MUSEUMS OF BUILDINGS:
HISTORIC PRESERVATION AND THE AMERICAN OPEN-AIR MUSEUM

Andrea Antoinette Tonc

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
Master of Science in Historic Preservation

Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation
Columbia University
May 2016
Abstract

Museums of Buildings:
Historic Preservation and the American Open-Air Museum

Andrea Antoinette Tonc
Advisor: Andrew S. Dolkart
Readers: Janet Foster and Anne Walker

The American open-air museum was founded on the principles of identity, education, and preservation - objectives that have remained relevant to American society for over six decades, leading to the typology’s longstanding history. While the use of the typology would be unheard of in today’s society, the movement has had a clear impact on the perception of America’s built history and continues to do so today as these museums remain open for the public’s enjoyment. While the bulk of the literature on the American open-air museum focuses on its Golden Age, in reality, the typology’s development was far more encompassing, sweeping the entire nation in three distinct waves: the first in the 1930s and 40s with education tourism and the automobile, the second in the late 1950s and 60s in response to urban renewal and the threat of neglect, and the third in the late 1970s and 80s with a reinvestment in Americana in relation to the 1976 Bicentennial of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. This lack of research and discussion on the museum typology as a whole is the result of the negative connotation placed by preservation authorities on the typology’s method of relocation. In order to claim the typology’s long-deserved place within the historic preservation discourse, this thesis provides an overall context for the American open-air museum movement through the examination of three case studies as they relate to the three waves of museum creation: Old Sturbridge Village (1946), Nevada City, Montana (1959), and Old World Wisconsin (1976).
Acknowledgements

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the many people involved in making this thesis a reality.

To my advisor, Andrew S. Dolkart, your persistence and enthusiasm gave shape and substance to an initially timid idea, guiding my research into a final body of work – thank you.

My readers, Janet Foster and Anne Walker, thank you for your time and lively conversation. To Janet, our initial phone calls and your constant validation gave me the courage to keep moving forward. It was truly a pleasure working with both of you.

Thank you to everyone who made my case study research possible. To the staff at Old Sturbridge Village, thank you Tom Kelleher, Amy Hietala, and Caitlin Emery for your time and invaluable knowledge. Thank you Dan Freas and the rest of the staff at Old World Wisconsin for providing a highly informative experience during your off season hours, and finally, to the staff at Nevada City and the Montana Preservation Alliance, thank you for giving me the experience that inspired the topic of this thesis.

My deepest gratitude goes to my other half, David. Without your love and support, I would not have survived my final year. I am grateful for your willingness to accompany me on my many research adventures and for the hours spent immersed in conversation on America’s back roads.

Finally, this thesis is dedicated to my parents, Vince and Sheila. Their lives and energy have been dedicated to providing me the opportunity to pursue my dreams. I am forever grateful for the life you’ve given me and the set of values you have instilled in my heart.
# Table of Contents

Abstract ..................................................................................................................................................................................... iii  

Acknowledgements .................................................................................................................................................................... iv  

1 Introduction: A Story Untold ............................................................................................................................................ 1  

2 European Origins ............................................................................................................................................................... 6  
   2.1 The Beginnings of a Typology .................................................................................................................................................. 7  
   2.2 Embracing a Movement .......................................................................................................................................................... 11  
   2.3 Images of European Open-Air Museums ............................................................................................................................. 15  

3 Transference to the United States: .................................................................................................................................. 18  
   3.1 Educational Tourism and the Automobile ........................................................................................................................... 19  
   3.2 The Threat of Neglect .............................................................................................................................................................. 25  
   3.3 A Reinvestment in Americana with the Bicentennial ......................................................................................................... 30  
   3.4 Images of American Open-Air Museums ............................................................................................................................. 35  

4 Old Sturbridge Village (1946) ......................................................................................................................................... 37  
   4.1 Motivation for Collection: The Wells Family Story ............................................................................................................. 38  
   4.2 Contextual Origins for the Museum Layout ........................................................................................................................ 42  
   4.3 Complexity and Contradictions ............................................................................................................................................. 51  
   4.4 The Museum Today ................................................................................................................................................................. 58  
   4.5 Building Inventory: Old Sturbridge Village ......................................................................................................................... 61  
   4.6 Images of Old Sturbridge Village ........................................................................................................................................... 64  
   4.7 Map of Old Sturbridge Village ............................................................................................................................................... 74  

5 Nevada City, Montana (1959) ......................................................................................................................................... 75  
   5.1 A Chance Discovery ................................................................................................................................................................. 76  
   5.2 Motivation for Collection: The Charles Bovey Story ........................................................................................................... 83  
   5.3 Contextual Origins for the Museum Layout ........................................................................................................................ 88  
   5.4 Complexity and Contradictions ............................................................................................................................................. 97  
   5.5 The Museum Today ............................................................................................................................................................... 103  
   5.6 Building Inventory: Nevada City ......................................................................................................................................... 107  
   5.7 Images of Nevada City ....................................................................................................................................................... 111  
   5.8 Map of Nevada City ............................................................................................................................................................ 119
6 Old World Wisconsin (1976) ........................................................................................................................................ 120
6.1 Motivation for Collection: A Shared Vision ........................................................................................................121
6.2 Contextual Origins for the Museum Layout ........................................................................................................ 125
6.3 Complexity and Contradictions ........................................................................................................................... 136
6.4 The Museum Today .............................................................................................................................................. 143
6.5 Building Inventory: Old World Wisconsin .............................................................................................................. 146
6.6 Images of Old World Wisconsin .......................................................................................................................... 148
6.7 Map of Old World Wisconsin .................................................................................................................................. 159
7 Conclusion ............................................................................................................................................................. 160
7.1 Visions and Visionaries ........................................................................................................................................... 161
7.2 Reconciling Historic Preservation and the American Open-Air Museum .............................................................. 164
Works Cited .............................................................................................................................................................. 169
General ........................................................................................................................................................................... 169
Old Sturbridge Village .................................................................................................................................................. 170
Nevada City, Montana .................................................................................................................................................... 170
Old World Wisconsin ..................................................................................................................................................... 172
1 Introduction: A Story Untold
The concept of the open-air museum, as first introduced in Europe, lies in society’s identification with its material culture and affinity for the ordinary. The traditional museum, defined as “a permanent institution in the service of society and of its development, open to the public, which acquires, researches, communicates and exhibits, for the purpose of study, education, and enjoyment, the tangible and intangible evidence of people and their environment,” takes society’s material culture and interprets its history in a curated museum setting, usually in a single building designed for such a purpose. The open-air museum takes this same basic concept, only inverting the relationship between building and collection. The simple notion that history is best understood within its original context led to a shift in traditional museum practice in Europe during the late 1800s towards the collection of entire buildings which were then organized in their own curated setting, usually in the form of a recreated village. From this concept, the open-air museum typology was born, moving Europe’s scattered, vernacular architecture into park-like settings for the general public’s education and enjoyment. The typology is founded on the idea of preservation by relocation versus the traditionally accepted method of preserving buildings in situ. It is this characteristic that has given the open-air museum a negative connotation, a misappropriation when considering its true definition: a museