institution’s collections. As Hansen explained, after the new wing was built in 1979, the Plains Indian Museum acquired the Chandler-Pohrt Collection, and later the Anderson and Simplot Collections. These collections, in addition to art from the Whitney and Native American material already possessed by the Buffalo Bill Historical Center, provided the Plains Indian Museum with objects and artifacts through which it could tell a broader story of Native North America.

As Hansen noted, the original 1969 exhibits of the Plains Indian Museum consisted of large cases, packed with objects. The exhibits followed very old-time methodologies of display and had very odd interpretations. Objects were mislabeled, and displays were somewhat randomly assembled. With the opening of the Plains Indian Museum in 1979, Hassrick reinstalled the exhibits, and with guidance from his father, Royal Hassrick, reinterpreted the overall collections. George Horse Capture served as the museum’s first curator. Hansen described this reinstallation as much more historical than the previous displays. Yet, she explained that the exhibits still lacked context. The display cases housed collections of moccasins, weapons, traditional art, and other objects, and the text panels briefly discussed the objects within. As Hansen continued, the exhibits focused on the material, but there was very little information about the people themselves.

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96 Peter Hassrick is a well-known art historian. His father, Royal Hassrick, was a well-known anthropologist.  
97 Hansen, interview, 1-2.  
99 Hansen, interview, 2.
Emma Hansen came to the Buffalo Bill Historical Center in 1992. At the time of her arrival, she said, “the museum had not been well-maintained at all. It had been totally neglected. There were old, yellowed removal notices from years before, and it was really pretty bad.” Hansen asked what could be done and what could be changed. The original 1979 installation came about as a product of the efforts of Royal Hassrick, Richard Port, and others. Despite the fact that the existing museum came about as a product of his father’s vision, Peter Hassrick informed Hansen that she could change whatever she wanted as long as she could raise the necessary funds to do so. As Hansen recalled,

So, we went through and we started working on particular galleries and… tried to do something with them because they were so bad. And there came a point at which I just said, “You Know, we really need to redo the whole thing.” We’d update one gallery. We’d update that gallery. We tried to make all our labels consistent. There were like four different formats of labels, and big empty spaces. So, I tried to just kind of patch-work and then said, “No, we really need to do a whole project.” And it probably took five years to get that 2000 project together.

Hansen continued to explain that, for the 2000 reinstallation, she and her staff “tried to work very closely with tribal representatives and scholars in terms of developing the exhibits and bring the people more into the story…” In 1976 Peter Hassrick established the Plains Indian Museum advisory board. Hansen noted that the board was one of the first of its kind in the country. Originally consisting of all tribal representatives (this initially included no nonnative peoples), the board worked with the Plains Indian Museum and its staff as an advisory body and support group. Shortly after its inception, the other museums at the Buffalo Bill Historical Center

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100 Hansen, interview, 1, 19.
101 Hansen, interview, 19-20.
102 Hansen, interview, 20.
103 Hansen, interview.
104 Hansen, interview, 2.
established advisory boards of their own. Hansen noted that the Plains Indian Museum advisory board lacked the financial backing found among the institution’s other advisory boards. As a result, the Plains Indian Museum admitted non-Indian members as well.

At the time of my visit, the exhibits displayed in the Plains Indian Museum came about as a result of the 2000 reinstallation and reinterpretation. As Hansen explained, the story told in the museum spans primarily from the mid-nineteenth century through the present. For the most part, it examines the histories and stories of Plains Indians peoples, largely focusing on the reservation period. She added that, more recently, she has attempted to add more contemporary pieces to the collection as well. The primary focus of the collection centers is on the Northern Plains peoples, with heavy representation of the Lakota Sioux, followed by the Crow and Cheyenne. Additionally, the museum made greater efforts to include groups from outside of the Northern Plains region as well.

The 2000 remodel made an active effort to contextualize the story of the Plains Indians and provide a more inclusive discussion of its people. Hansen explained,

The old focus of the museum, you would have the impression that all tribes lived in tipis, and all tribes did Sundance and everything else, and we try to bring in those other stories by the Hidatsa earth-lodge. The make-up of the early museum advisory board did not include any Mandan or Hidatsa, Arikara people at all; the farming people of the Northern Plains. The advisory board tends to be more northern than southern and central too, and so it did not include any of those people. So, once we started working with some individuals in terms of putting together the installation, we brought a representative in from the tribes…

She continues, “And so we’ve kind of brought those stories in that had totally been ignored before. So, we talk about farming, and we talk about agriculture. The other thing is you also

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105 Hansen, interview.
106 Hansen, interview.
107 Hansen, interview, 2-3.
108 Hansen, interview, 3.
would think that there were no women among the tribes because [the previous museum installation] was very male-oriented.”

Hansen explained that Arthur Amoitte, a Lakota member of the museum’s advisory board, stressed that the exhibits tell both the story of the reservation period of 1880 to 1920. She argued that it was a compelling and often ignored story of survival. Thus, the museum’s various, thematic galleries include historic stories and oral histories in addition to Native artifacts and traditional art. While the Plains Indian Museum focuses heavily on the reservation period of Native American history, the exhibits also make a conscious effort to connect the historical events of the past to contemporary Native peoples of the present. Each gallery includes a section titled “Contemporary Voices,” which connects the galleries’ themes to contemporary examples of Native life. As Hansen explained, the concept behind this idea stresses the importance of the cycle of life.

Additionally, each gallery contains a large photographic banner highlighting the gallery’s name. The Assiniboine photographer Kenny Blackbird donated his collection to the museum. Each gallery banner depicts a related image of contemporary Native life. As visitors stand in a gallery, the adjacent gallery’s banner becomes visible, connecting one theme to another, the past to the present. Hansen clarified this idea through an example she thinks works best in the museum.

So, one of them I think works best is in the gallery on buffalo and the people. We talk about men as warriors and hunters, and then the photograph across the way is a photograph of a Northern Cheyenne man dressed in his uniform. He was part of a color guard, and it’s kind of that idea that most people, when they think of Indians as warriors they think of the nineteenth century warriors, and they never

109 Hansen, interview.
110 Hansen, interview, 4.
111 Hansen, interview.
think of contemporary warriors and what they’ve done since the Spanish American War on, and particularly today.\textsuperscript{112}

For Hansen and the advisory board members alike, this method of presentation not only connects the various gallery themes within the museum, but also provides a connection between the past and the present, helping dispel the myth that Native Americans are a lost group of people.

As visitors enter the museum they first encounter the Seasons of Life Gallery. A display of a painted buffalo robe immediately grabs visitors’ attention. The gallery houses a multitude of objects, spanning a time from the nineteenth century through the present. Photographic panels line the walls, while the room’s interior space houses glass display cases, and a large tipi fills the center space of the gallery hall. Through oral histories, historical accounts, and material culture, the gallery highlights the stories of Native peoples from the past and the present.\textsuperscript{113} As previously discussed, the gallery holds an array of thematic exhibits. Throughout the room, photographic banners frame exhibit cases and computer interactives. As mentioned, each historical topic connects to a contemporary discussion of the theme through the \textit{Contemporary Voices} displays.

As visitors walk through the gallery, they are introduced to themes such as men’s and women’s art through displays of hide shirts, ornamented dresses, and painted shields. Similarly, a display shows the role and objects of children and elders from plains communities. The exhibit’s first display discusses housing and shelter among the Plains Indians. The displays explore not only the ways in which items were constructed but also the various forms of housing on the plains tracing architectural patterns throughout modern structural designs.\textsuperscript{114}

\textsuperscript{112} Hansen, interview.
\textsuperscript{113} Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 11, 2008.
\textsuperscript{114} Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 11, 2008.
The next display examines the role played by children and elders throughout the community. As the text panel notes, “Every adult in the village played a role in a child’s development and education. They cared for the children, made them toys, and were great sources of wisdom, which they passed on through instructions, stories, and games.” The display case holds children’s toys, clothing, dolls, and other objects associated with childhood.

The exhibit titled *Farming and Gathering* explores agriculture and foodways of people on the Northern Plains. It explains that, “The women of the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara tribes contributed both to their families’ diets and to the trade economy from the bounty of their gardens. In the fertile floodplains of the Upper Missouri river, they grew squash, beans, sunflowers, and corn in gardens measuring up to three and a half acres. They also gathered wild turnips, berries, and various types of roots.” Through displays of tools and images, the exhibit depicts the ways in which these Native communities utilized agricultural methods to provide foodstuffs to sustain their populations.

A large exhibit focuses on the transportation and migration of the Plains Indian peoples. It notes that these people were nomadic, and traveled the Plains seasonally, moving from one location to the next. These migratory hunters traveled from place to place depending on the availability of game and other natural resources. Additionally, the exhibit explained that war and conflict also factored in to the movement of people. The exhibits show visitors various methods of transportation and the items that Plains Indian peoples utilized along their journeys, such as traveling clothing and storage items. Additionally, the display shows the importance of animals.

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118 Personal visit, August 11, 2008. Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming.
in transportation. It notes that not only did horses assist in transportation, but dogs played crucial roles as well.\textsuperscript{119}

The transportation exhibit seamlessly transitions into the next exhibit, which explores the horse as one of many modes of transportation. A text panel explains that the horse became central to the lives of Plains people, as it extended the distance people could travel and increased the amount of material objects they could bring along the way. The exhibit cases house a variety of objects including saddle blankets, saddles, bridles, and other items associated with equestrian travel. The focal point of the display consists of a recreated Plains family riding horseback across the landscape.\textsuperscript{120}

The next exhibit, which focuses on trade, notes that Native peoples traded with their neighbors since ancient time. Over time, extensive trade networks evolved moving objects and natural resources from one coast to another. It explains that, “Trade relationships were often cemented through adoption or marriage, resulting in influential and broadly dispersed alliances.”\textsuperscript{121} As European contact increased among Plains tribes, the amount and types of goods introduced to Indian people increased as well. The exhibit’s objects range from traditional crafts constructed by Plains Indians, such as necklaces and leggings, to objects of Euro-American origin, including trade beads and blankets.\textsuperscript{122}

Moving through the museum space, visitors then come upon an exhibit focusing on the role of the buffalo. The exhibit explains that buffalo were a vital resource for the Plains peoples. They provided not only food but other materials, such as hides and bones, from which the Plains

\textsuperscript{119} Personal visit, August 11, 2008. Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming.
\textsuperscript{120} Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 8, 2008.
\textsuperscript{121} Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 8, 2008.
\textsuperscript{122} Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 8, 2008.
peoples made clothing, tools, and other necessary items. The exhibits included displays of art depicting buffalo hunting and a variety of goods and tools constructed from materials extracted from the buffalo.

The next two displays explore the topic of art among the Plains Indians. The first display examines art created by men and notes that men’s art often recorded successful encounters through hunting and war. Additionally, art told narrative stories of history, spiritual beliefs, and the regional landscape. In recording these stories on personal belongings, such as clothing and tools, the stories were preserved and could be passed from one generation to the next. A similar exhibit discusses art produced by women, which was derived from daily tasks crafts. Quill and beadwork and other craft products served as means of artistic expression for Plains Indian women. These skills not only provided a sense of place for women, but also established an economic and social outlet.

Linked to the exhibits discussing the buffalo and men’s art, the exhibit exploring hunting and warfare notes that for Plains Indian men, honor and social standing were tied to one’s accomplishments and successes as a hunter and warrior. As the text panel notes, “Plains Indians traditionally waged war in defense or retaliation against enemy attacks, to preserve and expand hunting territories, and to capture horses, which were essential to hunting and as an indicator of wealth. A man was acclaimed for his success as a hunter, and he gained war honors through a system of counting ‘coups,’ or acts of bravery against the enemy.” The exhibit displays a wide

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variety of objects associated with hunting and warfare, such as clothing, weapons, and a Pawnee “Coup Stick.”

Related to previous displays, the exhibit *Warriors, Leaders, and Healers* examines the various roles played by men throughout Plains Indian societies. The display states that, “Men’s societies prepared their members for the changing roles and responsibilities they faced throughout life. Young boys’ societies trained warriors. Adult men’s societies encouraged them to defend their tribes, territories, and resources. As a man aged he was still revered for past war honors, but reached the highest level of respect upon demonstrating his ability as a leader, healer or peacemaker.” The exhibit continues to explore the numerous roles and functions played by men throughout the Plains Indian societies, through exhibitions of traditional clothing, headwear, and tools.

The next several exhibits explore the topic of spirituality. Through displays of Sacred Arts, and ceremonies like the Sun Dance and Ghost Dance, the exhibits discuss the beliefs and sacred practices of the Plains Indians peoples. The exhibit explains that “The Sun Dance is one of the most powerful sacred ceremonies, honoring the sun and the powers of the universe and promoting health, prosperity, and abundant buffalo herds.” It continues, “Participants fast, pray, and dance in a temporary lodge built around a sacred cottonwood tree. Through their suffering, they gain renewal for themselves, their families, and the earth.” The exhibit notes that the U.S. government outlawed the ceremony in 1883, but it has since reemerged as a contemporary practice. Similarly, the exhibit on the Ghost says that it is “…a powerful religious

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movement about hope and renewal that reached Plains Indians in the late 1880s. The Paiute visionary Wovoka and his followers prayed for the return of their ancestors, the restoration of the great buffalo herds, and the removal of White intruders. They believed the new era would emerge for Indian people, and that the vital culture of tribal life would prevail.”

Both displays house objects and artifacts related to the ceremonial practices, such as clothing, tobacco bags, and whistles.

As the exhibits explain, art played a vital role in the ceremonies of the Plains Indian peoples. Linked to the displays on the Sun and Ghost Dances, the exhibit exploring Sacred Arts notes, “The sacred ceremonial significance of the art of Plains women pervaded their everyday lives. Artistic abilities were considered gifts, often acquired through dreams or visions. Lakota, Arapaho, and Cheyenne women formed quilling and beading societies, which ensured that artistic traditions and skills would be passed on to future generations. Membership in a society, or guild, was reserved for a privileged group of talented women.”

The two exhibits exploring the Sun and Ghost Dances link together with the exhibit on Sacred Arts through an array of displays of Cheyenne, Lakota, Crow, Arapaho, and other indigenous sacred objects tied to spiritual activities throughout Plains Indian societies.

The Ghost Dance exhibit goes on to explain that American opposition to the ceremony culminated in Wounded Knee Massacre of 1890. As the exhibits explain, the late nineteenth century presented a time of adversity and an opportunity for renewal, and also challenges of endurance and survival for the Plains Indian peoples. The exhibits explain that, “Beginning in the late 1870s, Plains Indians were denied access to ancestral lands, dislodged from established

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economies and tutored in Christian ideologies, their sacred traditions prohibited by law. Yet Plains people sustained their cultural identities, in part through production of art. Objects and imagery of this era celebrated tribal affiliations, honored traditions, and evolved to accommodate an altered world. Reservation-era art is a testament to Plains Indian vitality and dynamism in the face of adversity. “The final section of the area explores Plains Indian culture from the late-nineteenth century to the present. Beginning with a display of reservation art, the exhibit shows the lives and products of Plains people, who were faced with adversity during this period. Despite this, the exhibit culminates by highlighting the fact that Plains Indian peoples overcame these obstacles. The final display on Endurance and Survival highlights the transition from traditional lifeways into contemporary patterns of living."

From there, the museum opens into a large auditorium-like space titled Seasons of Life Gallery. Here the visitor confronts a large, reconstructed plains environment. Throughout the area, the gallery depicts a tipi surrounded by Natives, while in the back of the room, two other Indians look down upon the encampment. At the same time, the exhibit displays digital images of Natives and natural environments across a panoramic screen. The immersive display transports audiences back to a recreated nineteenth-century Plains Indians setting. In the back of the room, object cases introduce visitors to Natives from the various regions of the West, such as the Plateau. The exhibits examine such topics as diversity and spirituality among the people within the given regions.

From there, visitors confront an exhibit titled Encounters. As Emma Hansen explained, this gallery contains the historical data and timeline for the nineteenth century Plains Indians.

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138 Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 8, 2008.
139 Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 8, 2008.
Beginning in 1799 the exhibit discusses Euro-American contact and trade with the Blackfeet. From there, it highlights events and topics such as epidemic disease, missionization, and warfare. Each thematic exhibit within the gallery contains artifacts and text panels contextualizing the individual topics. For example, within the section on warfare, objects such as a rifle, pipe axe, and painted hide tell the story of the Battle of Little Big Horn. Oral histories and painted robe tell the story of the 1864 Sand Creek Massacre, where roughly 200 Cheyenne and Arapaho were killed. The gallery continues through the forced removal of Native Peoples, the loss of land, and destruction of food sources up through the reservation system and Native boarding schools. The exhibit ends with a discussion of the 1890 Battle of Wounded Knee. Hansen explained that the gallery came about as a reaction to visitor requests. Patrons asked to see more about the nineteenth century. She noted that, “They may not know, and they may not have accurate ideas about it, but they know something took place; that there were wars and that sort of thing. And so, we tried to explore that in that section as well. And given more space we would have explored it more deeply I think, but that was one way of approaching [the topic].”

The Plains Indian Museum Resource Center contains exhibitions and computer programs that introduce visitors to other aspects of its collections. It displays Native American artifacts from Native North American regions such as the Great Lakes and the Eastern Woodlands and highlights the diverse nature of Native Americans throughout North America. Visitors encounter displays containing objects from Natives of the Northwest to the Southwest; from traditional arts

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140 Personal visit, August 10, 2008. Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming.
141 Personal visit, August 10, 2008. Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming.
142 Hansen, interview, 4-5.
to contemporary art. Additionally, as Hansen explained, the resource center references the use of archeology and its contribution to our understanding of history.

Since its initial creation, the Buffalo Bill Historical Center provided a discussion of Plains Indian Culture, but not until 1979 did the topic receive its own exhibition space. By 1992, under the leadership of Emma Hansen and the advisory board, the museum envisioned a new installation, which by 2000 would contextualize the subject within a contemporary and progressive framework. The Plains Indian Museum contains a remarkable collection of exhibits, highlighting the lifeways and cultures of the Plains Indian People. The museum provides audiences with a visible chronology of American western art history. Today, it continues to expand by constructing a new space to house the Paul Dyck Collection.

Dedicated in 1991, the Cody Firearms Museum holds the most comprehensive collection of American firearms in the world. The museum holds over 7,000 firearms and 30,000 related objects. As visitors enter the museum, they confront a large, armored Gatling gun, directly across from a walled exhibit displaying an encyclopedic collection of western firearms produced by manufacturers such as Colt, Henry, and Winchester. The Cody Firearms Museum presents its collection and exhibits primarily in a chronological fashion. It traces the development of European and American firearms from the sixteenth century through the present. With paintings and prints lining its walls, and glass cases filled with firearms occupying the interior’s space, it presents itself as part gallery and part armory. Upon entering the museum, the first displays visitors see present early fifteenth century cannons and sixteenth century European flintlock and wheel lock firearms. The Wooddruff Gallery focuses on the evolution of firearms from 1550

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143 Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 8, 2008.
144 Hansen, interview, 3.
145 Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 8, 2008.
146 Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 8, 2008.
to 1750. From there, exhibits present comprehensive collections and detailed descriptions of
wheel lock and flintlock arms, and a variety of sporting arms. The objects range from standard
models to ornate fine arms.147 Here, visitors also encounter a replica colonial gun shop, circa
1750-1790. The exhibit discusses the process of gun making during the colonial era. It explains
the types of arms produced during this period, and explains that most firearms manufactured
during the era were used for hunting.148

The exhibits and displays progress in a chronological manner, depicting firearms from
the nineteenth century and examining technological advancements such as percussion and
repeating systems and action technology. This area of the museum also contains a frontier stage
stop, which highlights the importance of firearms in the process of western settlement.149 This
section of the museum also includes both a late nineteenth century western hardware store
exhibit and late nineteenth century firearms factory. As with earlier exhibits, these recreations
stress the importance of firearms in western settlement, and the importance of the industrial
revolution to firearms manufacture.150

The final section of firearms displays houses collections from 1900 through the present.
The back of the museum holds an exhibit discussing the Boone and Crockett Club, which was
founded in 1887 by Theodore Roosevelt to promote ethical hunting and wildlife conservation.
The club and its members helped create such organizations as the U.S. Forest Service and the
National Park Service, and pushed for the expansion and protection of such places as
Yellowstone National Park. The exhibit houses itself in a replica Adirondack hunting cabin filled
with animal trophies. The exhibit explains that,

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147 Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 8, 2008.
148 Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 8, 2008.
149 Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 8, 2008.
150 Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 8, 2008.
The Boone and Crockett Club has also become known as the authoritative source for data on native North American big-game trophies. Since 1932, the club has gathered and maintained statistics on trophies that meet the stated requirements of Fair Chase, minimum score, and other documentation.

The mounted specimens of North American big game that you see here are only a remnant of a much larger collection that once made up the national collection of Heads and Horns.151

As the text panel notes, the Cody Firearms Museum is the home of the Boone and Crockett Club’s National Collection of Heads and Horns. The somewhat controversial exhibit displays dozens of mounted trophies, including the Chadwick Ram, the prized ram taken in 1936 by Lee Sherman Chadwick, which holds the record for largest sheep taken.152

The Cody Firearms Museum chronologically traces the history of European and American firearms from the period of American settlement through the present. In its encyclopedic presentation, it displays a catalogue of arms from each period of American history. Firearms utilized in each American war have their own individual displays as well. Firearms from the American Revolution, Spanish American War, World War I, World War II, the Korean War, and Vietnam all have their own individual displays within the broader context of American firearm history.153 In addition to its chronological display of European and American arms, the museum holds a number of manufacture-specific galleries as well. The Browning Gallery discusses the history of and displays collections of weapons produced by Browning Industries Inc.154 Similarly, the museum houses displays for Colt, Remington Arms, Parker Brothers, Savage Arms Co., The Ithaca Gun Company, Smith and Wesson, and numerous other firearms manufacturers. The Olin Gallery houses the Winchester Arms Collection, the prize of the Cody

151 Text panel, Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 8, 2008.
152 Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 8, 2008.
153 Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 8, 2008.
154 Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 8, 2008.
Firearms Museum. In 1975, the Olin Corporation loaned its Winchester Collection to the Buffalo Bill Historical Center. In 1988, the Olin Corporation formally gifted the collection to the Buffalo Bill Historical Center, which provided the foundation for the Cody Firearms Museum. The Olin Gallery contains a complete and comprehensive collection of Winchester arms and ammunition.

The Cody Firearms Museum also houses a number of topic-related exhibits as well. For example, in the back of the museum, a small display explores the history of air guns, beginning with their European roots in the 1640s. A number of displays scattered throughout the museum look at current ammunition throughout the history of firearms. One of the museum’s highlights, the Robert W. Woodruff Gallery, displays examples and explores the history of engraved and embellished arms. The exhibit displays a unique collection of one-of-a-kind, masterfully embellished arms. The museum holds numerous firearms owned by famous historical figures, or featured throughout popular culture. As visitors stroll through the galleries and exhibits, they encounter prop pistols from the television series Bonanza, and the mountain man John “Liver-Eating” Johnston’s Hawken Rifle.

The Cody Firearms Museum holds an extensive collection of European and American firearms. It provides visitors with a unique opportunity to view a comprehensive collection of American arms, while discovering the role firearms played throughout American history. Despite the fact that firearms, hunting, and gun violence remain controversial topics in contemporary society, the museum presents the topic of firearms history in a balanced and fairly neutral manner. The informative and straightforward exhibits offer a glimpse at largest collection of

155 Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 8, 2008.
156 Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 8, 2008.
American arms in the world, while contextualizing the objects within the greater history of American and western history.

The city of Cody and its populations reside to the greater Yellowstone region. Yet, as part of this larger community, the Buffalo Bill Historical Center lacked any discussion of natural history, and there were very few references to the greater Yellowstone region and its ecosystem. According to Charles Preston, the founding curator of the Draper Museum of Natural History, in 1992, Nancy Carol Draper joined the Buffalo Bill Historical Society as a board member. Draper also found it curious that a museum so near Yellowstone National Park lacked a natural science component. In 1994, the Buffalo Bill Historical Center conducted a visitor survey in order to assess interest in the inclusion of a natural science component. Preston explained that, of the 300 individuals surveyed, roughly 90 percent of the visitors supported the addition of natural history. The survey showed an overwhelming desire among visitors for an increased focus on wildlife and geology, and indicated an increased likelihood of visitation were such exhibits to exist.\(^{157}\)

Throughout 1994, the board entered into discussions about the creation of a new museum that focused on natural history, with Nancy Carol Draper as the leading proponent. Draper not only pushed the idea but agreed to financially support the museum’s creation. As Preston explained, when Byron Price became the director of the Buffalo Bill Historical Center, he pushed for the board of directors to pursue the idea. With his support, the board voted to proceed with a conceptual design for a museum of natural history. The following year in 1995 the Buffalo Bill Historical Center approached Preston. At the time, Preston worked at the Denver Museum of Natural History as the head of the zoology department. Preston interviewed with the Buffalo Bill Historical Center and soon thereafter received an offer for the position of senior curator of the

\(^{157}\) Charles Preston, interview by the author, Buffalo Bill Historical Center, August 14, 2008. Preston indicated that from the 300 people surveyed, over 90 percent expressed a desire for the inclusion of a natural history component.
Draper Museum of Natural History. Preston described the opportunity as “the chance of a lifetime to come out and actually create something from scratch.”158

With Preston on board, the institution began the process of design implementation. He noted that the Buffalo Bill Historical Center brought in designers and fabricators from all over the country. In order to implement the process, the new Draper Museum received significant support from the National Science Foundation. Construction of the new museum began in 2000, and the Draper Museum of Natural History opened its doors in June 2002.159 As Preston noted, from the beginning, the Draper envisioned itself as a research museum. However, unlike other museums of natural history, which have amassed large collections of specimens, the Draper intended to maintain a relatively small collection, primarily for the purposes of exhibition. The rationale behind this decision came about largely due to the cost associated in collecting and preserving large collections of specimens. Additionally, as Preston explained, had the Draper chosen that route, the decision would have created a great deal of overlap and competition with other regional and national museums of similar focus.160 Thus, the Draper staff chose to maintain a small, selective specimen collection for educational, exhibition, and research purposes, rather than acquire and preserve and encyclopedic collection. However, as Preston noted, the Draper staff believed they could become a leader “developing a scientifically acquired and documented digital collection of sights and sounds.”161

The Greater Yellowstone Sights and Sounds Archive became a collection focus for the Draper Museum of Natural History. As Charles Preston continued,

We’re building video histories with people that have connection with the land, whether they’re scientists, land owners, managers with many agencies around [the

158 Preston, interview, 2.
159 Preston, interview.
160 Preston, interview.
161 Preston, interview.
The archive exists to preserve and audio and visual collection of the region’s natural history. Members of the Draper staff go out to specific, regional sites and set up audiovisual recording systems in order to document wildlife in their natural habitats. Additionally, the Draper staff traps and releases birds and small mammals for the purpose of study and data collection. Preston explained that the collection provides an example of the ways in which the greater Yellowstone region’s natural world has changed over time.

However, in addition to the Greater Yellowstone Sights and Sounds Archive, the Draper Museum does maintain specimen collections. Preston explained that most of the institution’s physical specimen collections came to the Draper from various regional and national agencies.

…most of our specimen collections here have come to us through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, or the Wyoming Game and Fish Department, or Montana Parks Fish and Wildlife, or Fish Parks and Wildlife, I guess, as salvage specimens; either confiscated after poaching, for example, or they’ve [the specimens met] an untimely end with a vehicle accident or something else.

When the institution requires a particular specimen for an exhibit or educational program, it contacts regional and national wildlife agencies to salvage natural materials. Thus, the Draper Museum really focuses on sustainable collecting and acquisition practices.

The Draper’s collections and exhibits focus on four natural regions, or biomes, in the greater Yellowstone area: the alpine region, mountain forest, mountain meadow and riparian areas, and the plains basin and sagebrush steppe. Preston noted that, primarily, he hoped the Draper’s exhibits inspired visitors and conveyed the nature’s mysteries and wonders, but also stressed the interconnectedness of the human and natural worlds. He noted, “…the other thing I

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162 Preston, interview.
163 Preston, interview, 3.
164 Preston, interview.
hope people recognize through our exhibition is how linked animals and plants are to one another and to the environment, and how humans are part of that whole system.” 165 The museum’s exhibits consist of what Preston called “bio-inventories.”166 Through its exhibits, the Draper presents a both a scientific and historical display of the region’s landscape, and landscape use, from both the past and the present. This tactic, Preston noted, allows the museum to examine change over time, and explore such issues as climate change and other human impacts on the natural world. Through its displays, the museum explores the ways in which humans have interpreted and interacted with the natural world. The exhibits examine human perceptions of the environment, and the ways in which artists, scientists, historians, authors, and explorers interacted with and interpreted their surroundings.167

As visitors enter the Draper Museum of Natural History, they immediately confront an exhibit discussing and visualizing the greater Yellowstone Basin. The exhibit discusses early exploration to the region, and some of the first recorded findings preserved by American trappers and naturalists. Additionally, the exhibit includes a recreation of a naturalist’s cabin. The display houses artifacts, along with interactive kiosks, which continue the discussion of the greater Yellowstone ecosystem.168 Just before entering the main exhibition space lies the Draper Museum of Natural History Discovery Laboratory. As Preston explained, the Discovery Laboratory is an operation laboratory where the Draper staff prepare and maintain scientific specimens for collection, preservation, research, and exhibition. The front of the laboratory contains a glass wall, allowing visitors to observe the staff at work. As Preston noted, the lab also

165 Preston, interview, 4.
166 Preston, interview.
167 Preston, interview, 4-5.
168 Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 10, 2008.
opens its doors to the public several hours each week, providing visitors entry to the lab and enabling them to closely examine the scientific procedures of specimen preparation.\textsuperscript{169}

Upon entering the main gallery, the visitor sees a large room with an ascending ramp. The museum constructed its exhibition space in such a way that visitors begin their journey at the valley floor and ascend through the four main biomes, culminating with the alpine mountain.\textsuperscript{170}

Additionally, the area houses an original 1867 Concord stagecoach, known as the “Deadwood Stagecoach,” and a Yellowstone Observation Coach from the mid-1890s.\textsuperscript{171} The museum’s first exhibit or region transports visitors to the valley floor through a discussion and exhibition of geological land formation and archeological excavation. The display discusses that the completion of the last ice age led to a land transformation and created ecological changes, establishing the environment of the greater Yellowstone region. Additionally, it notes that archeological excavations, fossils, and artifacts yield considerable information regarding the flora and fauna of the region, as well as provide a glimpse into the lives of those who first settled the region.\textsuperscript{172} As visitors continue along the path they confront displays of a large beaver dam, a moose, and two mountain lions set atop a large cliff, and discussions of early encounters with the regional landscape. The exhibits explain how waterways attracted wildlife and human settlement to the region, and how humans utilized the environment for economic purposes of resource extraction, such as the fur trade. At the same time, the exhibits discuss contemporary uses and debates of land use and environmental management.\textsuperscript{173} For example, one display explores the subject of fish management throughout history. It notes that, “When Europeans first arrived in

\textsuperscript{169} Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 10, 2008.
\textsuperscript{170} Conversely, the visitor may begin the journey at the mountain peak and descend to the valley floor.
\textsuperscript{171} Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 11, 2008.
\textsuperscript{172} Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 11, 2008.
\textsuperscript{173} Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 11, 2008.
the greater Yellowstone region, many waters contained no fish.”\textsuperscript{174} Over time, humans introduced native species into the region and developed policies for their management.

As a museum of natural history, the Draper tackles a number of environmental debates through its exhibitions, including fish management, but also subjects such as oil, wildfire management, grizzly bears, and hunting. That, in its very nature, is at times controversial, as portions of the population refuse to recognize or acknowledge scientific knowledge.\textsuperscript{175} Despite that, the Draper’s exhibits do discuss a number of environmentally controversial themes, such as wildlife management, pollution, and climate change. As Preston explained, “I’ve always argued that we don’t advocate for a particular position. Some museums do, and that’s great, but we don’t want to advocate for a particular position or policy position on something; instead, identify what we know about the cause and consequences of certain human action, and let people judge for themselves…”\textsuperscript{176} He continued, “…and in a couple of places we ask folks to let us know what they’re thinking, how they respond to this. Is there room for wolves in the greater Yellowstone ecosystem, for example?”\textsuperscript{177}

In my discussion with Charles Preston, he noted that wildlife management, especially the issue of the region’s wolf population, came under a great deal of scrutiny. Rather than shy away from the topic, the museum chose to incorporate the discussion into its exhibition space. The exhibit presents the issues surrounding wildlife management. It explores the economic consequences wolves pose to communities, specifically those centered around the ranching industry. The discussion examines the arguments posed by pro- and anti-hunting advocates. The exhibit aims to present all sides of the issue, exploring the economic, social, and ecological

\textsuperscript{174} Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 8, 2008.
\textsuperscript{175} Preston, interview, 5.
\textsuperscript{176} Preston, interview, 6.
\textsuperscript{177} Preston, interview.
factors surrounding the debate. Rather than propose an outcome, the exhibit seeks to present information and allow visitors to process the material and come to their own decisions.

As visitors follow the path, they encounter an array of exhibits that explore the flora, fauna, and peoples of the plains basin. Through taxidermied animals and artistic renderings, visitors experience the abundant wildlife of the greater Yellowstone region. At the same time, the museum continues to explore the ways in which humans not only impacted the regional environment through settlement, but also the ways in which the regional landscape impacted decision-making processes in arenas such as farming and ranching.178

As visitors continue up the path, they arrive at the Mountain Meadow and Aquatic Environments exhibition space. Here visitors travel through artificial rivers, meadows, and forests, again examining displays of flora and fauna that discussed the ecosystem of the region. As I walked through the exhibits, I began to hear recorded sounds of the environment, which provided a sensory experience of the regional environment.179 Much like the pervious displays, this section of the museum also deals with contemporary debates over uses of the natural landscape, such as logging, and wildfires.180 As I walked through this section, I began to experience the smell of smoke and burning wood. At first, I thought that I only imagined this sensation due to the captivating qualities of the exhibits. However, I then realized that I did in fact smell smoke, and that the sensation was an introduced and intentional facet of the exhibit. When I spoke with Preston, he explained that from the start of the design conceptualization, he wanted to create an “immersive experience,” which most museums lacked.181 Not only do visitors experience the sights and sounds of the greater Yellowstone region, but the Draper

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178 Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 11, 2008.  
179 Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 10, 2008.  
180 Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 10, 2008.  
181 Preston, interview, 7.
Museum includes exhibits where visitors receive tactile experiences, and they are able to smell wildfire, and sagebrush after a rainstorm.\textsuperscript{182}

As visitors continue along the path, they follow the smell of wildfire through a historical discussion of forest conservation and fire management. Visitors next encounter displays dealing with the topic of regional wolves. The exhibits present a very balanced view of all sides of these discussions, including economic, recreation, conservation, and preservation, from wildlife proponents to ranchers. Again, the exhibits not only discusses the ways in which management changed over time, but also how human perception has changed and how the debates surrounding the discussion have evolved.\textsuperscript{183}

From here, visitors further ascend the path and enter the Mountain Environment. Here, the exhibition space discusses the mountainous region of Yellowstone, at an elevation of 6,000-10,000 feet. Visitors learn about the Green River, as well as the impacts of global warming through displays that once again transport audiences to an immersive exhibition space. The final section brings audiences to the Alpine region. The displays again present the regional diversity of the mountain and alpine ecosystems. They describe the reasons why the landscape, as well as the flora and fauna, change at higher elevations. They also discuss the peoples of the mountains, and why the high mountains were attractive and remain so today. Through discussions revolving around topics such as mining and recreation, the display provides a historical continuum, stressing the attractiveness of the Greater Yellowstone region. The vantage point at the top of the museum provides audiences with a clear view of a recreated buffalo jump, located on an outer wall of the museum.\textsuperscript{184}

\textsuperscript{182} Preston, interview, 7-8.
\textsuperscript{183} Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 10, 2008.
\textsuperscript{184} Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Personal visit, August 10, 2008.
The Draper Museum of Natural History began with a vision from Nancy Carol Draper. Under the leadership of Charles Preston, the Draper evolved into one of the leading natural history museums. Its discussion of the greater Yellowstone region provides audiences with an immersive experience of the biomes throughout the area. The museum’s displays contextualize scientific and environmental topics within a historical framework, connecting the natural environment to the human environment and tying the past to the present. Additionally, the exhibition spaces tackle many contemporary and often controversial issues surrounding several environmental debates. As the region’s primary natural history museum, the Draper not only serves to educate the public on Yellowstone’s history, it also provides an arena for environmental debate and discussion. It contextualizes both human culture and the natural environment within the story of the American West.

William F. Cody always saw himself as not only a showman but also an educator. To honor his memory, in 1917 the citizens of Cody, Wyoming, began the process of establishing a museum in his name. What began as a small cabin has expanded today into an institution consisting of over 300,000 square feet. In 2008, the Buffalo Bill Historical Center consisted of five museums all under one roof, located on roughly seven acres of land. It employed roughly 100 staff members and exhibited well over 10,000 objects, with millions of objects in the overall collections.
CHAPTER IX

THE NATIONAL COWBOY AND WESTER HERITAGE MUSEUM

The National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum occupies a 220,000-square-foot exhibition space in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. The museum complex serves not only to tell the story of the American West, but also to pay homage to one of the most popular figures of its history: the American cowboy. Through its mission, the institution strives to “preserve and interpret the heritage of the American West for the enrichment of the public.”

As visitors approach the museum complex, they are greeted by Hollis Williford’s \textit{Welcome Sundown}, a large bronze sculpture of a cowboy shielding his eyes from the sun. The piece won the Prix de West Purchase award in 1980. The museum’s façade displays Tom Ryan’s \textit{The Remuda}, a large image of galloping horses covering the museum’s exterior. Upon entering the building, visitors confront several more sculptures throughout the museum’s lobby. James Earle Fraser’s plaster statue \textit{Abraham Lincoln} immediately grabs the visitors’ attention. The large sculpture of a seated Lincoln serves to remind visitors of the role he played in encouraging western expansion and settlement. Next to the Special Events Center, near Dining on Persimmon Hill, the museum’s food court, Laura Fraser’s 1953 piece, \textit{Oklahoma Run}, covers 21 feet of the museum’s wall. The large plaster panel depicts the story of the 1889 Oklahoma land run, which initiated white settlement of the region and was the first of several instances of land distribution throughout Oklahoma. Fraser created the plaster panel as a model for a larger bronze sculpture which was originally designed for the Oklahoma State Fairgrounds. Off to one side rests \textit{Canyon}

\footnote{1}{“Mission Statement,” National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, Dickinson Research Center, Director’s Files.}
\footnote{2}{The National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Personal visit, March 8, 2007.}
Princess, Gerald Balcair’s fifteen-foot tall marble statue of a female cougar. At the east end of
the museum’s entrance sits Glenna Goodacre’s bronze statue of Ronald Reagan. Ronald Reagan:
After the Ride serves to remember Reagan for his role as a western performer. 3 Facing the
museum’s entrance lays James Earle Fraser’s plaster sculpture The End of the Trail. Originally
created for the 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exhibition in San Francisco, the eighteen-foot,
four-ton sculpture of a Native American on horseback fills a windowed hallway.

Beyond the lobby, the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum contains
numerous galleries exhibiting a range of collections related to the history of the American West,
including focuses on art, firearms, and the American cowboy. In many ways, the galleries
themselves exist as small museums. Each gallery focuses on separate aspects and interpretations
of the history of the American West, yet common themes run through each gallery. As a result,
the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum possesses similarities to the Buffalo Bill
Historical Center in terms of presentation and exhibit structure. However, at an administrative
and organizational level, all the galleries are part of one central museum.

In no way does the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum attempt to depict a
full or chronological history of the American West. The collections and exhibitions clearly center
on the topic of the American cowboy, and the museum consciously chooses to omit specific
stories related to the American West. As Richard Rattenburry, the curator of the History at the
National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, indicates, there are things the museum simply
does not do. “We don’t do transportation in the West in a notable way. We don’t do the mining
frontier in the West.” 4 As a result, the museum intentionally focuses on a few select and specific
facets of the overall story of the American West.

3 The National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Personal visit, March 8, 2007.
4 Richard Rattenbury, interview by the author, March 6, 2007, National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, 4.
Upon entry, visitors arrive at the William S. and Ann Atherton Art of the American West Gallery. Much like the Buffalo Bill Historical Center and the Autry National Center, the National Cowboy and Western Heritage museum possesses an encyclopedic collection of art from the nineteenth century through the present. Landscapes, bronze sculptures, portraits, and still lifes depict images of people, places, and objects from the greater regions west of the Mississippi River, stretching from Missouri to Oklahoma, to the Pacific Northwest. The gallery’s collections boast art produced by such artists as Fredrick Remington, Charles Russel, Alfred Jacob Miller, Solon Borglum, and Albert Bierstadt.

As visitors walk through the gallery’s archway, they first encounter one of the gallery’s highlights: Albert Bierstadt’s large landscape titled *Emigrants Crossing the Plains*. The piece depicts a caravan of settlers passing through the western Plains.\(^5\) The gallery’s exhibit focuses heavily on nineteenth century art. Surrounding Bierstadt’s piece, visitors are drawn to works such as the Charles Russell painting, *When Mules Wear Diamonds*, and *Cavalcade (Indian Grand Parade)*, by Alfred Jacob Miller [See Images].\(^6\)

The gallery exhibit works produced by a plethora of artists over the course of roughly 200 years. Throughout the gallery space, larger collections highlight the works of several artists. The gallery pays specific attention to the works of Charles Russell, Frederick Remington, Henry Farny, Charles Schreyvagel, and Solon Borglum. The Charles Russell exhibit displays the artist’s works on paper as well as his bronze sculptures. The exhibit features spectacular oil paintings, such as *Smoke Talk, Planning the Attack, Red Man’s Wireless, and Custer’s Last Stand*. These works, while mythological representations of the American West, show Russell’s focus on a

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\(^5\) The National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Personal visit, March 8, 2007.  
\(^6\) The National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Personal visit, March 8, 2007.
Native American subject matter. Additionally, works in bronze such as *Meat for Wild Men* and *Counting Coup* tell similar tales of the Native West.

Similarly, the Frederic Remington exhibit highlights both the artist’s paintings and sculptures. In paintings like *Old Style Texas Cowboy, Hunter’s Super*, and *The Quarrel*, the artist chose the American Cowboy for his subject matter. Much like Russell, Remington paints a romantic mythology of western history. He portrays Native Americans in a similar fashion through pieces such as *Sign of the Buffalo Scout*. His bronze sculptures, much like those created by Russell, continue to portray popular versions of Native American and cowboy themes as seen in his first bronze, *The Bronco Buster, The Buffalo Signal, The Scalp*, and the popular piece *Coming Through the Rye*.

The gallery features works by such famed western artists as Alfred Jacob Miller, Edmund Darch Lewis, Wilson Hurley, E. Irving Couse, Robert Henri, and James Bama. The gallery also highlights modern and contemporary western works, specifically in the Prix De West Collection.

The National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum is home to one of the finest contemporary western art collections in the nation. At the heart of this prestigious grouping of paintings and sculpture is a body of work known as the Prix de West Collection.

The growth of the Prix de West Collection traces its origins to the formation of the National Academy of Western Art in 1973. That organization was formed by a group of established western artists in association with the museum for the shared common purpose of preserving and improving the western genre in artistic endeavors. The Academy’s major activity immediately became an annual exhibition and sale held at the museum during the second weekend in June. Among the several awards made at that Exhibition was the Prix de West Purchase Award which allowed the museum to buy the artwork of its choice from show for its permanent collection. These accumulated purchases have become known as the Prix de West Collection.

Although the exhibition name and format have changed since its inception, the original purpose of introducing new young artists, providing a venue for

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7 The National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Personal visit, March 8, 2007.
8 The National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Personal visit, March 8, 2007.
established artists, and making the best in western art available for public viewing continues. And, true to its founding vision, the Prix de West Purchase Award has transcended its immediate financial reward and has come to represent the best in artistic tradition as the Prix de West Collection.9

In the museum’s lobby, the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum lists recipients of the Prix de West Award on one of the walls. The Prix de West Collection exhibits contemporary works of art, embracing both traditional and modern interpretations of the West. Works by contemporary artists such as Tim Cox and Tom Lovell fill the gallery space. Additionally, the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum possesses the Tom Lovell studio, exhibited in the gallery.10

The museum displays its newest acquisitions in the Robert L. and Grace F. Eldridge Gallery. During my time spent at the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, the gallery showed the exhibit Fact and Fiction: Popular Western Imagery from the Glen D. Shirley Western American Collection. As the exhibit notes, “Glen D. Shirley (1916-2002) is one of the foremost historical writers about the American West.”11 It included visual images, such as Wild West show banners and movie posters, books, dime novels, and pulp fictions.12 The museum exhibits Native American artwork separately from the works in the Atherton Gallery. The museum displays Native artwork in the Arthur and Shifra Silberman Gallery, which draws largely from the Silberman Collection of over 2,500 drawings and paintings and exhibits works created by Native American artists from the nineteenth century to the present.13

From the Atherton Art of the American West Gallery, visitors enter the A. Max Wietzenhoffer Collection of Fine American Firearms. While the Cody Firearms Museum at the

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10 The National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Personal visit, March 8, 2007.
Buffalo Bill Historical Center exhibits a comprehensive collection of American firearms, the
Weitzenhoffer Collection focuses on craftsmanship, and decorative arts and finishes related to
firearms. As Richard Rattenbury explained, around 2001, A. Max Wietzenhoffer gifted his
collection of decorative firearms to the museum. The National Cowboy and Western Heritage
Museum opened the Wietzenhoffer Gallery the following year at its 2002 Western Heritage
Awards celebration. The lavishly decorated 1,000-square-foot exhibition space displays nearly
one hundred firearms, highlighting their superior craftsmanship and decorative details. As the
exhibit display explains,

The Wietzenhoffer Arms Collection provides a focused survey of the mechanical
and decorative arts during the Victorian Era. Typically combining technical
ingenuity with pleasing design, firearms may be seen as “functional sculpture.”
Many display superb finishes, and a select few feature rare embellishments. These
varied qualities, combined with rich historic associations make these arms worthy
of thoughtful study and appreciation. To the left are the firearms produced by
Colt, the premier marque in 19th-century America. To the right are arms made by
Marlin, Parker, Winchester, Smith&Wesson, Sharps, and Remington.

As Rattenbury continued to explain, the Wietzehnhoffer Gallery serves an aesthetic
interpretation of firearms. The gallery seeks to examine the history of firearms in the American
West through the lens of art and its place in the West.

Beginning with the left portion of the gallery space, visitors see a large collection of
decorative arms produced by Colt’s Patent Firearms Manufacturing Company. As the exhibit
explains, Samuel Colt received his first patent for a firearm in 1836, and established his first
firearms factory in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1848. In 1853, he expanded his company oversees

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14 Rattenbury, interview, 2.
15 “Western Museum Hands Over Reins to New Director,” The Daily Oklahoman March 5, 2002, in Cowboy Hall
Center, Director’s Files, 89-90.
16 Text panel, National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum. Viewed March 6, 2007.
17 Rattenbury, interview, 2.
and opened a factory in London. The Colt exhibit displays firearms produced by Colt throughout the nineteenth century. The objects provide excellent representations of the superior craftsmanship and artistic detailing that went into their production. Dark wooden display cases house cylinder and muzzle-loading percussion rifles, breach-loading cartridge revolvers and pistols, specialty models such as the Colt “Frontier” and the Colt “Navy,” along with shotguns and breach-loading cartridge rifles. Each object is ornately detailed, and the exhibits highlight their aesthetic features and superior detail.

While the Silberman Gallery exhibits Native American flat art (drawings and paintings), the Native American Gallery devotes its space to exhibitions of the traditional arts, ethnography, history, and material culture of western Native peoples. Native American material and themes exist throughout all of the galleries in the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum. However, at the time of my visit, both the Silberman Gallery and the Native American Gallery were in the beginning stages of remodel. I did, however, have a chance to view the exhibits. In a dimly lit gallery space housing brightly illuminated display cases, the Native American gallery showcases a diverse array of Native American artifacts. As Steven Grafe, curator of Native American History at the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, explained, the collection focuses primarily on Native peoples from the Plains, Plateau, and Southwestern regions of the United States. The objects on display range from clothing and utilitarian objects to equine and ceremonial artifacts from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As Grafe explained, the exhibits highlight the construction and craftsmanship of the objects, so the gallery approaches the exhibition of these objects as a display of Native American Fine Arts. The first exhibits in

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18 Text panel, National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum. Viewed March 6, 2007.
19 The National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Personal visit, March 8, 2007.
the gallery focus on the ways in which Native peoples crafted and decorated everyday objects, and how such objects serve as reflections of the ways of Native American lifeways. As the gallery progresses, the exhibits show how, with Euro-American contact, Native peoples adopted foreign ideas and incorporated them into their designs. Objects throughout the gallery include Christian Crosses and American flag motifs.21

Similar to the other museum galleries, horses play a central role throughout the Native American Gallery. The exhibits include several beaded horse collars and saddles crafted by different Native groups. As Grafe noted, the museum gallery intentionally avoids any discussion of Indian sovereignty and contemporary issues, loss of land, or issues of genocide. Instead, it focuses on the traditional arts of Native peoples. In many ways, the exhibit plan goes against the expectations of most visitors.22 During my visit, the gallery displayed a temporary exhibit depicting Mexican retables, or devotional iconography. Thus, the Silberman and Native American Galleries follow the institution’s mission to interpret the heritage of the American West. Placing a central focus on art, the Native American Gallery explores the history and heritage on Native Americans through everyday objects.

Like the Native American Gallery, the American Cowboy Gallery serves to highlight and preserve the history of American cowboy culture. Upon entry, visitors walk into a gallery space designed to feel as if they had entered a working cattle ranch. Planks line the galleries interior space, and antler chandeliers hang from the log beams of the gallery’s vaulted ceiling. The floor, in the design of a map, depicts the historically great ranches throughout the American West.23 A stone plaque explains,

21 The National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Personal visit, March 5, 2007.
22 Grafe interview, 3.
23 The National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Personal visit, March 8, 2007.
The central character of America’s colorful ranching heritage is called a cowboy – or vaquero, buckaroo or drover, depending upon his ancestry and locale. Ranch work required good riding and roping skills. Though daily chores tended to be more mundane than heroic, the cowboy’s knowledge of cattle and his ability as a horseman set him apart from miners, farmers, and other laborers on the frontier. The cowboy took pride in this distinction, and his equipment reflected that pride. This gallery explores themes relating to the evolving traditions of the working cowboy.²⁴

As visitors wander through the gallery, they pass display cases full of traditional cowboy equipment, such as collections of spurs, horse saddles, bridles, and bits. Many of the displays house models of horses, and human statues in ways that they would have been worn or utilized.²⁵

The gallery begins with a discussion of old-world ranching traditions. It explains that the roots of American cowboy culture lie in European (primarily British and Spanish) and African traditions, which were then brought to the Americas during the colonial period. The gallery then goes on to examine cattle and cowboy culture throughout New Spain. Several displays explore the Spanish history of the vaquero in California and Mexico, and the work conducted by slaves in the new world.²⁶ These displays provide a thorough explanation on the origins and early history of ranching in America.

The next several displays focus on the early history of ranching and cattle culture in the United States. Beginning with a display focusing on early ranching in Texas, the exhibits tell the story of the early American cowboy, while connecting the traditions to their early Spanish and African roots. As visitors pass display cases filled with different types and examples of saddles, they find an area devoted to different regional and ethnic traditions of cattle culture. Individual

²⁴ Text panel, National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum. Viewed March 5, 2007.
²⁵ The National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Personal visit, March 5, 2007.
²⁶ The National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Personal visit, March 5, 2007.
displays explore the histories and culture of Southwestern, Native American, and Black cowboys. An additional display discusses the history of cowgirls.27

Displays depict the history of early cattle drives, while also focusing on the day-to-day activities of cowboys, highlighting utilitarian objects such as boots, spurs, and pistols. Additionally, a display explores the topic of “Cowboy Grub,” examining foodways on cattle ranches and meal preparation on cattle drives through the exhibition of a chuck wagon. Along one wall, the gallery displays a recreated bunkhouse, depicting the living quarters of working cattlemen.28

The next set of exhibits delves into the history of the open range. Several displays explore the history of great ranches and open range policies throughout the West.29 From there, the displays explore the ways in which cattlemen identified their herds and contained their cattle after the period of the open range came to a close. An exhibit plaque explains, as cattle herds spread throughout the West, cattleman took advantage of large expanses of grazing land, relying on natural barriers like rivers and valleys to contain their stock. An elaborate system of brand symbols and ear marking helped them to identify their cattle on the open range. The brand often became the common name of the ranch. The Capitol Freehold Land & Investment Company was known far and wide as the XIT.

Barbed wire, which inspired both respect and hate from cowboys, became a symbol for the closing of the open range on the Great Plains. By the 1880s, when competition for land and water increased the need for fencing, barbed wire provided a solution for sprawling ranches where traditional fencing was impractical. The barbed wire study collection on either side of this room contains 1,300 unique examples drawn from the museum’s collection of more than 8,000 different wires.30

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27 The National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Personal visit, March 5, 2007.
28 The National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Personal visit, March 5, 2007.
29 The National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Personal visit, March 5, 2007.
30 Text panel, National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum. Viewed March 5, 2007.
The display depicts numerous examples of brands from ranches throughout the West. It discusses the ways in which cattlemen would brand their herds in order to identify one cow from another, as cattle grazed over vast amounts of land in the plains. Similarly, the barbed wire exhibit discusses the history and uses of wire fencing in the West. It explores the construction, various types, uses, and impact of fencing in the West.  

Visitors then enter into a large area of exhibits displaying the apparel of the American cowboy. From functional to fashionable, these displays depict the iconic apparel associated with cattlemen throughout American history. Display cases house hats, boots, and chaps in numerous styles for different uses and function. The exhibit examines clothing styles both functional and fashionable. It begins with an exploration of the functional clothing of the working cowboy and goes on to explore the ways in which the functional wear found its place in mainstream American fashion. The collection also showcases fine examples of lariats, reins, tack, and other equine-related materials.  

The American Cowboy Gallery serves to provide visitors with a comprehensive and chronological history of cattle culture in North America. It examines the origins and evolution of the American cowboy and ranching industry in America. At the same time, it alludes to popular representations of the cowboy through a discussion of fashion. The next two galleries specifically focus on popular and mythical aspects of the American Cowboy and the West. As the exhibits explain, the history of the American West created a popular mythology surrounding the iconic American Cowboy. The next two galleries, the Western Performers Gallery and the American Rodeo Gallery, focus on the ways in which ranching and cattle culture impacted American popular culture.

31 The National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Personal visit, March 5, 2007.
32 The National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Personal visit, March 5, 2007.
The newest exhibition space, opened in 2003, the Western Performers Gallery pays homage to the mythic cowboy throughout popular culture. The gallery serves to provide an alternative representation of the American West from those throughout other galleries in the museum. While the American Cowboy Gallery, The Native American Gallery, and the Joe Grandee Museum of the Frontier American West aim to discuss topical histories, and examine social and cultural aspects of the American West, the Western Performers Gallery seeks to discuss alternative ideas of western history, and explore the affects the American cowboy had on the mythos and popular consumption of the American West. Just as western art created an alternative, even fictional, portrayal of the history of the American West, literature, theater, and film continue to discuss the West’s role throughout popular culture.

The gallery’s exhibits provide visitors with an alternative view of the American cowboy than presented in other galleries throughout the museum. Hollywood film posters line the entrance walls representing examples from the Western film genre, such as *Harlem on the Prairie*, *The Land of Missing Men*, and *North of Nevada*. The gallery’s exhibits showcase popular paraphernalia and memorabilia. Inside, the gallery, memorabilia line the room’s outer walls. Filled with saddles, film posters, and costumes, the exhibits narrate a chronological history of the West’s place in popular culture. Above the glass display cases, a visual border leads visitors through a chronological timeline of Western film history. At the gallery’s center, a recreated 1930s theater and marquee serves as a nucleus for the exhibits. Inside the small theater, the exhibit plays a short, fifteen-minute film, narrated by Western film star Sam Elliot, which discusses the history of the Western film genre. Stars bearing the names of Gene Autry, Tom
Mix, and Will Rogers, similar to those lining the Hollywood Walk of Fame, cover the gallery’s floor.\textsuperscript{33}

As the exhibits explain, works such as Owen Wister’s \textit{The Virginian}, published in 1902, and Edwin S. Porter’s \textit{The Great Train Robbery}, released in 1903, helped establish the place of the West in popular culture.\textsuperscript{34} Through an exhibition of such early works, the displays examine the roots of America’s love for the Cowboy hero and the Western genre through early literature and silent film, and “B Westerns.” The collections include saddles, posters and costumes from such famed actors as Hoot Gibson, Buck Jones, Tim McCoy, Will Rogers, and Tom Mix.\textsuperscript{35}

This section focusing on the early popularity of the Western pays special attention to the role played by Gene Autry. As the exhibit explains, Autry became known throughout Hollywood as the “singing cowboy.”\textsuperscript{36} Having begun his career in music and radio, Autry entered the silent film industry and then starred in his first major film, \textit{Tumbleweeds}, in 1935. In 1950, Autry moved to the television industry with \textit{The Gene Autry Show}. Throughout his career, Autry made a lasting impact on the place of the popular American West in music, radio, theater, film, and television.\textsuperscript{37}

The gallery also discusses women in the Western film genre. As the exhibit states,

In the early films of the genre, women played a supporting role to the hero figure. They often represented the voice of the cultured East in contrast to the frontier hero who was torn between the freedom of the West and the taming influence of women. Jean Arthur’s boisterous portrayal of Calamity Jane in \textit{The Plainsmen} (1937) was an exception. Minority women did not fare as well. While frequently stereotyped as less virtuous, they played background roles predominantly.\textsuperscript{38}

\textsuperscript{33} The National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Personal visit, March 5, 2007.
\textsuperscript{34} Text panel, National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum. Viewed March 5, 2007.
\textsuperscript{35} The National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Personal visit, March 5, 2007.
\textsuperscript{36} Text panel, National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum. Viewed March 5, 2007.
\textsuperscript{37} The National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Personal visit, March 5, 2007.
\textsuperscript{38} Text panel, National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum. Viewed March 5, 2007.
The exhibit pays particular attention to Barbara Stanwyck, who was “among the first leading ladies to achieve more prominent roles.” Stanwyck starred in several major films such as *Annie Oakley* (1935) and *Cattle Queen of Montana* (1954), where “she garnered top billing over costar Ronald Reagan.” Stanwyck is best known for her role as Victoria Barkley in the ABC television series *The Big Valley*.39

The discussion of Stanwyck’s role in *The Big Valley* opens the gallery’s exploration of the Golden Age of Western film and television. From the 1940s throughout the 1970s, the film industry experienced a boom in the production of Westerns. The exhibit includes in-depth examinations of the lives and careers of such actors as Walter Brennan, Slim Pickens, and John Wayne. The gallery also explores the careers of film directors such as John Ford. As the exhibit notes, Walter Brennan appeared in more than 200 films and three major television series, and he received three academy awards throughout his roughly thirty-year career. John Wayne starred in more than 140 roles over his fifty-year career. Wayne, who served as a trustee for the museum, donated his collection of western memorabilia at the time of his death. The exhibits also include a discussion of what the museum describes as “Anti-establishment Westerns,” which depict a more violent aspect of the film genre. The section includes discussions on the careers of actors such as Jack Elam, Richard Farnsworth, and Clint Eastwood.

The final gallery displays explore the continued popularity of the western myth in modern and contemporary culture. The exhibit explains,

> Westerns remained popular for a century because their format was flexible and could reflect changes in moral values and cultural currents within American society. Westerns have typically been written by “Easterners.” Unfamiliar with

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39 Text panel, National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum. Viewed March 5, 2007.  
40 Text panel, National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum. Viewed March 5, 2007.  
41 Text panel, National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum. Viewed March 5, 2007.  
42 The National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Personal visit, March 5, 2007.  
43 The National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Personal visit, March 5, 2007.
the perils and daily struggles of a real working cowhand, script writers relied upon the plots of pulp fiction, which mythologized the cowboy. The advent of the home video player and the reappearance of classic Westerns on cable television has brought about a revival of interest in the cowboy stars and western themes of the past. 44

The exhibit highlights the influences that actors such as Robert Duvall and Danny Glover had on the revival of the genre, and explains that series such as *Lonesome Dove* (1989) and films like *Tombstone* (1993) helped keep a place for the mythic West in contemporary popular culture.

Much like the other exhibits within the gallery, the final displays showcase artifacts and memorabilia from contemporary Western films and television.45

The *American Rodeo Gallery* highlights the place of the West in American sport. A text panel at the exhibit’s entrance explains,

> America’s truly indigenous sport, rodeo evolved as a colorful celebration of the riding and roping skills of the working cowboy. Breaking rank horses and roping calves and steers constituted the cowboys everyday work, and these special skills become the first contested events of rodeo. Over the decades events like steer wrestling and bull riding were added, and rules were formalized for each. By the mid-1920s, great contenders and great rodeos captured the public imagination from coast to coast. Today, rodeo is a multi-million-dollar sport with more than 700 PRCA-sanctioned venues a year in the United States alone.

From its informal origins in isolated roundup contests more than a century ago, to big business excitement of today’s National Finals competition, rodeo personifies the colorful drama, rugged individualism and competitive spirit of the 19th-century American West. Yet, modern rodeo is more than mere historical spectacle. It embodies the heritage of thousands of men and women whose skill and perseverance has been matched through the years by growing dedication and professionalism. Many of their stories – and tangible legacies of their vibrant sport are here in the American Rodeo Gallery.46

Designed in the fashion of a 1950s rodeo arena, the American Rodeo Gallery explores the history of rodeo and also preserves the legacy of great rodeo stars in the Rodeo Hall of Fame. At the

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44 Text panel, National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum. Viewed March 5, 2007.
45 The National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Personal visit, March 5, 2007.
46 Text panel, National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum. Viewed March 6, 2007.
gallery’s entrance, *The King*, Robert M. Scriver’s bronze statue of famed rodeo champion Bill Linderman, welcomes visitors. The gallery’s construction invites visitors to enter a fictional rodeo arena, *The Red River Roundup*. Bleachers line the gallery space providing a view of the announcer’s box, set above and overlooking the gallery’s interior. Scattered throughout the gallery, visitors encounter wooden chutes, life-size models of penned bulls, and sculptures of contestants on horseback. To create a more immersive visitor experience, life-size cutouts of individuals fill the announcer’s box, while monitors throughout the gallery play a rodeo documentary narrated by singer and actor Reba McEntire, and rodeo announcer Clem McSpadden. As Don Reeves explained, the cutouts within the announcer’s box are actual life-size photos of members of the museum staff dressed in costume.47

Throughout the gallery, the exhibits explore the history and development of rodeo from the nineteenth century throughout the present. The first set of exhibits display items from rodeos early origins, such as the Wild West shows, and items associated with the working cowboy.48 As the first series of exhibits explains, rodeo began as an informal competition among cowboys at ranches throughout the West in the 1860s as way to show off their skills. A text panel also notes, “The Cowboy skills and contexts that would become the sport of rodeo first received broad public attention through traveling Wild West shows. In fact, rodeo as a true spectator sport really began on July 4, 1882, when William F. “Buffalo Bill” Cody staged his Old Glory Blow Out at North Platte, Nebraska.”49 At the end of the nineteenth century, rodeo became a form of popular entertainment that paralleled Buffalo Bill’s Wild West shows.50

47 The National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Personal visit, March 6, 2007.
48 The National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Personal visit, March 6, 2007.
49 Text panel, National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum. Viewed March 6, 2007.
50 The National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Personal visit, March 6, 2007.
The exhibit notes that “Pecos, Texas claims to have held the first formal rodeo performance in an open field next to the county courthouse in 1883.”51 As rodeo’s popularity and participation increased, similar to the rise in popularity of the Western genre of film, by the early twentieth century organizers established more formalized rules and regulations, as well as honors and prizes for the sport. At that time, large rodeo events were held throughout the West, such as Cheyenne’s Frontier Days Rodeo, the Pendleton Roundup, and the Calgary Stampede. By 1925, rodeo became “…a full-time occupation for serious contestants.”52 In 1936, the professional Rodeo Cowboys Association formed to organize and promote the sport of rodeo throughout the country.53

Prior to the widespread professionalization of the sport, rodeo events existed as an informal competition amongst ranch hands. As an exhibit text panel explains,

Throughout the history of rodeo in the United States, trophy prizes have served as tangible symbols of excellence to both contestants and spectators. During the early 20th century, when rodeo was more a part-time pursuit than a full-time profession, such trophies were often more sought after – and more valuable – than prize money. Usually taking the form of engraved belt plates, inscribed silver loving cups, or finely carved and silver mounted saddles, the most expensive of these prizes were created by talented silversmiths, jewelers, and saddlers between 1900 and 1940.

Businesses with special interests in the West, such as the Union Pacific Railroad, the Denver Post newspaper or Ranch Romances magazine, sponsored many rodeo trophies. Commercial firms with more direct rodeo associations included the Plymouth Cordage Company (ropes), the Levi Strauss Company (Jeans), the Stetson Hat Company and the Hamley Saddlery Company. Displayed here are examples of these and other rare and prestigious prizes, including a Roosevelt year trophy, the Jack Dempsey Trophy, the McAlpin Hotel trophies, The Duff Aber Memorial Trophy, and the famed Metro Goldwyn Mayer Studio Trophy.54

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51 Text panel, National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum. Viewed March 6, 2007.
52 Text panel, National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum. Viewed March 6, 2007.
53 The National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Personal visit, March 6, 2007.
54 Text panel, National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum. Viewed March 6, 2007.
The gallery devotes an entire section of its space to the exhibition of rodeo prizes and trophies, and the exhibit displays highlight several of these early rodeo events and showcase many fine examples of such trophies.\textsuperscript{55} The exhibit notes that by the 1920s, rodeo had a national audience, and out of the small, regional contests of earlier years, it grew into a national sport. Aside from the exhibitions on rodeo’s early history, the American Rodeo Gallery primarily devotes its exhibition space to an examination of rodeo as a popular national sport.

In addition to its exhibition of traditional rodeo events, the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum houses the Rodeo Hall of Fame. Since 1955, contestants and performers have been inducted into the Rodeo Hall of Fame. A wall display in the museum’s lobby denotes individuals designated as an All-Around Champion Cowboy. As explained, “The most prestigious award bestowed by the Professional Rodeo Cowboy Association is that of All-Around Champion Cowboy. It is earned annually by the rodeo contestant who wins the most prize money during the year while competing in two or more events.”\textsuperscript{56} Throughout the American Rodeo Gallery, exhibits highlight the careers and achievements of several well-known rodeo performers and hall of fame inductees. Interspersed with the exhibits dedicated to the discussion of the various rodeo events, display cases present the histories and biographies of some of the most praised rodeo performers, such as Clay McGonagill, Harry Brennan, Mike Hastings, Bill Hancock, Hoot Gibson, and Gene Pruett, who helped establish the sport of rodeo at a national level. The gallery also marks the careers of rodeo champions like Dean Oliver, Bill Pickett, Harry Tompkins, Jim Shoulders, Casey Tibbs, Bob Crosby, and Homer Pettigrew, who all excelled in their individual rodeo events.\textsuperscript{57}

\textsuperscript{55} The National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Personal visit, March 6, 2007.
\textsuperscript{56} Text panel, National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum. Viewed March 6, 2007.
\textsuperscript{57} The National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Personal visit, March 6, 2007.
The gallery’s central exhibits focus is on the interpretation of six rodeo events: calf-roping, steer wrestling, bull riding, saddle bronc riding, steer roping, and bareback bronc riding. The gallery discusses the activities of trick roping and fancy roping, and trick riding and fancy riding. The museum gallery dedicates exhibition space to each rodeo event, discussing the context’s history, rules, and champions throughout time. Steer roping, calf roping, and saddle bronc riding all evolved from the traditional skills of the working cowboy. Bareback bronc riding, bull riding, and steer wrestling were added as contests later in the history of rodeo.

According to the calf roping exhibit,

Evolved directly from the traditional task of branding time, calf roping pits the contestant and his well-trained horse against the clock and a 250 to 350-pound calf. As in other timed roping events (steer roping and team roping), success hinges on the smoothly coordinated efforts of horse and rider.58

As described in the exhibit, in the calf roping event, the calf is released from the chute, and then the contestant pursues the calf and attempts to rope the calf and take it to the ground. The calf must remain tied for a period of six seconds. The roper with the fastest time wins the contest.59

As visitors enter the exhibitions space, they walk past a wooden corral containing life-size sculptures of several bulls.60 The American Rodeo Gallery states that, out of the six main rodeo contests, bull riding is arguably the most dangerous event. As explained,

Perhaps the most dangers and dramatic spectacle in rodeo, bull riding pits determined cowboys against cantankerous bulls weighing from 1,700 to 2,000 pounds. Because the bulls spin as well as buck and will attack a downed contestant, this event is considered the ultimate in rough stock riding. Among rodeo spectators, no event surpasses bull riding in popularity.61

58 Text panel, National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum. Viewed March 6, 2007.
59 Text panel, National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum. Viewed March 6, 2007.
60 The National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Personal visit, March 6, 2007.
61 Text panel, National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum. Viewed March 6, 2007.
Contests are scored on time and performance. The more aggressive the ride, contestants receive higher scores. According to a text panel, “Unlike bucking bronzes, which are not naturally aggressive toward man, bucking bulls will deliberately attack a downed rider with deadly hooves and horns.” One such famous bull, Tornado, is buried on the museum grounds.

Equally thrilling for participants and spectators alike, steer wrestling, sometimes referred to as “bulldogging,” pits contestants and their horses against a 2,000-pound bull. In the event, the bulldogger pursues the steer while riding horseback. The rider then leaps from the horse, and wrestles the bull to the ground by grabbing the animal’s horns and attempting to knock it off balance. Once down, and the animal’s legs no longer touch the ground, the official signals for the contestant’s time to be scored, and the bull is set free. Like bull riding and bareback bronc riding, steer wrestling did not originate from the historic activities of the ranch cowboy. As the exhibit notes, credit for the event’s creation is given to African American cowboy Bill Pickett. Pickett, known as “The Bull Dogger,” competed in rodeo and also performed with Cody’s Wild West show.

The most recognizable of the rodeo events, “saddle bronc riding evolved directly from the traditional horse-breaking tasks of the nineteenth-century cowboy. More than brute strength, this exciting, judged event demands flamboyant style and superb balance on the part of the cowboy contestant, who must stay atop a 1,200-pound bucking horse for the bone-jarring, eight-second qualifying time.” Similar to bull riding, contestants are judged based on time and style. Both rider and horse are judged based on performance. “Rhythmic spurring in time with the

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63 The National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Personal visit, March 6, 2007.
64 Text panel, National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum. Viewed March 6, 2007.
65 The National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Personal visit, March 6, 2007.
gyrations of the bronc – from the horse’s shoulders back along the flanks near the cantle board of the saddle – will gain the contestant many points. Winning contestants typically earn around 75 points. Any score above 80 points is seen as a “superior” ride. Two famous bucking horses, Steamboat and Hells Angel, are laid to rest on the museum grounds.

Similar to calf roping, the contest of steer roping evolved from the historic practice of working cowboys. A timed event, like many other rodeo contests, “…the cowboy must pursue, rope, and tie down a big, powerful steer. Often called ‘jerk down’ roping or ‘fairgrounding,’ this timed event is now held at only a few modern rodeos because of frequent stock injuries.” Unlike calf roping, the 400- to 500-pound steer is roped around the horns and the slack attached to the horse’s saddle. The horse speeds off and brings the steer to the ground in rapid fashion. The contestant then ties the downed steer. Once the steer is secured, contestants raise their hands, and the downed animal must remain secured for an additional six seconds. The fastest time wins the event.

Much like the roping events, bronc riding, specifically saddle bronc riding, evolved from the traditional practices of the working cowboy. The sport evolved from the practice of breaking, or subduing, an untrained horse. “Whether bareback broncs or saddle broncs, these horses are ‘non-conformists’ that refuse to tolerate a rider. Rodeo broncs are not trained to buck – they simply have a natural and consistent tendency to do so.” According to the exhibit, prior to the 1950s, bucking broncs came from farms and ranches throughout the West, or were located in the

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68 Text panel, National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum. Viewed March 6, 2007.
70 Text panel, National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum. Viewed March 6, 2007.
71 Text panel, National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum. Viewed March 6, 2007.
72 Text panel, National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum. Viewed March 6, 2007.
wild. Today, rodeo broncs are bred for the competition. The exhibit area depicts a facsimile of a cowboy on a bucking horse. Two such famous horses, Midnight and Five Minutes to Midnight, are buried on the museum grounds.

Despite the overtly masculine language used throughout the gallery (and more broadly the museum itself), women have participated in rodeo since its early beginnings throughout the present. From the very start, women competed in rodeo events, and helped establish rodeo as a national sport.

Rodeo cowgirls were among the first women in the United States to achieve recognition as professional athletes. Combining Wild West showmanship with real athletic skills, they defied conventional gender roles by competing in a traditionally male sport. By 1920, women had achieved a prominent place in rodeo as rough stock contenders, trick riders, and relay racers.

Beginning in the 1930s, however, competitive cowgirls declined in number and prominence. Male-dominated rodeo organizations ignored women as serious participants, opting instead for parades featuring glamorous “Ranch Girls.” This stance sharply diminished the role of true, competitive cowgirls. With Gene Autry’s monopoly of big-time rodeo in the 1940s, the participation of female contestants virtually ceased.

In 1948 the Girls Rodeo Association (GRA) was founded to ensure women’s future participation in legitimate rodeo. All-girl rodeos gained some prominence in the 1950s and 1960s, but are now less common. Today, under the auspice of the Women’s Professional Rodeo Association (WPRA), female rodeo athletes concentrate on barrel racing, a timed event with more than two million dollars in annual prize money.

At the turn of the century, just like their male counterparts, most women competing in rodeo developed their skills working or growing up on ranches in the West. The exhibits dedicated to women in rodeo, segregated from the other exhibits discussing rodeo’s history and famous male champions, begin by discussing the early history of women’s involvement in the sport, and the

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73 Text panel, National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum. Viewed March 6, 2007.
74 The National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Personal visit, March 6, 2007.
75 The National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Personal visit, March 6, 2007.
76 Text panel, National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum. Viewed March 6, 2007.
impacts of early female rodeo stars like Fannie Sperry Steel and Bertha Kaepernick Blancett, who were some of the first women to win major rodeo events. The exhibits discuss the decline and rebirth of women’s involvement in the sport, and examine the event of barrel racing, which today has gained acceptance as a major event at a national level. Similar to the rest of the gallery, the section highlights the careers of a number of female champions, such as Tad Barnes Lucas, Florence Hughes Randolph, Alice Greenough, and Lorena Trickey Peterson. Each exhibit case, filled with the individual’s personal belongings, trophies, and riding apparel, discusses the biographies and accomplishments of these female athletes.

Additionally, one display case explores the introduction of rodeo clowns to the sport. As the exhibit notes,

Clowns entered the rodeo arena in the early 20th century, becoming an established part of most programs by 1920. Some came from Wild West shows or circuses, but many were competing cowboys who made extra money by entertaining during the idle time between events. Early clowns delighted audiences with spontaneous gags, slapstick routines and well-rehearsed acts that included everything from trained mules to exploding cars.

With the introduction of aggressive Brahma Bulls in the late 1920s, rodeo clowns took on a more serious function. Because Brahma bulls would attack a downed contestant, bullfighting clowns, who distracted the animal while the rider scrambled to safety, became a real necessity. These fearless funnymen risk their lives to save bull riders from serious injury or death in the arena.

Today many clowns continue to enliven the rodeo program with traditional skills and humorous dialogue. Others specialize around the bull riding event, either as bullfighters or as barrelmen. Bull fighters bait the animal head to head, relying on suburb quickness and athletic ability to elude the angry beast. Barrelmen use heavy, reinforced “walking” barrels to distract the bulls and protect themselves if charged.

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77 The National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Personal visit, March 6, 2007.
78 Text panel, National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum. Viewed March 6, 2007.
Like other exhibits in the gallery, the display documents the history of rodeo clowns through photographs and artifacts like costumes and props. While noting the humorous role played by the clowns, the exhibit also stresses their vital role as a safety measure for rodeo contestants.\(^79\)

As noted throughout the other gallery exhibits, rodeo evolved into a major sport both nationally and internationally. The final display addresses the roles played by promotors, contractors, and corporations in the sport of rodeo. The exhibit explains that in the sport’s early days some individuals saw opportunity in marketing rodeo as a “distinctively American pageant.” The exhibit continues to explain that in the twentieth century, “Legitimate promoters such as C. B. Irwin, Guy Weadick, and Tex Austin sought to increase prominence and profitability of rodeo through the creation of spectacular venues featuring star athletes and outstanding rough stock.”\(^80\) Today, much like any other professional sport, rodeo is a major enterprise involving marketing, promotion, and sponsorship.

The American Rodeo Gallery displays one of the most extensive collections of rodeo artifacts in the country. The gallery, unlike any other, exhibits the histories of the sport and the stories of those individuals who helped its rise to prominence. Additionally, through the Rodeo Hall of Fame, the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum celebrates and honors the champions who have excelled in the sport. Though a form of popular entertainment, just like western art and the Western film genre, rodeo has become a part of western history.

In 1999, Prosperity Junction opened as one of the museum’s more unique galleries. Designed to resemble a small cattle town in the West circa 1900. The gallery’s entrance sets the scene by inviting people to enter the town.

Welcome to Prosperity Junction. Our community is a small twenty-year-old cattle town located somewhere in the West at the turn of the century. The railroad,

\(^79\) The National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Personal visit, March 6, 2007.
\(^80\) Text panel, National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum. Viewed March 6, 2007.
which arrived only a few years ago, has wrought many changes in our community. Factory-made building materials, luxury household goods, and visitors from outside the region, all brought by the railroad, have transformed Prosperity Junction from a raw frontier cattle town to a growing, prosperous community on the eve of the twentieth century.

It is just after dusk in Prosperity Junction, and all of its structures are lighted by kerosene and gas lamps. However, Main Street is illuminated by electric lights powered by a newly installed generating plant that is the pride of the town. Its homes and businesses are authentic in design and style of the era. They range in age from five to twenty years and a few have been refurbished as the town has grown in recent years. Each building has its own story which can be gleaned from the pages of the Prosperity Junction Dispatch, church bulletins, and from town residents whom you will from time-to-time meet on Main Street.81

Prosperity Junction exists as an attempt by the museum to create a more immersive, almost living history experience for visitors. As Don Reeves, the McCasland Chair of Cowboy and Culture and the curator of Cowboy Collections at the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, explained, Prosperity Junction occupies a 13,000-square-foot space with thirty-eight-foot high ceilings. Most visitors spend several hours wandering through the town; some take the entire afternoon. The museum worked with museum designers and craftspeople from Michigan to create an outdoor space indoors. Prosperity Junction is set in a square room, but the town is rotated roughly thirty degrees, and then the lights are dimmed in order to deliberately disorient visitors. It gives them the sense that they have been transported in both place and time.82

As visitors walk down Prosperity Junction’s Main Street, they encounter fifteen full-size buildings, a windmill, and a railroad cattle car. Visitors first encounter the Prosperity Junction Livery Stable, which houses a model of a horse and a stagecoach.83 From there, visitors pass the J. J. Garett’s Saddle and Harness Shop, the Union Pacific Train Depot, and O’Brian’s Blacksmith Shop. Visitors can enter most of the buildings, which are filled with period décor and

81 Text panel, National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum. Viewed March 5, 2007.
82 Don Reeves, interview by the author, March 7, 2007, National Cowboy and Western Heritage Center, 5.
83 The National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Personal visit, March 5, 2007.
artifacts. Each structure gives visitors a sense of daily life and labor in the town. Prosperity Junction also alludes to a story of American progress and industry. By juxtaposing the livery, saddle shop, and blacksmith alongside the train depot and railway express, the town tells a story of industrial progress and historical change.84

Walking past the blacksmith and train depot, visitors encounter the Thompson House, the local hotel and restaurant, and the Express Land and Cattle Company. In the middle of these buildings stands a full-size windmill. Moving forward, visitors encounter the local newspaper building, the Prosperity Junction Dispatch, and the Silver Dollar Saloon. Again, each building is furnished and outfitted with objects to indicate their purpose and provide a sense of contextualized place and time.85 Moving farther up Main Street, visitors encounter Osborne Photo Studio. Some buildings, such as the photo studio, provide a more detailed history of specific facets of the American West. The Osborne Photo Studio provides a narrative and photographic history of the settlement of Oklahoma, including discussions of Indian Territory, the land rush, and statehood. Included in this discussion, the exhibit also examines Hollywood depictions of the Oklahoma land runs of 1889 and 1893.86 The exhibit specifically highlights the 1960 film *Cimarron*, starring Glen Ford, Maria Schell, and Anne Baxter.87 In doing so, the building ties together many of the themes present in other museum galleries, such as the Western Performers Gallery and the Joe Grandee Museum of the Frontier West.

Next, guests walk past the Law office of Philip E. Daugherty, and the U.S. Marshall’s office. Both structures, again filled with objects such as handcuffs, firearms, and a holding cell from the New Mexico Territory, tell the story of law, order, and justice on the American frontier.
From there, visitors enter Prosperity Junction’s commercial district. Fleming Mercantile supplies locals with goods of all types and houses the U.S. Post Office. Across the street stands Cattleman’s State Bank, an elegant yet foreboding stone structure, replete with oak counters, teller windows, a safe, desks, and an advertisement for American Express Co. money orders, foreign drafts, and travelers’ cheques. Dr. Edward Calhoon’s home and medical office provide a glimpse of the medical field at the turn of the century. Finally, Blake’s Feed and Seed, the last commercial building hints once again at the town’s economic ties to the cattle industry. Main Street culminates with a one-room schoolhouse and a steepled, gothic revival church. The final two buildings provide a sense of community within Prosperity Junction.

Prosperity Junction attempts to provide an immersive experience for its visitors by recreating the look and sense of place of a turn-of-the-century western cattle town. While lacking many of the facets of living history museums, Prosperity Junction does create a human-free sense of place for its visitors. In doing so, the gallery describes the way of life in American frontier towns and provides a glimpse and specific facets of settlement in the American West.

Of all the museum’s gallery installations, the Joe Grandee Museum of the Frontier West mirrors a more traditional, historical exhibition space. The gallery explores four thematic areas within the broader scope of the history of the American West. Within the 6,500-square-foot gallery, the museum looks at the thematic histories of Native peoples; trappers, traders, and trailblazers; the U.S. military; and the impact of sport hunting in the West. A large, marble panel at the gallery’s entrance explains,

Comprised of more than 5,000 artifacts, The Joe Grandee Museum of the Frontier West is among the most extensive collections of western Americana held in a public institution. Noted artist Joe Ruiz Grandee gathered the material over some
40 years, using many of the artifacts to translate authentic details to his western narrative paintings.

Four topical areas are interpreted in the Grandee Gallery: Native American life on the Great Plains; the role of trappers, traders, and trailblazers in opening the West; the frontier experience of the U.S. Army, and the impact of hunting in the West. Other Grandee objects are exhibited in adjoining galleries and the western town installation.90

As Richard Rattenbury, curator of history at the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum explained, much like the other galleries throughout the museum, the stories told in the Joe Grandee are collections driven. The collection of more than 6,000 artifacts tells a rich history and provides strong interpretations of specific facets of the American West. However, the history is not inclusive—for example, the exhibits give very little attention to the history of mining or homesteading.91

The gallery exhibits begin with an exploration of Plains Indians peoples. As the first inhabitants of the regions of the West, Native Americans are the first to shape the landscape and its history. As the exhibit explains,

Native Americans inhabited the West for centuries before the first Europeans appeared. Affiliated by band and tribe, they developed a rich diversity of life ways and traditions. The most dynamic of these peoples lived on the Great Plains from Canada to Texas; tribes known as the Plains Cree, Blackfeet, Assiniboine, Gros Ventre, Crow, Lakota, Cheyenne, Arapaho, Kiowa, Comanche, and Plains Apache.

Plains Native Americans thrived in a nomadic horse culture sustained by vast buffalo herds and focused on intertribal raiding and warfare. Prior to the mid-19th century, these vibrant people dominated the Great Plains region, sometimes in alliance but more often in competition with one another. Although it may not be accurate, their colorful societies and dramatic histories today represent much of Native American life in popular imagination both here and abroad.92

90 Text panel, National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum. Viewed March 6, 2007.
91 Rattenbury, interview, 4.
92 Text panel, National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum. Viewed March 6, 2007.
The Plains Native American exhibits begin with a presentation of Native handcrafted objects, such as leggings, shirts, beaded moccasins, and saddles.\textsuperscript{93} The artifacts depict the history of Native Peoples and their lifeways. Additionally, scattered throughout the exhibits, text panels provide quotes from non-Native peoples. These quotes contain outside interpretations of Native peoples and provide insight into the Euro-American interpretation of Native culture. The text panels act as a juxtaposition between Native culture and history and historical mythology.\textsuperscript{94}

The exhibit continues to explain that the introduction of the horse forever changed the lives of Plains Indian peoples. The horse provided greater mobility, more efficient hunting, and allowed Native Americans to transport more goods from place to place. Similar to other exhibits throughout the museum’s galleries, this set of display cases houses Native American equine-related objects. The exhibits also focus on artistic and quality craftsmanship, such as an ornately crafted bighorn sheep skin shirt.\textsuperscript{95}

The exhibit alludes to the fact the introduction of the horse, firearms, and other foreign objects arrived with the immigration of non-Native people to the West. The section on “Trappers, Traders, and Trailblazers” addresses the immigration of Euro-Americans to the Plains regions of the West and describes cultural contact between Native Americans and white immigrants to the region. A large glass case filled with a European patterned skin coat, muskets and pistols, pelts, and an assortment of trade goods begins to tell the story of contact and western enterprise.\textsuperscript{96} As the exhibit explains, many frontiersmen came to the West in the early nineteenth century for the economic pursuits of hunting, trading, and trapping. The exhibit notes that the nineteenth century fur trade was an enormous economic venture in the United States and

\textsuperscript{93} The National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Personal visit, March 6, 2007.
\textsuperscript{94} The National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Personal visit, March 6, 2007.
\textsuperscript{95} The National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Personal visit, March 6, 2007.
\textsuperscript{96} The National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Personal visit, March 6, 2007.
Europe. Large text panels throughout the room contain quotes and statements discussing the fur trade and those individuals who took part in the enterprise. The exhibit pays special attention to Castor canadensis, or the beaver. As noted, from the early 1600s to roughly 1840, there existed enormous demand for beaver pelts for European and eventually American fashion.

This section of the exhibit notes that early trappers and traders explored much of what would become the American West. Men such as Jedediah Smith explored regions of the Rocky Mountains, Great Plains, and Columbia Plateau down to the American Southwest in search of profit and adventure. However, as the exhibit explains, their explorations also pushed American expansion and settlement, as well as the idea of manifest destiny. By the 1830s, the fur trade declined. However, during this same time America witnessed increased immigration into the West’s frontier regions. These frontiersmen helped usher in a new wave of expansion. The exhibit explains that “former mountain men applied their valuable knowledge of the West as guides to artists and scientist.” Others, such as Thomas Fitzpatrick and Christopher “Kit” Carson, guided military expeditions and explorations.

As expansion moved further westward, the region experienced an increased presence of the American military. As the exhibits explain, the American military played a vital role in westward expansion by protecting American settlers, enforcing Native American removal treaties, protecting American economic interests, and fighting occasional military campaigns as well. As Don Reeves explained, the museum possesses an encyclopedic collection of artifacts pertaining to the U.S. military and U.S. cavalry in the nineteenth century American West. The museum designed this section of the gallery to resemble a boardwalk inside a military fort. It

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97 The National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Personal visit, March 6, 2007.
98 Text panel, National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum. Viewed March 6, 2007.
100 Reeves, interview, 3.
gives visitors the sense that they transitioned from an open wilderness space to a regimental fort.

The exhibits focused on the U.S. military in the West take an in-depth look at not only the federal military presence in the region, but also the day-to-day lives of people stationed in the Plains region of the United States. As the exhibit explains,

The U.S. Military embodied a multi-faceted sub-culture in the 19th-century West. Native-born white men predominated within this society, but the army actually embraced wide diversity in nationality, race, gender, and even age.

Irish, English, German, and other European emigrants served in large numbers. Following the Civil War, African American troops and Native American scouts represented significant ethnic minorities.

Women, be they wives, laundresses, servants, or prostitutes, exercised a strong influence within the frontier army. And, on more established posts, children also enlivened military life.

No matter their background or place in the army, all observed a strict hierarchy and prescribed etiquette that served to segregate the military family by rank, ethnicity and even gender.101

Objects ranging from standard issue equipment such as binoculars, uniforms, and firearms, to personal effects like photographs and a match case describe the daily lives of personnel station in the West.102

The exhibits utilize the Joe Grandee collections to its fullest extent, providing an encyclopedic account of the U.S. military, specifically the U.S. cavalry in the nineteenth century American West. The numerous exhibits explore the lives of groups such as line officers, enlisted men, infantry, U.S. Dragoons, and a large exhibit discussing the U.S. Cavalry. Each exhibit case displays the uniforms and equipment utilized by the specific rank or group, while additionally providing an explanation of the roles, duties, and daily activities of each group. One exhibit discusses African American Buffalo Soldiers of the Ninth and Tenth Cavalry and Twenty-fourth

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102 The National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Personal visit, March 6, 2007.
and Twenty-fifth Infantry Regiments in the West, and their involvement in the Indian Wars and enforcing removal policies. This section of the gallery pays specific attention to armed combat with Native Americans through a discussion of the Indian Wars. The exhibit discusses in a broad fashion the series of armed conflicts in the West resulting from the federal policies of Indian removal. Similarly, the gallery also devotes exhibit space to the discussion of Native Americans in the U.S. military.

Additionally, an exhibit focuses on Army women. The display notes that,

Women played an influential role in the masculine culture of the frontier army. Their presence leavened the commonness of garrison life and helped to enforce the Victorian mores of the period. With sacrifice, hardship and adventure, army women experienced what one called a life of “glittering misery.”

Reflecting their station in the military caste system, officers’ wives possessed the greatest influence at any post. They provided a measure of social refinement by organizing dinners, musical concerts and theatricals. Some, such as Elizabeth Custer and Martha Summerhayes, recorded fine accounts of army life in the West.

Prior to 1878, regulations allotted for laundresses to each company of soldiers. Often wives of noncommissioned officers, these women also worked as midwives and nurses in emergencies. In contrast, some unmarried laundresses also operated as prostitutes. On established posts, a few families hired household servant girls, but these young women frequently married soldiers within months of their arrival from the East.

Such exhibits not only highlight the diversity of military life in the West, but tell the story of American diversity. As Don Reeves noted, many of these women were immigrants, unable to find work in the East. Thus, a military presence in the frontier West created a dynamic, stratified social life.
Other displays explore the topics of military forts, life on the post, and frontier and firepower. In addition to the objects housed in the individual display cases, the exhibit space displays mannequins of soldiers on horseback and an 1876 breech-loading military battery gun, or “musket length” Gatling gun.\(^{108}\) A separate area devotes discussion and exhibition to the display of military arms and equipment. The exhibit discusses the weapons and gear of each military group stationed in the West [See Images].\(^{109}\) Through the exhibits, the Joe Grandee Museum of the Frontier West tells the story of an American military presence in the West. It explores the diversity of military life and, through its objects, provides a detailed account of military organization and personnel through material culture. It also tells an underlying story of removal, expansion, and manifest destiny.

The final exhibit area of the Joe Grandee Museum of Frontier History focuses on the topic of sport hunting in the West. Designed to resemble an early twentieth century parlor, the gallery’s walls are lined with animal trophies. Inside the exhibit area, visitors encounter a life-size model of two young men overlooking the plains. One man aims a rifle, while the other points to a heard of buffalo grazing in the distance.\(^{110}\) The exhibit explains that,

The 19th-century American West harbored an amazing abundance of wildlife. Before 1880, duck, quail, prairie chicken, wild turkey, prairie dog, rabbit, antelope, deer, elk and buffalo flourished in seemingly unlimited numbers from the eastern Great Plains into the Rocky Mountains. Both Native Americans and Euro-Americans exploited these resources as subsistence hunters seeking food, clothing and shelter, and as market hunters seeking trade and profit. Euro-Americans also pursued the big game animals – antelope, deer, elk, moose, bighorn sheep, buffalo and bear – as recreational sport hunters in the cultural tradition of Europe.

During the 19th century, unregulated hunting had profound and far-reaching effects on the western environment. Market hunters brought several species to near extinction, greatly altering the ecological landscape and contributing to the

\(^{108}\) The National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Personal visit, March 6, 2007.
\(^{109}\) The National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Personal visit, March 6, 2007.
\(^{110}\) The National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Personal visit, March 6, 2007.
destruction of Native American culture on the Great Plains. In reaction, sport hunters began long-term efforts to save these endangered species through state and federal hunting regulations and habitat preservation policies. Today, western lands and wildlife are aided in many ways but the sportsmen – and sportswomen – who actively promote and fund scientific game management while hunting.\textsuperscript{111}

The gallery’s exhibits explore hunting activities on the Great Plains from the nineteenth to early twentieth century. Filled with rifles, skinning knives, and photographs of hunting parties, the first exhibits provide an account of in the West. This first set of exhibits explores both mass-market hunting and sort hunting.\textsuperscript{112} Much like the other displays throughout the gallery, the exhibits throughout the final section are filled with clothing, tools, firearms, and other objects associated with hunting. Fur and skin coats, knives, pistols, rifles, bags, and ammunition all fill the gallery’s cases.

The displays note that the market hunting of buffalo nearly decimated the species and brought further hardship for Native Peoples.\textsuperscript{113} Additionally, they continue to explain that by the end of the nineteenth century, “…sport hunting in the West was the domain of naturalists and aristocrats. Through their writings, these avid sportsmen stimulated an appreciation for western wildlife and the thrill of the chase.”\textsuperscript{114} Both the exhaustive nature of market hunting, and attractive glamour of sport hunting took a heavy toll on wildlife populations in the Plains. The exhibit provides an account of the aristocratic Irish hunter Sir Saint George Gore, who embarked on a hunting trip “…in the mid-1850s with 40 servants, cooks, gun-bearers, dog handlers, teamsters and guides. Gore’s unrestrained slaughter of 2,000 buffalo, more than 100 bears, and 1,500 deer and elk emphasized the crucial need for hunting regulation and a code of ethics even

\textsuperscript{111} Text panel, National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum. Viewed March 6, 2007.
\textsuperscript{112} The National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Personal visit, March 6, 2007.
\textsuperscript{113} Text panel, National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum. Viewed March 6, 2007.
\textsuperscript{114} Text panel, National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum. Viewed March 6, 2007.
among sportsmen. This, when combined with the devastation caused by professional market hunters who “…in the West slaughtered literally millions of wildlife and game animals for profit,” led to the near demise of numerous animal species, including the beaver and buffalo.

As the exhibit continues, it notes that the second half of the nineteenth century marked the *Golden Age* of sport hunting. Railroad expansion provided greater access to remote settings, and some companies promoted and advertised hunting trips where sportsmen could hunt from specially designed train cars. Improvements to firearms and ammunition allowed hunters improve their accuracy and range, and also actively pursue larger game. “Scores of American gentlemen-hunters joined in, including artists Thomas Moran and Albert Bierstadt, military officers George Crook and George Custer, and eastern blue-blood Theodore Roosevelt.”

However, as the exhibit highlights, many of the same individuals noted that the landscape was rapidly vanishing. As the exhibit progresses in its historical discussion, the visitor sees the evolution of not only hunting but industry as well. Photographs depict hunters showing off larger kills and greater numbers of animals, while objects on display, such as ammunition and firearms, progressively become more advanced.

The exhibit notes that by the end of the nineteenth century, most Americans, especially hunters, realized that wildlife populations were rapidly declining, some to the point of extinction. Many well-known gentleman-hunters, including Theodore Roosevelt, began arguing for ethical hunting and regulations to govern the sport. The efforts of such conservation spokesmen resulted in greater state and federal regulation. As the exhibit notes, by 1900, when market hunting was

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115 Text panel, National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum. Viewed March 6, 2007.
118 The National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Personal visit, March 6, 2007.
at least curtailed, many wildlife populations in the West were on the brink of collapse. Throughout the gallery, visitors encounter paintings associated with the hunt, and a replica hunter’s camp. In its exhibition, the exhibits on hunting tackle a fairly controversial subject matter. The topics of hunting, sustainability, conservation, and wildlife management all bring about a great deal of debate in today’s society. Without taking a side on the debate, the exhibit lays out the issues in a historical context so that visitors may formulate their own opinions on the larger issues at hand.

The Joe Grandee Museum of the Frontier West explores four specific themes within the greater history of the American West: Plains Indian life, trade and exploration, the U.S. military, and hunting in the West. Although not overtly discussed, in its exhibition of these themes, the Joe Grandee Museum of the Frontier West tells the larger story of Indian removal and the decimation of traditional lifeways. The gallery begins with a discussion of Native American lifeways. It continues to explore contact and removal through the sections on the fur trade and U.S. military, and concludes with the hunting of wildlife, the primary food sources for the Plains peoples. In a few instances, such as the discussion of the Indian Wars, the exhibits openly discuss the controversial themes of removal and genocide. However, much of the discussion of Native removal exists at a subtler level throughout the gallery.

The National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum tells a story of the American West based on its institutional mission and foundational origins, its collections, and its regional identity. In its initial concept the museum focused on one small aspect of a larger western American history, that of rodeo and cattle culture. Those themes still run throughout all of the museum’s galleries in order to tell a larger, regionally focused history of the American West.

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120 Text panel, National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum. Viewed March 6, 2007.
The museum, much like others discussed in this study, chooses to focus on topics of Native American history, the broader history of the American West, and the West’s role in popular culture. However, the theme of the cowboy and horse and cattle culture still remain the central focus within the larger subject areas presented throughout the museum.
CHAPTER X

THE AUTRY NATIONAL CENTER

Founded in 1984, “The Autry National Center explores the experiences and perceptions of the diverse peoples of the American West, connecting the past with the present to inform our shared future.”¹ Since the institution opened its doors in 1988, similar to other institutions in this study, the Autry became a leader in shaping the ways in which the public perceives and the history of the American West. However, unlike many of its peer institutions, the Autry National Center provides a broader, more encompassing history. As Michael Duchemin, senior curator at the Autry National Center, explained, the institution defines the West as the trans-Mississippi West, which also includes Alaska and Hawaii. The institution’s collections and exhibitions reflect this geographic concept and definition of space. The stories told through the collections span time from pre-contact indigenous stories to the present. Additionally, guided heavily by the scholarship of the New Western Historians, the Autry seeks to tell stories of the diverse peoples who lived in and shaped the history of the American West.² In this, the Autry seeks to explore the diversity, perceptions, environment, region, and peoples of the American West.³

Located in Los Angeles’s Griffith Park, the collections of the 140,000-square-foot, Mission Revival structure houses the Southwest Museum of the American Indian, the Museum of the American West, and the Institute for the Study of the American West.⁴ As visitors walk through the front doors, they see on the wall a brief timeline tracing the history of the Autry

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¹ Mission Statement, Autry National Center, Autry Institute for the Study of the American West, Institutional Archives.
³ Interpretive agenda.
⁴ The Autry National Center, Los Angeles, California. Personal visit, October 31, 2007.
National Center, connecting its roots to the Women in the West Museum, Gene Autry, the Southwest Museum of the American Indian, and Charles Lummis. From there, visitors enter a large, paved courtyard. Signs guide visitors to institutional locations such as the Wells Fargo Theater, the Mary Pickford Education Center, the Golden Spur Café, the museum store, and the Museum of the American West. In the courtyard’s center rests Back in the Saddle Again, a large bronze sculpture of a seated Gene Autry, playing guitar in front of a horse. Around the statue, engraved floor tiles honor donors and friends of the institution. A plaque on the wall honors cofounder, president, and chief executive officer Joanne D. Hale for her leadership and service to the institution. An additional plaque honors the first board of directors and influential individuals involved in the institution’s opening in 1988. A small alcove holds an additional statue of a Native American titled Pueblo Bonita, by artist Doug Hyde.5

As visitors enter the Museum of the American West, they first arrive at a space dedicated to temporary exhibitions. Throughout its history, the Autry National Center exhibited a series of blockbuster temporary exhibitions, such as On Gold Mountain, Culture Cultura, and Powerful Images. During my visit, the Autry National Center displayed a centennial exhibition for its namesake, Gene Autry. From June 22, 2007, to January 13, 2007, the institution exhibited Gene Autry and the Twentieth-Century West: The Centennial Exhibition, 1907-2007. The exhibit explores the life and history of Gene Autry. The exhibit entrance, designed to resemble the front of a movie theater, with marquee and ticket counter, advertised the film South of the Border. To the right, Autry’s five stars from the Hollywood walk of Fame—one each for music, radio, film television, and live performance—all hang from the wall. The exhibit begins with a discussion of Autry’s early career. He began his career in the 1920s in New York and ultimately signed with

5 The Autry National Center, Los Angeles, California. Personal visit, October 31, 2007.
Columbia Records in 1929. However, as the exhibit explains, Autry gained fame as a recording and performing artist on WLS, an independent Chicago radio station owned by Sears, Roebuck and Company. Autry arrived in Chicago in 1932 and called himself the “Oklahoma Yodeling Cowboy.” Autry hosted radio shows and toured throughout the region. Sears also sold Autry recordings, merchandise, and sheet music, helping to make Gene Autry a prominent celebrity. 

Display cases house copies of Autry’s sheet music, one of his guitars from this period, promotions for his tours, and a variety of photographs from this period of his career.

The fame achieved through his radio celebrity resulted in his first Hollywood film role in 1934 with the movie, *In Old Santa Fe*. Autry starred in dozens of films and serials during the 1930s and became a national celebrity. During a difficult time in American history, Autry remained a source of hope and an important aspect of popular culture. The exhibit explains that, Gene Autry was America’s favorite Cowboy from 1937 to 1942. As the Great Depression ended and the nation prepared for war, Autry became a hero to more than one out of four Americans. Every week, forty million fans turned out to see Gene Autry pictures. Fans bought sound recordings, sheet music, and songbooks. They learned to play and sing cowboy’s songs at home. Many saw “Gene Autry, in Person” shows in small-town and neighborhood theaters. Autry toured relentlessly to earn extra income and to promote his films and music. Young women and adolescent boys were his biggest fans. The cowboy’s appeal was strong amongst rural and small-city audiences. In urban areas, he was popular with new immigrants and working-class audiences.

The exhibit continues by explaining that, during the Great Depression, Autry supported President Franklin Delano Roosevelt and his New Deal policies. Such policies were popular among Autry’s fans, and Autry promoted them in his music and films of the era. Autry stated, “While my solutions were a little less complex than those offered by FDR, and my methods a bit more

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8 The Autry National Center, Los Angeles, California. Personal visit, October 31, 2007.
direct, I played kind of a New Deal Cowboy who never hesitated to tackle many of the same problems: the dust bowl, unemployment, or the harnessing of power. This may have contributed to my popularity with 1930s audiences." The exhibit displays depict props from and advertisements for Autry’s films and music from the period.

Not unlike William F. "Buffalo Bill" Cody, Gene Autry helped secure a place for the American West in popular culture. By the 1930s, Autry became a star. As the exhibit notes, "There was pandemonium…like Beatlemania for the 1930s, only around Gene Autry." Autry used his celebrity to support America in its endeavors and promote patriotism in the United States. He strove to become a model for America’s future generations. The exhibit displays a statement Autry made in 1940.

If I can show our youth what it is like to be a real American, then I’m doing a good job. I want to show them that in this country everybody has a chance-just as I did... In the programs we try to keep everything strictly American down to earth. That’s the sort of thing that will do more to knock any Communist, Nazi or other such ideas out of their heads than anything else. As I see it, the way is not to get up and say the Communists and others are wrong. Instead we should show the young people the decent, good things that are in this country; things that don’t exist now in other countries of the world.

As implied in the exhibition, Autry saw his cowboy persona as an image of American patriotism. He purposely used his celebrity status to fight against actions and ideals that he saw to be in opposition of what it meant to be a true Americans, such as communist ideology.

Above the section of the exhibit, a banner hangs from the ceiling that reads, “The New Deal Cowboy 1939-1941.”. In addition to artifacts linked directly to Autry’s career, in this section of the exhibit museum staff installed a sofa, two chairs, and a large wooden radio in a space
designed to resemble a family living room. On the wall hang three images: a young man and child listening to the radio, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt delivering a speech, and Gene Autry singing into a microphone. In this juxtaposition of images, the exhibit suggest that Americans listened to Autry’s message in a similar fashion to the words of Roosevelt in his fireside chats.\textsuperscript{15}

As the exhibit continues, with the onset of World War II, Autry enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Corps. During a live radio broadcast, he… “entered the service as a technical sergeant, a noncommissioned officer.”\textsuperscript{16} He conducted basic training at the Santa Ana Army Air Base but spent most of the war on “…special detail raising money to support the war, including his Sergeant Gene Autry radio show, performed before servicemen between August 2, 1942, and August 1, 1943.”\textsuperscript{17} However, Autry wanted to become a military pilot and serve in this capacity. In 1944 the U.S. Army Air Corps promoted Autry to flight officer, where he served with the ninety-first Ferrying Squadron. During this time, Autry flew airlift operations over the “Burma Hump,” the stretch between India and China.\textsuperscript{18} The exhibit details Autry’s military career as both celebrity and serviceman. Images depict Autry dressed in Cowboy apparel, signing autographs for servicemen, and Autry in his uniform in the cockpit of a plane. Additionally, a display case exhibits Autry’s military uniform and other artifacts from his time in the service.\textsuperscript{19}

Above the next exhibit section hangs a banner bearing the phrase, “The Corporate Cowboy 1946-1960.” Returning from the war, Gene Autry established his business enterprise, Gene Autry, Inc. As a text panel explains,

\textsuperscript{15} The Autry National Center, Los Angeles, California. Personal visit, October 31, 2007.
\textsuperscript{17} Text panel, Autry National Center. Viewed October 31, 2007.
\textsuperscript{18} Text panel, Autry National Center. Viewed October 31, 2007.
\textsuperscript{19} The Autry National Center, Los Angeles, California. Personal visit, October 31, 2007.
In the postwar period, Gene expanded his interests to include financial investments in a variety of projects. Some of these were allied with his professional work, and others ranged far afield. In addition to Gene Autry Productions and Flying A Pictures, the cowboy owned radio stations, newspapers, ranches, rodeos, oil wells, a Western clothing store, merchandising tie-ups, a song publishing company, comic books, and a frozen-food outfit. Specialists in particular lines managed all of his holdings, but the cowboy made all the big decisions. Autry was known as a keen businessman. His office in Hollywood was the center of most of this activity. He also maintained a New York office.²⁰

Just as he did prior to the war, Autry continued to focus heavily on America’s youth in the post-war world. His business ventures designed Gene Autry and cowboy-themed clothing, toys, and a variety of other youth-oriented items, all marketed toward children throughout the United States. As the exhibit notes, “Gene Autry was among the first Western Stars to enter the merchandising field.”²¹ During the 1950s, Autry had established a merchandising empire. As the exhibit notes,

Approximately fifty manufacturers held Autry licenses in 1953. Their aggregate business was estimated to be about $6 million. Factories were located all over the United States and Canada. Directly and indirectly, these companies employed about one million people. Gene Autry goods were sold in over 15,000 retail outlets.²²

As eluded to in photographs displayed throughout the exhibit, Autry frequently performed for and met with children.²³

Despite his enlistment and during the war, and hiatus from the public spotlight, Autry’s career rapidly expanded in the post-war years. On August 14, 1949, Gene Autry headlined the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Championship Rodeo, where he joined rodeo queen Jane Russell and the event’s grand marshal John Wayne before an audience of 100,000 people. The display exhibits a mannequin wearing Autry’s performance outfit, sitting atop a facsimile of a rodeo horse fitted with the champion’s saddle. In the postwar era, Autry continued to star in Hollywood

films, radio broadcasts, and television shows. Additionally, as he did during the Great Depression, Autry continued his mission to promote what he thought to be true American ideals and morals, specifically to American children.

From 1940 to 1956, Autry hosted a weekly CBS radio program, *Melody Ranch*. From 1950 to 1956, he additionally hosted his famed *Gene Autry Show*. To promote his ideals, and address America’s youth, Autry created what he called the “Cowboy Code.” According to the exhibit,

> Gene Autry’s Saturday matinee saddle pals wanted to be just like their hero. Gene responded with the Cowboy Code, sometimes known as the Cowboy Commandments.

THE COWBOY MUST NEVER SHOOT FIRST,
HIT A SMALLER MAN, OR TAKE UNFAIR ADVANTAGE,

HE MUST NEVER GO BACK ON HIS WORD,
OR A TRUST CONFIDED IN HIM,

HE MUST ALWAYS TELL THE TRUTH,

HE MUST BE GENTLE WITH CHILDREN,
THE ELDERLY, AND ANIMALS,

HE MUST NOT ADVOCATE OR POSSESS RACIALLY OR RELIGIOUSLY INTOLERANT IDEAS,

HE MUST HELP PEOPLE IN DISTRESS,

HE MUST BE A GOOD WORKER

HE MUST KEEP HIMSELF CLEAN IN THOUGHT, SPEECH, ACTION, AND PERSONAL HABITS,

HE MUST RESPECT WOMEN, PARENTS, AND HIS NATION’S LAWS,
THE COWBOY IS A PATRIOT.24

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While following many ideals of America’s Cold War mentality, Autry promoted American nationalism through the image of the American, iconic cowboy. At the same time, he continued to expand his enterprises.

In 1949, Gene Autry Productions established Pioneertown as a filming location near Palm Springs, California. As the exhibit notes, “Outdoor scenery was a major selling point for Western films, so filming on location was an essential element in most pictures.” The exhibit panel continues,

Both Gene Autry Productions and Flying A Pictures used Pioneertown to film Westerns until 1953. The flying cowboy commuted by air between the movie location and his Hollywood studio.

During the early 1950s, more than 3,000 visitors flooded the town on weekends, filtering in and out of saloons and restaurants along Mane Street. Autry quit filming at Pioneertown in 1953 because of congestion and development in the area and because the smog was so bad. By 1957 – after more than two hundred Westerns had been filmed at Pioneertown – the movie location had gone bust.

Similarly, in 1952, Gene Autry purchased the former Monogram Ranch, a twenty-two acre back lot with recording studios and sound stages. Autry renamed the location Melody Ranch. At the same time, thousands of listeners tuned in to the CBS radio network on Saturday evenings to hear the Gene Autry Show. Each week, an average of 250,000 listeners across the nation tuned in to Autry’s family program, which broadcasted on 174 stations and continuously ranked in the top twenty network shows throughout the country.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, Gene Autry continued his celebrity and corporate success. Through radio, film, and music performances, he captured the attention of audiences both young and old. Autry retired from performing in 1964. However, despite leaving show

business, he continued with his business investments. The final exhibition section, titled “The Cowboy 1960-1980,” focuses on the final stage of Autry’s career. Toward the end of his life, Autry focused on his business investments, as well as his personal passions. As the exhibit notes, Autry invested heavily in radio, real estate, and television, while his previous investments and partnerships continued to flourish as well. Autry, who had a passion for baseball, acquired ownership of the Los Angeles Angels in 1961, and during his career as owner said in 1979, “I’ve won everything I could except the pennant and the World Series. I’d like to win that.”

In the 1980s, Autry sold a number of his investments to help finance one of his remaining visions: a museum of the American West. In 1985, his wife Jackie Autry said, “My husband has always wanted three things in life. He has wanted a World Series ring, he has wanted an Academy Award, and he has wanted a museum. I know I can’t get him the first two, but I think I can get him a museum.” The exhibit closes with an exploration of the establishment of the Autry National Center. Throughout his life, Gene Autry played a central role in popularizing the American West. Like Buffalo Bill Cody, Autry started as a showman, but as the exhibit shows, over time, Autry played a much more central role in shaping the overall ideal of how Americans consumed and understood the American West.

As visitors leave the exhibit *Gene Autry and the Twentieth Century West*, they enter the *Showcase Gallery*, which provides exhibit space from temporary and special exhibits. At the time of my visit, the *Showcase Gallery* displayed an exhibition of photographs from the Braun Research Library Collection titled *Picturing the People*. The exhibit showcases the Braun’s collection of nineteenth century Native American photographs. As the exhibit’s first text panel

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29 The Autry National Center, Los Angeles, California. Personal visit, October 31, 2007.
explains, “Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, Euro-American photographers traversed the American West to portray a “vanishing race” of Native Americans.” The photographs served as a continuation of the longstanding practice, beginning with colonial artists, to artistically represent and culturally define Native peoples. It continues to explain that,

Around 1900, however, Native photographers began making their own photographs. Over the past several decades that work has flourished, as indigenous artists have claimed their images and redefined themselves, their communities, and their world.

This exhibition presents historic and contemporary photographs of Indigenous peoples of North and South America, the Pacific, and the Middle East. Native American guest curators divided the exhibition into two sections. The right side of the gallery space exhibitions presents Photographs From the Braun Research Library Collection. This section of the exhibit highlights images by a group of Native American guest curators. The left section of the gallery space displays, Our People, Our Land, Our Images: International Indigenous Photographs. This portion highlights images created by Native peoples not only in the American West but around the world as well.

The right portion of the exhibition, Photographs From the Braun Research Library Collection, highlights a selection of historical photographs, or “pictures.” As an exhibit text panel indicates, historically, Euro-American photographers photographed Native peoples in attempts to romanticize Native Americans. Yet, at the same time, Native Americans viewed these images in a different way. They see them as “family portraits in an album.”

The exhibit showcases dozens of images of Native peoples from throughout the West. The exhibit provides a

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broad representation of different photographic methods, from wet-plate processing to stereographic images. 37

The left portion of the exhibition hall presents a similar collection of images. However, the idea behind these images drastically diverges from those of the Braun Research Library Collection. In “Our People, Our Land, Our Images: International Indigenous Photographs,” the collection of images provides a visual history and narrative of Native peoples throughout the world. This section is divided into three portions. The first, Our Past, exhibits a collection of historical photographs of Native culture, produced by indigenous peoples. 38 The second section, Our Present, examines contemporary lives of indigenous peoples and indigenous lands, as recorded by Native photographers. 39 The third section highlights photographs of younger generations of Native Peoples. 40 The three sections that make up the exhibit Our People, Our Land, Our Images: International Indigenous Photograph serve two purposes. They visually tell the stories of indigenous peoples from throughout the world, from the past to the present. The images tell stories of Native peoples and places throughout history. At the same time, the exhibit highlights Native art, by showcasing photographs taken by Native artists.

After leaving the Showcase Gallery, visitors walk through a corridor filled with sculptures toward the museum’s permanent collections. 41 The Autry’s permanent exhibitions revolve around the “spirit” of the West. In 2004, the Autry National Center launched its inaugural issue of the museum’s magazine, Convergence. The idea of convergence captured the Autry’s vision of the American West as a multiethnic, multicultural, and multifaceted region and

38 The Autry National Center, Los Angeles, California. Personal visit, October 31, 2007.
41 The Autry National Center, Los Angeles, California. Personal visit, October 31, 2007.
community. For the Autry, this spirit of convergence flows through all facets of the history of the American West, and the permanent exhibitions endeavor to highlight these themes. As Stephen Aron explained, this idea of convergence is critical to understanding the history of the American West. He argues that the nation of convergence informs the ways in which people came together, sustained life, and lived side by side in the regions of the West. Aron explained,

…the central metaphor, the ruling principle or idea, the precept that we’ve established here is this idea of convergence; the West as a place of convergence, and what that means, and how it recreates and reshapes everybody’s world here, and how none of us are in this alone, and we’re all a product. No culture is built in isolation. We’re all in some way a product of a combination of peoples, and ideas, and cultures that shape, have shaped, and will shape this region.  

This critical idea informed the development of the museum’s exhibitions. Traditionally, most museums build their exhibits from existing collections. However, the Autry chose to begin with a theoretical framework and central idea. The exhibits and stories evolved from the larger concepts and questions. From one gallery to the next, artifacts blend into the various thematic concepts and make the transition between galleries appear as if the audience is traveling through thematic Western landscapes.

After leaving the temporary exhibition galleries, visitors next encounter The Spirit of Romance Gallery. This gallery houses and features the Autry National Center’s collection of western art. As the exhibition hall’s name eludes, the Spirit of Romance Gallery explores romantic products and interpretations of the American West. The gallery looks at the ways in which art, literature, and theater shaped popular images of the American West in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Like most of the Autry’s permanent installations, the gallery’s exhibits include few text panels and little interpretive discussion, allowing the objects to tell the

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43 Aron, interview.
stories and the visitors to interpret the gallery’s overall themes for themselves. Through the
exhibition of primarily nineteenth century western art, the gallery divides its displays into three
sections: “The Land as Landscape,” “Inventing Icons,” and “The West That Was.” The gallery
exhibit begins with the display of the museum’s collection of landscapes. In the nineteenth
century, landscape artists such as Thomas Moran, Thomas Cole, and Albert Bierstadt began a
new tradition in American art by focusing on the American West as their subject matter.

As visitors begin their tour through the gallery, they first encounter Thomas Moran’s
famous piece *The Mountain of the Holy Cross*. In 1874, Moran visited Colorado’s Mountain of
the Holy Cross after viewing William Henry Jackson’s photograph of the location. The
photograph inspired Moran to paint the landscape, and his piece came to symbolize manifest
destiny, and American expansion. John Gast’s *American Progress* further distills the idea of
manifest destiny with his imagery of immigrants traveling westward to conquer the landscape, all
the while guided by an angel who watches over their journey. Alfred Jacob Miller’s piece
*Indian Encampment* depicts a romantic, mountainous landscape occupied by a band of Native
Americans. Similarly, Albert Bierstadt’s *Mountain Lake* places viewers at the edge of a lake,
where off in the distance, the sun peaks through the clouds to illuminate a backdrop of
mountainous peaks. In addition to the romantic paintings of Bierstadt, Moran, Miller, and other
nineteenth century artists, the gallery also displays period furnishings such as a parlor chair,
silver serving ware, and a 1903 Steinway piano, the back of which has been decorated with a
mural of a Plains Indian encampment by Edwin Willard Deming. The pairing of art and

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furnishings provides audiences with an immersive experience, and gives viewers the sense that they are in a turn-of-the-century parlor.

The gallery’s next section, “Inventing Icons,” centers on popular and iconic images and figures of the West by exploring frontier life through art. This collection of paintings, while still displaying romantic notions of western history, focuses on imagery embraced by popular ideas of the American West, such as pioneering immigrants and Native Americans. Additionally, the section exhibits a large body of work by well-known artists such as Charles Christian Nahl, Ernest Narjot, Charles Deas, and Arthur Fitzwilliam Tait. 48 The final section, “The West That Was,” focuses on cowboy art, specifically through the works of Charles M. Russell and Frederic Remington, the gallery dedicates a significant portion of exhibition space to William F. “Buffalo Bill” Cody and his Wild West show. As the exhibit indicates, Buffalo Bill played a key role in securing a place for the American West in popular culture and creating its modern mythos. Display cases house artifacts owned by Wild West celebrities like Doc Carver, Annie Oakley, and Buffalo Bill.

From the displays of the Wild West show, visitors transition into the next permanent exhibit gallery, The Spirit of the Imagination. This gallery continues the exploration of the West’s role in popular culture. The Spirit of Imagination Gallery examines the ways in which radio, film, television advertising, mass media, and art have shaped our images and ideas about the American West and its inhabitants. Curators designed the gallery space to resemble a central street of a western film. Throughout the gallery space, video and sound installations provide an audiovisual history of Western popular culture. The film set exhibit displays showcase movie props and memorabilia in their storefronts and windows. 49

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The gallery exhibition begins by exploring the popular place of the Western in early radio, theater, and film. Film posters and memorabilia highlight early works, such as Owen Wister and Kirke LaShelle’s stage version of *The Virginian*, and *The Life and Adventures of Buffalo Bill: Actual Scenes in Moving Pictures by Cody Himself*. Like *The Spirit of Romance Gallery*, the exhibits in *The Spirit of Imagination* include minimal interpretive text. Rather, the gallery immerses visitors in a Western film setting, allowing the audience to travel through the West’s popular history as they move through the exhibition space. As visitors progress through the gallery space, the exhibits center their focus on the Western in film. Through posters, costumes, and props, the displays stress the powerful impact the Western had on popular film in the early twentieth century.

As visitors pass through gallery’s constructed film set, they enter an open space filled with glass display cases and lined by borders designed to look like film strips depicting iconic images from Western films. At the exhibit’s entrance, a text panel explains,

> On display in the Imagination Gallery are costumes, props, posters, and other materials used by actors, writers, promoters, and fans. The American West as portrayed in popular culture is an essential part of the history of the region. Film, television, and radio programs originating in the United States and other countries disseminated notions and images of the West around the world. As cultural documents, these entertainments can show the ambivalence of frontier life and explore complex questions of race, class, gender, and American culture in the twentieth century.

For example, the 1920s and 1930s Westerns made specifically for African Americans acknowledge the reality of segregated cinemas. Cowboy musicals, which are seemingly simple-minded, became profound statements on the human condition when understood as diversions from people suffering during the Great Depression: cheerful songs for desperate times. In 1950s living rooms, children watched happy and friendly cowboys on television. In contrast, adults adjusting to life after the Second World War could go to the movie theater to see Western heroes and villains who struggled with their own circumstances.

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50 The Autry National Center, Los Angeles, California. Personal visit, October 31, 2007.
51 The Autry National Center, Los Angeles, California. Personal visit, October 31, 2007.
The exhibit asks audiences to think about their own lives within the context of the displays. It asks them to think about their favorite films, shows, and songs about the American West. It asks them to think about the time and setting of their favorite Westerns, and to contemplate the appeal. Unlike similar galleries and museums, the *Spirit of Imagination Gallery* asks visitors to contextualize and think critically about the role of the West in American popular culture. Much like the *Spirit of Romance Gallery*, the exhibits seek to explore the roles played by the television and film industries in the history of the American West, but they highlight the fact that the exhibits are products of popular culture.

The exhibits within the gallery provide a nearly encyclopedic display of the Western in popular culture. From toys and memorabilia to television and film costumes and props, the exhibits highlight such Westerns as *The Lone Ranger*, *Gunsmoke*, and *Walker Texas Ranger*. From comedies to drama, the gallery showcases Western films like *City Slickers II*, *the Wild Bunch*, *the Grey Fox*, and *Unforgiven*. One display specifically looks at the impact of John Wayne, exploring his career in such films as *El Dorado*, *Fort Apache*, and *Rooster Cogburn*.53 The gallery highlights the careers of Western stars like Monte Hale, Roy Rogers, Dale Evans, Gene Autry, Tom Mix, Tim McCoy, and Hoot Gibson. Additionally, the gallery explores the influence of Native American actors and the portrayal of Native peoples in popular culture, from art to film. As the exhibit explains,

> As many as 10,000 Western films and television shows have been produced since the late 1890s. A large percentage of these releases featured Native Americans, making them icons in popular culture. However, few films and television programs provided a balanced view of the people. Movies and television programs regularly divided Native Americans into two categories: the “bad Indians” who were murderers or drunks, and “noble savages” who were stoic friends to whites or children.54

53 The Autry National Center, Los Angeles, California. Personal visit, November 1, 2007.
Each display case, filled with costumes, props, and movie posters, provides a narrative overview of the Western in popular culture.

After leaving the *Spirit of Imagination Gallery*, visitors travel to the museum’s lower level, where they enter *Heritage Court*, a 2,200-square-foot indoor space with a 140-foot long mural covering room’s walls. A text panel ask visitors what they think of when they imagine someone from the West. It asks if images of cowboys or Indians come to mind, or if their images are influenced by popular culture.\(^{55}\) While not overtly stating, both *The Spirit of Romance* and *The Spirit of Imagination* suggest that the American West shaped and influenced people through the world. While the West had a profound impact on popular culture, as the previous galleries indicated, that influence was often romantic, mythic, and imaginative. The mural in *Heritage Court* really encapsulates the Autry’s idea of convergence and sets the stage for the remaining permanent galleries.

The mural in *Heritage Court* portrays a multicultural history of the American West. The room’s left panel begins with images of petroglyphs, prehistoric hunters and gathers, and Pueblo settlement in the Southwest, the mural tells the story of the first settlement of the region. From there the mural depicts Spanish conquest and the establishment of Franciscan missions. To the right, the mural explores the lives of the Plains Indians, the Sun Dance, and the Mandan Buffalo Bull Society. From there the mural incorporates images of American expansion west: fur trappers in the 1820s, gold miners in the 1850s, and nineteenth-century immigrants.

The mural’s center panel explores transportation and conquest through images of the stagecoach and locomotive, and the U.S. cavalry. It highlights notions of community by depicting Plains farmers as explorers and trappers, European immigrants, a teacher, a ranch

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foreman and a lawman alongside a Crow man, a Hopi woman, a Chinese laborer, a Hispanic woman, the cowboy Nat Love, and a California vaquero. The panel also shows the artist Charles M. Russell and Billy the Kid. The center panel bears the title *Spirit of the West*. Below the title stand the words Discovery, Opportunity, Conquest, Community, Cowboy, Romance, and Imagination—the names of the museum’s galleries. The room’s right panel incorporates western images from popular and national culture. Present are representations of William Jackson, Theodore Roosevelt, Buffalo Bill Cody, Sitting Bull, Annie Oakley, Bill Pickett, Will Rogers, Buck Jones and his horse Silver, John Ford, Tom Mix and his horse Tony, Gary Cooper, John Wayne, Gene Autry and his horse Champion, Dale Evans, Roy Rogers, the Lone Ranger and his horse Silver, Tonto and his horse Scout, Clint Eastwood, and James Arness. The mural encapsulates the Autry’s idea of convergence. It highlights the fact that the American West is not one single place, moment in time, or historical event. Rather, it is an amalgamation, or cumulative product, of numerous peoples, events, times, and places and experiences.56

Just off of Heritage Court, the Autry provides visitors with the opportunity to experience the landscape and environment of the West. Visitors have the option to walk through the *Trails West* exhibit, which provides a display of different Western environments in an outdoor setting. The exhibit notes,

Where is the West? Scholars across disciplines have made many claims as they try to define the exact location of the American West. Everyone seems to agree that the west includes all the territory from the Front Range of the Rocky Mountains to the Sierra Nevada and Cascade Range. There is no consensus about the rest of the region west of the Mississippi River. Some people argue that the West is not a real place at all, but a state of mind. The truth is there are many Wests and many trails west. The Autry Museum can help you explore them all.57

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56 The Autry National Center, Los Angeles, California. Personal visit, November 1, 2007.
The exhibit leads visitors along paved paths through western landscapes composed of plains, mountains, deserts, and prairies. Along the paths, audiences are encouraged to interact with displays, allowing them to, for example, pan for gold. Visitors encounter along the way a mail coach, and a general store with outrageously inflated prices, as would have been typical in a western boomtown. The exhibit explains the importance of the western landscape to the motion picture industry and the West of popular culture. A text panel explains that directors such as John Ford often filmed on location to capture the authentic look and feel of the American West.58

Once back inside, visitors are led back to the museum’s permanent exhibition galleries. The next gallery, the *Spirit of the Cowboy Gallery*, which examines the history of one of the West’s most popular and iconic images, the American cowboy. Through a rich exhibition of material culture, the gallery explores the history of the working and mythical cowboy over the last several hundred years. The *Spirit of the Cowboy Gallery* combines into one thematic exhibition the themes presented at the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum in the *American Cowboy Gallery* and *The American Rodeo Gallery*. The exhibit begins with a discussion of ranching’s Spanish roots, and the Latino workers, who established the industry in America up to the working cowboy of today. As the exhibit notes,

The land grant ranches of Californians who first had been citizens of Spain and then Mexico were attractive to the Americans who settled there during the gold rush. They slowly acquired the old land grants through purchase and by marrying into the old families. The ranches of southern California supplied plenty of beef to thousands of newcomers.

They also supplied vaqueros, cowboys well versed in herding stock, breaking horses, and caring for ranches. Many of these workers were of Mexican heritage; many were California Indians. Each learned traditions of riding and working that had been developed in Mexico, Spain, and Morocco. Their equipment and dress, which had originated in Mexico, were usually manufactured in small shops and factories which developed in growing towns. In fact, the styles and shapes of much of this equipment, which were a mixture of California traditions and

58 The Autry National Center, Los Angeles, California. Personal visit, November 1, 2007.
American conventions, were adopted and promoted by manufacturers that supplied cowboys throughout the West.\textsuperscript{59}

The gallery begins with a discussion of the early origins of ranching. A large display exhibits a life-size taxidermied cow, and another exhibits the garb of a Spanish vaquero. The exhibit notes that the Spanish brought both horses and cattle to America, thus establishing a herding and ranching tradition.\textsuperscript{60}

Through an exhibition of Spanish colonial material culture, such as horse equipment, firearms, saddles, chaps, boots, and spurs, the first section of the gallery looks at the origins of the Spanish vaquero and the establishment of the cattle industry in the American southwest and California by the early nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{61} This section ends by explaining that,

By the end of the nineteenth century, the glory days of California’s ranches were over. Very few of the old families retained their ranch lands or political power. Yet as America became more urbanized and industrial, many Americans felt nostalgic for a simpler, more pastoral time. Southern California responded by celebrating the region’s “Spanish” past as a happy, gracious, and carefree time. \textit{Californias} (Spanish Californians) of the old elites eagerly revived their culture as a romantic ideal. In the early twentieth century, they helped to organize parades, pageants, and fiestas; recreated Mexican music and dance; and demonstrated vaquero skills on richly decorated horses.\textsuperscript{62}

From there, the gallery proceeds chronologically to systematically explore the evolution of the cattle culture and cowboy within American history.

The next section focuses on the expansion of the cattle industry in the American West, specifically in Texas. As the exhibit explains,

Though the expansive ranges of Texas were dry and covered with mesquite, a vast herd of longhorn cattle thrived there. After the Civil War, many herds were driven to rail towns in Kansas to be shipped to Chicago and other points east. A hungry nation demanded beef and Texas supplied it. Drought, lighting storms, disease,
and conflicts with Indians and farmers all made the cowboy’s work more
difficult.63

Again, the displays exhibit a wide variety of material culture associated with the working
cowboy, such as saddles, spurs, chaps, and horse equipment. A large map shows how cattle
drives used trails established in the second half of the nineteenth century to move cattle north to
markets.64

Throughout this section, numerous displays exhibit the tools and equipment of working
cowboys and depict life on the range. Photographs show working cowboys in the West during
the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Displays exhibit mannequins of cattleman
performing daily tasks such as roping horses, tending to fences, branding cattle, and even
relaxing or at play. Within these displays, the gallery explores different types of rope and saddles
utilized working with horses, issues of cattle branding and cattle rustling, fencing and the
introduction of barbed wire, and free time on the range. The display of the cowboy at play
explores music and dance, hand crafts, and also skilled competition, which led to the invention of
rodeo. A large, central display depicts a chuckwagon, highlighting food preparation and living
conditions on the range. A separate display depicts a bunkhouse.65 One exhibit notes the role
played by women in the West, specifically in Wild West show. This section of the gallery also
highlights regional diversity in ranching practices throughout the West, by focusing on cowboys
in the Northern Plains, Texas, Wyoming, Nebraska, and California. Each display exhibits
regional clothing and equipment to highlight the diversity.66

64 The Autry National Center, Los Angeles, California. Personal visit, November 1, 2007.
65 The Autry National Center, Los Angeles, California. Personal visit, November 1, 2007.
66The Autry National Center, Los Angeles, California. Personal visit, November 1, 2007.
The final section of the gallery examines the working cowboy of today and looks at the ways in which the profession changed over time yet still plays an integral role. This section also discusses the role of rodeo in modern cowboy culture, including rodeo.

The exhibit notes,

Today’s cowboy may be a man, woman, young or old; may work for a ranch full time or seasonally; may come from a ranch family or the inner city; may work on a line camp or in a feed lot. They all have in common a love for their profession, and a deep respect for the cowboy who rode before them.67

The exhibits depict contemporary clothing, tools, and equipment, much of which is similar to that of the nineteenth century. However, the exhibits also note that modern technology, such as the airplane, has changed the ways in which the profession operates today.68

Housed within the Spirit of the Cowboy Gallery, the McCormick Tribune Foundation Family Discovery Gallery provides a more contemporary view of western life. One of the museum’s most popular attractions, the gallery provides a multicultural learning opportunity, which seeks to promote cultural heritage and foster an appreciation for diversity. Since its opening in 1992, the gallery displays have focused on the lives of a collection of diverse immigrant communities and families. During the time of my visit, the exhibit displayed the home and adjacent business belonging to a Chinese immigrant family. Through the personal belongings and immersive settings, families immerse themselves in the lives of a Los Angeles immigrant family.69

The Spirit of the Cowboy Gallery transitions into the Spirit of Community Gallery. The gallery begins by displaying a large plat map for the town of Tombstone, Arizona. Next to the

68 The Autry National Center, Los Angeles, California. Personal visit, November 1, 2007.
69 The Autry National Center, Los Angeles, California. Personal visit, November 1, 2007.
map, a text panel asks the question, “Why did some western communities become violent places?” The panel continues to explain,

This map of Tombstone Arizona was printed in 1881, the same year as the “Gunfight at the O.K. Corral.” The violent showdown has become famous, but it does not tell us the whole story of conflict in the West. By looking closely at the map, we can discover a few clues about why people turned against one another in western communities.

The exhibit explains that population density, diversity, and land disputes all may have led to conflict in this specific community. Through a rich collection of objects and images, the gallery explores the creation of community in the West, and the ways in which diverse people interacted and sometimes came into conflict with one another.

The gallery exhibits begin with a discussion of law and order in the West. The exhibit notes that,

The rapid development of Western communities quickly led to the establishment of laws and agencies to enforce them. Courts and law officers existed at state, territorial, county and town or city levels. Community standards which codified expectations of behavior were common and situations were rare when citizens in boom towns organized as vigilantes to take control from those beyond the law. Gunfights were rare and many communities adopted ordinances against gambling, drinking and prostitution.

As alluded to in the exhibit’s text panel, the gallery’s first section focuses on the topic of law and order. The exhibit features discussions of law and lawlessness, a reconstructed jail cell, as well as collections of firearms and personal objects from famous lawmen and outlaws, such as John Wesley Harding, Pat Garrett, Jesse James, James Butler Hickok, Wyatt Earp, Dr. John Henry “Doc” Holiday, Billy the Kid, and the Dalton Gang. A large, wall-mounted case displays sheriff’s badges from towns throughout the West, and an exhibit case discusses the Wells Fargo

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72 The Autry National Center, Los Angeles, California. Personal visit, November 6, 2007.
Company. The gallery provides a great deal of exhibition space to the display of firearms and related equipment, such as gun belts and early bulletproof vests. The exhibit notes,

Few Westerners were gunfighters, although many carried handguns for protection and hunting or for the sake of appearance. Prior to the 1850s, many pistols were carried in saddle holsters or thrust into waist belts. During that decade, increased popularity of the revolver led to the standard practice of carrying handguns in holsters on a belt.

Housed within the gallery space, audiences are invited to take a closer look at western arms in the Greg Martin Gallery. The gallery showcases a collection of Colt firearms and munitions. The displays exhibit Colt firearms from the nineteenth century, beginning with an 1835 prototype Colt revolver. The gallery space exhibits a large array of revolvers, handguns, rifles, shotguns, and muskets, along with other firearms from the nineteenth century, including a Colt Model 1893 Bulldog Gatling gun. The exhibit displays firearms from Hollywood films, such as Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid and Pancho Villa. Additionally, the exhibit showcases examples of finely engraved pistols and revolvers.

The exhibit concludes with an examination of the famed gunfight at the O.K. Coral. A large display sets the scene where Billy Claiborne, Ike and Billy Clanton, and Tom and Frank McLaury engaged in battle with town Marshal Virgil Earp, Morgan Earp, Wyatt Earp, and Doc Holliday. Display cases exhibit firearms used in the gunfight by its participants, and a map drawn by Wyatt Earp in his recollection of the event. From there, visitors enter the Anheuser-Busch Gallery. This exhibit, designed in the appearance of a nineteenth century saloon, provides

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74 The Autry National Center, Los Angeles, California. Personal visit, November 6, 2007.
76 The Autry National Center, Los Angeles, California. Personal visit, November 6, 2007.
77 The Autry National Center, Los Angeles, California. Personal visit, November 6, 2007.
78 The Autry National Center, Los Angeles, California. Personal visit, November 6, 2007.
80 The Autry National Center, Los Angeles, California. Personal visit, November 6, 2007.
audiences with a glimpse of nineteenth-century nightlife amusements. A large bar frames the back of the room. As the exhibit explains,

The Saloon was a social center in many Western communities, combining tobacco and liquor store, bar, restaurant, billiards parlor, and gambling hall. Some saloons served as dance halls, theaters, and fraternal meeting places as well. Not everyone found these gathering places desirable. Saloons sometimes face opposition from early temperance movements and community leaders opposed to gambling and other questionable activity.\textsuperscript{81}

The walls, lined with paintings and exhibit cases, display a variety of games of chance and other saloon paraphernalia.\textsuperscript{82} On the right wall, the exhibit displays an upright piano and Edison multiphone. The exhibit notes that saloons showcased music in a variety of forms throughout the day and night in order to draw in customers.\textsuperscript{83}

The final exhibition space within the \textit{Spirit of Community Gallery} explores the diverse peoples who immigrated to and ultimately settled throughout the American West. The gallery space explores the idea of community in the West. It begins with a display that examines the place of western communities in 1890. Centered along the wall, a map of the Trans-Mississippi West provides a visual representation of community settlement in the West. Surrounding the map, text panels discuss topics of segregation, urbanization, relations between communities, and community development. The exhibit explains that, “The community profiles in this gallery are set in the period from 1885 to 1895. This presentation allows visitors to compare and contrast similarities between communities in an era of great transition in the American West.”\textsuperscript{84}

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\textsuperscript{81} Text panel, Autry National Center. Viewed November 6, 2007.
\textsuperscript{82} The Autry National Center, Los Angeles, California. Personal visit, November 6, 2007.
\textsuperscript{83} The Autry National Center, Los Angeles, California. Personal visit, November 6, 2007.
\textsuperscript{84} Text panel, Autry National Center. Viewed November 6, 2007.
community groups resided throughout the West. The exhibit notes that the end of the nineteenth century witnessed the rise of western, urban populations. It explains that,

As the twentieth century neared, rural communities were in decline. More and more, new communities formed in urban enclaves scattered among the emerging western cities. Technological advancement, especially improvements in transportation and communications, encouraged urban growth and global interaction with the American West.85

Yet, the exhibit also notes that segregation existed in the West. It explains that,

Communities in the American West of 1890 were segregated by race, ethnicity, and religion. Sometimes groups divided themselves into segregated communities. Often involuntary segregation, initiated by people in control of government and business, led to struggles for dignity in defense of human rights.86

The exhibit continues to explain that diverse communities in the West frequently interacted, thus exchanging cultural ideas and beliefs. At the same time, this contact and interaction sometimes resulted in the rejection of foreign ideas and beliefs, and in the alienation and oppression of certain ethnic and cultural communities.87

Designed to mimic a town setting, the exhibit room houses a number of displays, all intended to resemble homes and storefronts, each designed in a different architectural style to provide distinction and to suggest segregation among each community group. Yet, the organization of the displays places the community groups in close proximity of one another, to suggest interaction. Each display focuses on a different community group in the West, centering around the year 1890, the year in which the U.S. Census Bureau defined the West as settled, and officially closed the frontier. However, the Autry arranged the displays and cases in such a way that enables visitors to look through one display to the next. It forces audiences to bend the

displays and their represented cultural and ethnic groups. In this, the exhibit creates the idea of an integrated community by allowing visitors to view one display while simultaneously experiencing others.88

The exhibit space begins with a discussion of European immigration to the West. It notes,

About 702,000 Europeans, about 10 percent of the total in the United States, lived in the West in 1890. Nearly one-half of these immigrants lived in segregated ethnic enclaves in Western cities. One third [of them] were German, followed by the Irish as the second largest European immigrant group in the West. Also notable because of their numbers were English, Swedish, Norwegian, Danish, and Russian communities.

European emigration to the United States was primarily a response to social and economic changes. Transportation improvements also played a significant role. Emigration agents, guidebooks, newspapers, and published letters advised and directed emigrants. Private correspondence undoubtedly was the most important source of advice and stimulus to emigration, particularly when passage money was sent from friends or relatives already in America.89

Filled with images and objects, the display discusses aspects of labor, community development, religion, arts and entertainment, and family among immigrant communities.90

The next section begins with a discussion on Hispanic and Mexicano communities in the West. The display explains,

About 300,000 people of Mexican decent living in the West in 1890 described themselves as Mexicanos. Mexicano communities included both Mexican Americans and new immigrants from Mexico. New Mexico was home to the oldest Mexicano settlements, colonized in the late 1500s. Mexicanos settled the Texas towns of San Antonio in 1718 and Laredo in 1755. In Arizona, Tubac and Tucson were established in 1751 and 1776 respectively. San Diego de Alcala, founded in 1769, was the first of twenty-one mission colonies and four presidios military colonies that extended for five hundred miles up the California coast by 1819.

The Texas Rebellion in 1836 created tension between the United States and Mexico. When the United States annexed Texas in 1845, Mexico broke all diplomatic relations. The American invasion of Mexico in May 1846 began a

88 The Autry National Center, Los Angeles, California. Personal visit, November 6, 2007.
90 The Autry National Center, Los Angeles, California. Personal visit, November 6, 2007.
brutal, unrestrained military campaign that did not end until early 1848. Under terms of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, Mexico was forced to accept the Rio Grande as its border with Texas and surrender nearly half of its territory. The United States forced Mexico to sell the present-day states of California, New Mexico, Nevada, and parts of Colorado, Arizona, and Utah – overt one million square miles – for $15 million.\(^9^1\)

The display’s text panel provides historical background for the Mexicano communities of the American West. At the same time, the artifacts housed within the display provide a window through which to examine the community, in exploring topics of labor, religion, and other facets of Mexicano culture.\(^9^2\)

The next display examines what the gallery broadly refers to as Asian communities in the West. As the display explains,

The earliest Asian communities in the American West were established by emigrants from China during the gold rush. By 1890 nearly 100,000 people of Chinese descent resided throughout the West, the majority in California. Many lived in “Chinatowns,” districts that were part of cities, mining camps, and farming towns.

Economic depression during the late 1870s led to conflicts between organized labor and big business. White workers targeted Chinese laborers as scapegoats. Congress responded by passing the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882. By 1885, mounting anti-Chinese sentiment led to a brutal attack in Rock Springs, Wyoming. White coal miners working for the Union Pacific Railroad rampaged through the local Chinese community killing 28 miners and wounding fifteen. In Seattle and Tacoma, Washington, white residents evicted all Chinese residents, putting them on a barge to San Francisco with warnings not to return.

Further provocation came with the Geary Act in 1892, which extended the exclusion of Chinese laborers from entering the United States for ten years. Immigrant Chinese had one year to register under the act; most failed to comply and were hence subject to deportation. By 1893, riots and boycotts in San Francisco and farming districts in California created conditions approximating civil war.\(^9^3\)

\(^9^2\) The Autry National Center, Los Angeles, California. Personal visit, November 6, 2007.
Similar to the display discussing Mexicano communities, this text panel and accompanying map of settlement patterns provides historical background for the settlement of Asian communities in the West. At the same time, artifacts and images provide a view of communities in the West. The juxtaposition of textual information and objects provides two different notions of community.\textsuperscript{94} Much like the display of Mexicano communities, the text highlights issues of conflict raised as a result of the multicultural nature of Western communities, while the objects displayed portray thriving, cohesive communities all contributing to the establishment of western communities. This duality highlights the reality of multiethnic and multicultural communities throughout the American West.

The next display explores the establishment of Euro-American communities. The exhibit notes that,

In 1890, the director of the U.S. census announced that the “country’s unsettled area has been so broken into by isolated bodies of settlement that there can hardly be said to be a frontier line.” The last twenty five years of the nineteenth century saw an explosion of settlement in the West Motivated by unhappiness at home, economic downturns, and the desire for opportunity, emigrants from the East and Midwest spread throughout the region. Farmers desperate for and moved into Kansas, Nebraska, the Dakotas, and parts of Wyoming and Montana. Between 1870 and 1900, 430,000,000 acres were peopled and 225,000,000 acres were placed under cultivation by nearly one million farmers.

The new world being created in the West was dominated by white males and their influence over public law and policy gave them control of the lives of other immigrants and residents. The Homestead Act in 1862 and the Desert Lands Act in 1877, along with the Timber and Stone Act of 1878 made land speculation and settlement possible.\textsuperscript{95}

Again, like the other displays, this portion of the exhibit highlights a duality. It stresses the establishment of communities of people, yet at the same time alludes to the American quest for control of land and people through notions of manifest destiny.

\textsuperscript{94} The Autry National Center, Los Angeles, California. Personal visit, November 6, 2007.
\textsuperscript{95} Text panel, Autry National Center. Viewed November 6, 2007.
The largest and most central of the displays, the Euro-American display case exhibits a wide array of objects and images that provide visual discussions of Euro-American life. Housed within a large, glass-walled structure, the exhibit displays objects linked to industry, recreation, travel, and other facets of community development and living. For example, musical instrument, business advertisements, clothing, and a “boneshaker” velocipede offer a view of nineteenth-century community life in the West, while a sign demanding “Votes For Women” hints at Western political topics of the time. A large display case housing a nineteenth century fire wagon and fireman’s uniform speaks to the organization of social institutions in western communities.96

In close proximity to the exhibit focused on Euro-American communities, the gallery examines communities of Canadian immigrants. As explained,

Canadians participated in the western fur trade, gold and silver rushes, and spread throughout the West. While some Canadians feared a powerful United States, many sought employment in America as their country faced economic depression and shortages of good farm land. Environmental barriers to the Canadian west, favorable U.S. immigration laws, ease of assimilation, and cheap land encouraged immigration.

Two distinct groups of Canadians helped settle portions of the West – British Canadians and French Canadians. British Canadians disappeared easily into American society. French Canadians generally did not form large, cohesive, or isolated groups. By 1890 nearly 100,000 Canadian immigrants were residing in the western United States. The largest concentration were in California, North Dakota, and Washington with notable numbers in Colorado, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, Oregon, and South Dakota.

The exhibit also includes discussion of Mormon communities in the West, noting that, by 1890, nearly 150,000 Mormons were living in 500 communities primarily located in Utah, Idaho, And Arizona.”97 In order to escape religious persecution and seek religious freedom, these

96 The Autry National Center, Los Angeles, California. Personal visit, November 6, 2007.
immigrants formed isolated communities throughout the West based on religious beliefs and cooperative economic practices.98

The next display case explores the establishment of African American communities throughout regions of the West. As the exhibit explains,

Geography played a key role in defining African American communities in the West of 1890. In Texas and Indian Territory, African Americans struggled to overcome a history of slavery. In Kansas, Nebraska, and the Oklahoma Territory, rural communities formed, eager to escape the legacy of the South and racial barriers. The desire for better opportunities and the hope of an end of discrimination helped distinguish these new communities. In such cities as El Paso, Denver, Oakland, and Los Angeles, railroads provided employment and aided the formation of urban neighborhoods.99

Much like the other displays, the objects and images housed within the cases tell a story of African American advancement community prosperity. They depict the daily lives of African Americans in the West and show how, through the establishment of African American–owned businesses and industries, for example, that blacks in the West not only thrived within communities but were integral to their creation.100

The final exhibit portrays the communities of Native peoples in the West. The case dedicated to American Indian communities explains that,

The [Native Americans] were the original residents of the West, but a huge and diverse population of American Indians was reduced in number by war and disease. The Buffalo were destroyed and throughout the West the tribes were forced onto reservations. In spite of tremendous suffering, native peoples survived and persisted, maintaining their cultural diversity.

Over 250,000 American Indians, representing dozens of separate groups, were confined on reservations in every state. They were distinguished from one another by language, dress, occupation, religious beliefs, and kinship arrangements. In 1877 the Dawes Severalty Act allotted 160 acre tracts from reservation lands to individual Indians. Left over land was then opened to white settlement. By 1934 two-thirds of the 138 million acres of Indian land was controlled by whites. Most

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100 The Autry National Center, Los Angeles, California. Personal visit, November 6, 2007.
native peoples entered the twentieth century living in poverty, with few tools to survive in white society.\textsuperscript{101}

The objects and photos exhibited in the display, much like the previous exhibits, paint a picture of assimilation into western communities. However, the exhibit also highlights the conflict and tension that existed for Native communities, highlighting that the assimilation of Native peoples was a forced action. Yet, the exhibit also stresses the cultural facets of Native communities. The objects and images illustrate religious, economic, social, and political participation of Native peoples in western communities.\textsuperscript{102}

Taken as a whole, the exhibit displays represent the composition and diversity of western communities. Positioned in the room’s center, the largest display, the Euro-American communities, acts as a focal point, or nucleus, for the community. The other communities represented in the gallery surround the central display. The glass walls allow visitors to look into the community and examine the objects. However, in doing so, visitors also look through the display and see the other surrounding communities. It alludes to the fact that no one single community group existed in isolation, and that all people and communities were connected. They interacted with and reacted to each other.

From the \textit{Spirit of Community Gallery}, visitors enter the last of the permeant galleries, the \textit{Spirit of Opportunity and Conquest Gallery}. The gallery looks at the motivating factors behind westward expansion, and the processes through which the United States controlled and conquered the region. As the exhibit discusses,

\begin{quote}
At the expense of the rights of other nations and native peoples, Americans aggressively moved west beginning in the 1820s. Many Americans believed in “Manifest Destiny,” a concept which held that divine providence intended the
\end{quote}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{101} Text panel, Autry National Center. Viewed November 6, 2007.
\textsuperscript{102} The Autry National Center, Los Angeles, California. Personal visit, November 6, 2007.
\end{flushright}
nation to grow. This sense of purpose helped to justify acquisition of Oregon, Texas, California, and the Southwest, even at the price of war with Mexico. Events such as the gold rush and fur trade pushed people into the region to seek economic opportunity, while military campaigns, such as the Indian Wars, brought the region under American control. At the exhibit’s entrance, a large map of the United States contextualizes the place of the West within the country. In front of the map, large pictographic images of people highlight the West’s diverse population. It provides a sense of continued history from Native inhabitants and Spanish colonization into the future.

Throughout the gallery space, visitors encounter a wide variety of exhibits that explore the ways in which people came to populate the West, and the ways in which, through settlement, the conquest of the West followed. Each exhibit display focuses on aspects of the process. As visitors enter the gallery space, several displays discuss and depict events and factors that pushed westward expansion, such as the discovery of gold, the fur trade, and farming opportunities. Additionally, the exhibits explore the ways in which immigrants traveled to the West once motivated to do so. By the 1840s, Americans began moving west at an increased rate, using trails such as the Oregon Trail. A small display case describes the process of surveying the West, and establishing trails in order to facilitate expansion and communication. A large display on the left side of the room, along with several smaller display cases, depict travel into the Western regions. A Pony Express saddle and Concord Mail stagecoach, along with trunks and personal items, discuss various modes and methods of transportation, trade, and communication throughout the West. Additionally, a case examines technological improvements to communication by discussing the telegraph and telephone. A smaller display case discusses construction of the

105 The Autry National Center, Los Angeles, California. Personal visit, November 6, 2007.
railroad, noting that the new transportation infrastructure revolutionized travel throughout the West. Additionally, a smaller exhibit displays a promotion for the W. B. Dinsmore clipper ship, providing an example of sea travel to San Francisco.\textsuperscript{106}

Near the previous displays, a collection of exhibits focuses on the experience of the pioneer settler. Centered around a large display of an immigrant family gathered around a Conestoga wagon, the group of displays focuses on a variety of topics related to the journey undertaken by overlanders. The exhibits showcase typical items pioneer settlers brought on their journeys. The display cases look at the experiences of settler women and children. Additionally, the exhibit discusses equipment required not only to complete the journey West, but also once settlers reached their final destination.\textsuperscript{107} At the same time, the exhibits depict the lives of Native Americans in the West. A large display depicting a buffalo in the plains provides a backdrop for several display cases housing Plains Indian artifacts. Moccasins, a beaded bag, pipe bowl and stem, a rifle, and other objects depict the lifeways of Native Americans on the plains during the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{108}

The opportunities that drove Americans West brought them into contact with those who already occupied the region. As the exhibit explains,

Conquest and settlement of the west in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century inevitably meant destruction of native people and their ways of life. By killing off millions of bison and by confining tribes to reservations, Americans dominated the West. Flamboyant soldiers, defiant warriors, and dramatic clashes helped to dramatize Indian fighting in the public’s eye. The warfare, however, involved individuals and families who suffered on both sides. While Native Americans and many of their traditions survived, they had their homeland changed forever.

The completion of transportation and communication lines went hand-in-hand with the rapid spread of new residents. Stagecoach lines and railroads as well as telegraph services helped to speed the movement of the new settlers throughout

\textsuperscript{106} Text panel, Autry National Center. Viewed November 6, 2007.
\textsuperscript{107} The Autry National Center, Los Angeles, California. Personal visit, November 6, 2007.
\textsuperscript{108} The Autry National Center, Los Angeles, California. Personal visit, November 6, 2007.
the West. Rushes for precious metals, the spread of agriculture, logging, town building, and industrialization were all a part of the permanent alteration of the land.109

Continuing from the displays related to opportunity, the exhibit moves into a discussion about the ways in which settlement moved to control the western regions of the United States. Through the display of military uniforms, photographs of soldiers, firearms, and a Gatling gun the exhibit interprets the military presence in the West, which ultimately led to conflict with and the removal of Native Americans. This, in combination to the systematic decimation of the buffalo, opened the West for opportunity and enterprise, but also destroyed traditional Native American ways of life.110

110 The Autry National Center, Los Angeles, California. Personal visit, November 6, 2007.
THE WEST AS COMMUNITY
In no way do I attempt to hide the fact that I absolutely love the West. I vividly remember watching the television adaptation of James Michener’s, *Centennial* as a child. I was captivated by the characters of Pasquinel, Levi Zendt, Hans Brumbaugh, Alexander McKeag, Clay Basket, and R. J. Poteet. For me, I was able to watch the “history” of America unfold before my eyes. As noted by many scholars, the American West served as the laboratory for the great American experiment. As a child, *Centennial* provided me with a glimpse of that laboratory. Later in life, after graduating from college, I revisited *Centennial* and read Michener’s text before returning to graduate school. This experience ultimately led to my study of the American West.

Admittedly, the book provides a highly romantic and mythical account of the American West. However, as is true with the body of work produced by Michener, the novel also connects to the larger histories of the region. The work epitomizes the ways in which mythology and history became related aspects of the West. As author Jane Tompkins argues, the idea and topic of the West have become engrained in popular culture. Hollywood continues to produce Westerns, and the subject matter spills over onto other realms of media as well. In 2004, Rockstar Games, the San Diego–based video game production company, released *Red Dead Revolver*. Set in the 1880s American West, the game focuses on the character Red, who seeks revenge for the death of his parents.\(^1\) In 2010, Rockstar released the second game in the series, *Red Dead Redemption*. The follow-up takes place in the year 1911 and focuses on former outlaw John Marston, who is forced to return to his former career as a gunman in order to secure the

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freedom of his wife and son, who have been taken hostage by the federal government in order to force John to assist in bringing his former gang of outlaws to justice. Set in the American West and Mexico, the game received critical reception.\textsuperscript{2} On October 26, 2018, Rockstar Games released the third game in the series, \textit{Red Dead Redemption II}. A prequel to \textit{Red Dead Redemption}, \textit{Red Dead Redemption II} follows the story of outlaw Arthur Morgan in the year 1899. Set throughout the American West, the game forces players to navigate the rise of modern American society in the frontier West, while the Pinkerton Agency pursues Arthur Morgan and his gang. Additionally, \textit{Red Dead Redemption II} incorporates the backstory of John Marston, the main character from \textit{Red Dead Redemption}. \textit{Red Dead Redemption II} concludes with former Pinkerton Agent Edgar Ross, now director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, staking out John Marston’s ranch, ultimately setting up the story for \textit{Red Dead Redemption}. Like its predecessor, the game achieved critical success.\textsuperscript{3} \textit{Centennial} and the \textit{Red Dead} series, just like the nineteenth-century art of the American West, are products of western popular culture. They continue long-standing myths we hold and desire pertaining to the American West. Whether inside or outside of a museum, people want to see some aspect of that mythology. It has become a distinct part of not just western heritage but American heritage.

As Tompkins explained, “Westerns play, first and last, to a Wild West of the psyche. The images, ideas, and values that become part of an audience’s way of interpreting life come in through the senses and are experienced first as drama.”\textsuperscript{4} The same holds true for video games. They offer audiences a way to connect to the past, albeit fictional. As shown throughout this work, museums offer visitors a similar experience, yet they bridge the gap between fact and

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{2} Rockstar San Diego, \textit{Red Dead Redemption}. May 18, 2010.
\textsuperscript{3} Rockstar San Diego, \textit{Red Dead Redemption II}. October 26, 2018.
\end{footnotes}
fiction. The museums discussed throughout this study exhibit both the history and romance of the American West, both fact and legend. However, museums do not exist in a vacuum. The institutions and their messages change over time, as they are influenced by history and the places in which they exist. Museums become a part of the very history they serve to represent. Museums thus become facets of communities.

Two scenes from Hollywood Westerns, *A River Runs Through It* and the series *Deadwood*, always remind me of this sense of personal place and community within the American West. For me, they illustrate this idea of western heritage. Directed by Robert Redford, the 1992 film adaption of Norman Maclean’s 1976 autobiographical novel *A River Runs Through It* follows the story of two brothers living in Montana during the early twentieth century. In the film, Norman and Paul Mclean, played by Craig Sheffer and Brad Pitt, grew up in Missoula, Montana, with their mother and father. Their father, a stern Presbyterian minister, played by Tom Skerritt, fostered a love of fly fishing in the two boys, which served as a common bond despite their exceedingly different characters. Norman, the more studious of the two brothers, eventually attended Dartmouth College, graduated with a degree in English, and strove to become a professor. Paul, the more rebellious of the two, remained in Montana and took a job as a newspaper reporter in Helena, Montana. After graduating, Norman returned home to learn about Paul’s rebellious and troubled life. He is forced to bail Paul out of jail for fighting, and discovers the danger Paul faces because of gambling debts. Ultimately, Norman falls in love with a woman named Jessie Burns (Emily Lloyd) and receives a teaching position at the University of Chicago. Hoping to save Paul from his situation, Norman invites Paul to come with him and Jessie to Chicago, yet Paul indicates that he will never leave Montana. Just before leaving for Chicago, the two brothers and their father go fishing. Paul catches a large trout, and his father
praised his abilities. That evening, Norman answers a call from the police who indicate that Paul was found beaten to death.

The film’s conclusion links to this idea of memory, identity, place, and community. In the closing scene, Norman Maclean has returned to Montana and fishes the Big Blackfoot River. In the scene, Norman Maclean reflects on his life and the place in which he grew up. Narrated by Robert Redford, Maclean recalls,

Now, nearly all those I love, and did not understand in my youth are dead, even Jessie. But I still reach out to them. Of course, now I'm too old to be much of a fisherman, and now I usually fish the big waters alone, although some friends think I shouldn’t. But when I'm alone in the half light of the canyon, all existence seems to fade to a being with my soul and memories, and the sounds of the Big Blackfoot River, and the four-count rhythm, and the hope that a fish will rise. Eventually all things merge into one, and a river runs through it. The river was cut by the world's great flood, and runs over rocks from the basement of time. On some of the rocks are timeless raindrops; under the rocks are the words, and some of the words are theirs. I am haunted by waters.5

For Maclean, the western landscape of Montana conjured memories, and his personal history of growing up in that place. That landscape served as a stage for the story of people and place; the interconnectedness of people and nature. For Maclean, that Western landscape defined his experiences with community.

The other scene comes from the HBO series *Deadwood*, created by David Milch. Set in the 1870s, the series looks life in the boomtown of Deadwood, South Dakota, before, during, and after its annexation by the Dakota Territory. The show’s plot blends fact and fiction, history and myth, to tell the story of the way in which people came together as a community, and the citizens of Deadwood struggled to form a sense of place in a chaotic and violent environment. *Deadwood’s* story primarily revolves around the lives of two central characters, Seth Bullock (Timothy Olyphant) and Al Swearengen (Ian McShane). Bullock left his position as marshal in

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5 *A River Runs Through It*, directed by Robert Redford (Columbia Pictures, 1992).
Montana to open a hardware store in Deadwood with his business partner Sol Star (John Hawkes). Bullock planned to open the store with Star, and once established, send for his wife and son. Due to Deadwood’s lawless, violent nature, Bullock finds himself drawn back into law enforcement as he becomes the town’s first sheriff. Swearengen, owner and operator of the Gem Saloon, ruthlessly positioned himself as a community leader from the first days of Deadwood’s existence as a camp. Throughout the series, the two characters straddle the line between good and evil, hero and villain.6

In the first episode of the second season, “A Lie Agreed Upon (Part I),” Bullock and Swearengen find themselves at odds with one another over the problems within and the direction of the town, specifically regarding the political forces descending upon Deadwood. During the conversation, Swearengen explains that he can handle situations on his end, but the present situation is more complex and beyond his areas of knowledge. He notes, however, that Bullock has experience in these areas. During the conversation, Swearengen verbally attacks Bullock, arguing that Bullock would be useful if he would only focus on matters at hand instead of the widow Alma Garret (Molly Parker). Throughout the conversation, Swearengen taunts Bullock over his illicit affair and pushes the sheriff to a breaking point. During the scene, Bullock removes his badge and gun belt and sternly asks Swearengen, “Will I find you’ve got a knife?” Swearengen, calmly responded by saying, “I won’t need no fucking knife.”7

A vicious fight ensues between Swearengen and Bullock, who both seem intent on killing the other. As the two men land blow after blow, the fight moves from Swearengen’s second-floor office outside to the balcony. As Swearengen hits Bullock in the stomach, he lands a solid head butt and pushes Bullock against the balcony rail. Bullock grabs Swearengen, and the two go over

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6 See Deadwood, created by David Milch (Home Box Office, 2004-2006).
7 “A Lie Agreed Upon (Part I),” Deadwood, directed by Ed Bianchi (Home Box Office, March 6, 2005).
the balcony in unison. As the two men fall from the second story and land in the muddy thoroughfare, a stagecoach arrives. Having attracted the attention of citizens, muddy and severely injured, Bullock and Swearengen continue to fight to the death. Alerted to the trouble, Dan Dority (W. Earl Brown), Al Swearengen’s loyal, right-hand man, runs out of the Gem Saloon and hits Bullock in the back of the head with the butt of his shotgun, while Alma Garret watches the scene from her hotel window. Johnny Burns (Sean Bridges), a loyal worker at the Gem Saloon, follows Dority into the thoroughfare with rifle drawn. While Dority is restrained by Silas Adams (Titus Welliver), a political emissary, Sol Star leaves the hardware store to check on the commotion in the street. Noticing that Star has drawn his pistol, Burns instructs Star not to come any closer. Without giving Star an opportunity to comply, Burns shoots Star in the shoulder. Immediately, Colorado Charlie Utter (Dayton Callie)—friend of Star, Bullock, and the recently deceased “Wild” Bill Hickock—attempts to subdue Burns. Panicked, Burns fires again, grazing Utter in the ear.

Amidst the chaos, Swearengen slowly rises to his feet and calls to the barely conscious Bullock, while pulling a blade from his boot. As he grabs Bullock, Swearengen proclaims, “I do have a knife. It come to me now.” At this point, the scene focuses on the stagecoach. Peering out the coach’s window, Bullock’s wife, Martha Bullock (Anna Gunn), locks eyes with her bloodied husband while she covers the eyes of their young son, William Bullock (Josh Eriksson). At that moment, Swearengen shifts his game toward the coach where he sees Bullock’s frightened wife and son. He locks eyes with William, who, much to Swearengen’s surprise, returns the gaze with a concerned yet ever so slight smile. Swearengen points the knife at William and his mother and proclaims, “Welcome to fucking Deadwood! It can be combative!”

8 “A Lie Agreed Upon (Part I),” Deadwood, directed by Ed Bianchi (Home Box Office, March 6, 2005).
9 A Lie Agreed Upon (Part I),” Deadwood, directed by Ed Bianchi (Home Box Office, March 6, 2005).
With that, the fight ends; Swearengen releases Bullock and limps back into the Gem Saloon. Bullock rises, collects himself, and slowly walks to his wife and child. The scene, in spite of its extreme violence, also creates a sense of community. While Swearengen nearly killed Bullock in a fit of rage, he genuinely welcomed Bullock’s family as members of the community, albeit a violent one.

These two scenes encapsulate the sense of connection to place. In no way is the West unique in fostering this connection to place and the past. As Joseph Amato argues in his text, *Rethinking Home: A Case for Writing Local History*:

Local historians are often historians of home. The meaning of home shapes their works. It is the source of first feelings and impressions, of primary encounters; it is the subject of first memories, deep senses, and enduring passions. Simultaneously the object of the most profound feelings, the subject of the greatest nostalgia, and a topic for a lifetime of rethinking, home is local historians’ measure of every other place.10

The fabric of a place and its people lie in its history. The West holds different meanings for people, depending on their connection to the region and interpretation of the place. Additionally, the history of the American West does not exist as one set time or place. It continues to hold both historic and contemporary meaning for various members associated with the region. As institutions both situated in and focusing on interpretation of the American West, museums serves as members of these regional communities while additionally preserving and exhibiting its history. In this study, however, the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial again serves as an exception. As Bob Moore noted, the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial’s mandate is to “…administer a museum that is a national site.”11 He explained that, while the museum staff would like to interact with the community on a greater level, the staff’s mission is to administer

the site and preserve its structure and contents. As a result, the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial fit into this notion of community in peripheral ways.

Native American Communities

The institutions discussed throughout this work not only depict the history of Native America, but also continue to interact and work with contemporary Native peoples in a variety of capacities. The National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum interacts and partners with Native communities as well. As Steven Grafe noted, each year the institution hosts exhibitions and sales of contemporary Native American art. The exhibitions provide a venue through which to promote and showcase living Native artists.12 Similarly, as Charles Schroeder explained, the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum partnered with and established a number of programs through the Native American Cultural and educational Authority in Oklahoma.13

At the Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Emma Hansen explained that the Plains Indian Museum has a number of long-standing partnerships with Native artists, communities, scholars, and tribal colleges, and regional universities. In terms of publications, the museum has worked with scholars such as Bee Medicine, Gerard Baker, Joe Medicine, Arthur Amiotte, and Bently Spang.14 Additionally, like the other museums at the Buffalo Bill, the Plains Indian Museum works closely with its advisory group on exhibit and programmatic design. Stemming from this interaction between the museum and its advisory committee, the Plains Indian Museum established a residency program for you Native artists.15 Outside of scholarship, the Buffalo Bill Historical Center holds the Plains Indian Museum Powwow each year over the third weekend in June. As Hansen explained, the museum promotes the two-day traditional powwow as an

14 Emma Hansen, interview by the author, Buffalo Bill Historical Center, August 12, 2008, 8.
15 Hansen, interview, 12.
education program. The event draws large audiences each year and features roughly 300 Plains Indians dancers.16

At the Autry National Center, the institution hosts a variety of public programs designed to engage with and promote Native history, culture, and arts. According to Donna Tuggle, director of education and programs and managing director of Native Voices at the Autry National Center, throughout the year the Autry runs several programs focused on the Native American community. One of the largest, the Intertribal Arts Market Place, focuses on Native American and First Nations art, performances, music, and storytelling. The Autry holds numerous discussion panels, music, film, and book series.17 As Tuggle continued to explain, the Autry National Center sees itself not only as a museum but also as a community space. The Autry involves itself in a number of community outreach projects. For example, as Tuggle explained,

We work with the Los Angeles Unified School District, the Title 7 American Indian Program, and the program was looking for a home, for a place to hold their parent meetings, and they approached the Autry, and it was a great, natural fit. And now, the American Indian Commission, with the LAUSD sees us as their place. They come here once a month, sometimes more than that. They have their graduation ceremonies here; they also now are part of our Native Voices, our Young Native Voices Theater Education Project.18

As Tuggle mentioned, the Autry operates the Native Voices program. Started in the 1980s, Native Voices, the Autry’s Native American theater company, performs two productions each year. The program hosts artist workshops, operates the Young Native Voices Theater Education Project, participates in community outreach with regional Native reservations, and holds radio theater broadcasts.19

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16 Hansen, interview, 13-14.
18 Tuggle, interview.
19 Tuggle, interview.
John Gray at the Autry National Center explained that the institution attempts to engage with all ethnic communities in the West. Through its idea of convergence, the Autry seeks to explore the place of all people in the history of the American West. With this, as Gray explained, the institution collaborates with members of the Hispanic, Jewish, Chinese, Japanese, and African American communities. He noted, however, that aside from topical exhibits and related programming, the Autry does not remain connected with cultural groups to the level that exists for Native American communities. 20

**Academic Communities**

At the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial, Moore explained that there was a lack of interaction between academics and the institution. He noted that, despite being an NPS-administered institution with visitation of upward of two million people annually, few scholars conduct research at the institution, and many are not even aware of its existence.21

The National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum recently began a program to promote scholarship. As Richard Rattenbury explained, the institution established a publication partnership with the University of Oklahoma Press in 2005 to create its Legacy series, a scholarly publication series focused on the American West. Additionally, the institution began collaborating with scholars for the purpose of exhibitions.22 Charles Schroeder added that the National Cowboy regularly interacts and partners with the University of Oklahoma. The museum offers classes from the Charles M. Russel Center for the Study of Western Art and hosts classes from the University of central Oklahoma’s museum studies program.23

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The Buffalo Bill Historical Center offers a number of educational programs. At the Draper Museum of Natural History, Charles Preston engages with the environmental and scientific community through the Discovery Laboratory. The lab serves as both a research and educational facility to explore and advance research examining the greater Yellowstone region.24 In 2002, Preston established a program call Lunchtime Expeditions, a lecture series that brings in scholars to discuss a variety of regional, environmental topics. Similarly, Mindy Besaw explained that the Whitney Gallery of Western Art, like the other museums at the Buffalo Bill Historical center, brings in scholars and academics throughout the year to discuss a variety of topics related to the institution’s exhibits and programs.25 As Bruce Eldredge explained, The Buffalo Bill Historical Center also has strong ties to the University of Wyoming, Northwest College, and the University of Montana.26

The Cody Institute of Western American Studies serves as the primary academic component at the Buffalo Bill Historical Center. As Bob Pickering explained, the Buffalo Bill Historical Center established the Cody Institute of Western American Studies to oversee the development of “…symposia, curricula, curriculum development, publishing, and the support of CIWAS fellows every year to do research.”27 As Dr. Kurt Graham, the Housel director of the of the McKracken Research Library and co-director of the Cody Institute for Western American Studies, explained, the Cody Institute of Western American Studies established fellowship and internship programs and promotes visiting scholar opportunities and research seminars.28 The McKracken Research Library serves as a major center for the study of the American West.

24 Charles Preston, interview by the author, August 14, 2008, Buffalo Bill Historical Center, 8.
25 Mindy Besaw, interview by the author, August 14, 2008, Buffalo Bill Historical Center, 8.
26 Bruce Eldredge, interview by the author, August 14, 2008, Buffalo Bill Historical Center, 6.
27 Robert Pickering, interview by the author, August 11, 2008, Buffalo Bill Historical Center, 11.
28 Kurt Graham, interview by the author, August 13, 2008, Buffalo Bill Historical Center, 1.
Similar to the Buffalo Bill Historical Center, the Autry National Center, through the establishment of the Institute for the Study of the American West, has become a major leader in the production of scholarship focusing on the study of the American West. The Autry National Center sees the academic community as a central component to its exhibitions and institutional programming. As Michael Duchemin explained, the scholarship of the *New Western Historians* played a key role in defining the messages and narrative of the Autry’s exhibitions.29 As Stephen Aron explained, the Autry created a model through which the museum operates not only as a public space for learning, but also as an intellectual center for the discussion of ideas.30 As discussed in Chapter Five, the Autry utilizes a number of advisory groups for the creation of exhibitions and programming. As Aron explained, once of the Autry’s central advisory groups, the Trustee Scholar Advisory group, includes “…many of the most eminent western historians in the country; Richard White, John Mack Faragher, Elliot West, Vicki Ruiz, Janet Fireman, Bill Deverall, Roy Ritchie, Eric Abella, Henry Uhe…”31 The institution partners with a number of leading universities, such as UCLA and Yale, for the purposes of establishing an intellectual stage for the discussion and examination of the American West. For example, the Autry hosts a series of scholarly workshops where university professors and scholars, graduate students, undergraduate students, and members of the community discuss the contemporary academic scholarship of and ideas about the American West.32

The Autry structures its programming and exhibitions around a number of key initiatives. As Aron explained, violence and justice are central themes within these initiatives.33 In 2007,

29 Duchemin, interview, 9.
30 Stephen Aron, interview by the author, November 8, 2007, Autry National Center, 8
31 Aron, interview.
32 Aron, interview, 4.
33 Aron, interview, 2.
John Mack Faragher presented a lecture at the Autry, where he explored the topic of violence in the West. The Autry held the lecture as part of its initiative to explore the themes of violence and justice. On June 19, 2004, the Autry began this initiative with a symposium, *The Wild, Wild West: Experiences and Perceptions of Violence in America*. The panel featured Richard Maxwell, professor emeritus at the University of Oregon, David Milch, executive producer of the HBO series *Deadwood*, Michael Barnes, former Maryland Congressman and president of the Brady Campaign, and Chuck Michel, chief attorney for the National Rifle Association. The symposium explored the topic of violence throughout the West in mythic, historic, and contemporary contexts.

**Local and Regional Communities**

As institutions within communities, museums become by their very existence facets of the communities in which they are located. Terry Weber of the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial noted that the institution operates an educational program. He explained that,

> We have students come through, through the St. Louis Public School System, and from the Archdiocesan Schools, and schools in Illinois, scouting groups; Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, also public programs, themes programs, either Black History or Women’s History month, also certain Park Service themes programs for the anniversary of the Parks Service…

The National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum partners in similar ways with local schools and community groups. At the Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Bruce Eldredge explained that the institution is heavily involved with the community of Cody, Wyoming. He noted that,

> We probably spend $30,000 a year on the promotion of community cultural things. Some of this comes through our advertising and marketing budget. Some of that is direct contribution. So, as a major player in our community we have to sit at the table of community development and boosterism.

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35 Eldredge, interview, 8.
Eldredge noted that the members of the Buffalo Bill’s staff were members of the local community. The same holds true for all museums. The Draper museum works with a number of regional conservation and wildlife organizations. In collaboration with Wyoming Game and Fish and the U.S. Forest Service, for example, the Draper has become a venue for the discussion of a number of poignant environmental topics.\textsuperscript{36}

The institutions hold a number of annual programmatic and celebratory events each year. At the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, each year the institution hosts the Chuckwagon Gathering, Children’s Cowboy Festival, Prix de West Invitational Art Exhibition and Sale, Traditional Cowboy Arts Association Annual Show and Sale, Michael Martin Murphey’s Cowboy Christmas Ball, and most notably Western Heritage Awards. Similarly, the Buffalo Bill Historical Center hosts several major events, including the Rendezvous Royale, Cody High Style, Cowboy Songs and Ranch Ballads, and its annual Holiday Community Open House. For the Autry, each year it hosts its annual gala and presents the Western Heritage Awards.

\textbf{Epilogue: The Museum Community}

In \textit{Museums and Historic Sites of the American West}, Victor J. Danilov states that by 2002, the United States housed nearly 1,500 historic sites and museums focusing on the American West. The four museums discussed throughout this work represent some of the leading western heritage museums found among Danilov’s study. However, while there exists a great deal of commonality among the four case studies, as this dissertation shows, each institution also presents greatly differing versions of the American West. Based on their original mission and the\textsuperscript{36} Preston, interview, 11-12.
visions of their founders, all four museums chose specific lenses through which to explore and preserve the history of the American West.

The term *heritage* really shapes the ways in which each institution chose to represent the history of the American West. The Autry National Center, for example, deliberately chose to remove the word heritage from its name. I believe that this is very telling. The term *heritage* tends to be more celebratory and exclusionary than historical. In many ways, the four museums within this study present regional histories rather than western heritage. As previously stated, museums and public history sites are vital for communities. They help local residents research, document, and interpret their own history. Museums foster a sense of belonging and identity within one’s community. This notion of heritage intertwines with regional history, and each institution within this study focuses on specific aspects of local and regional western history. Yet, the institutions also fit into the larger story and representation of the history of the American West. As an umbrella organization, Museums West serves to expose audiences to the history of the American West. By highlighting the regional histories presented at its member institutions, the consortium provides a collective narrative of the American West.
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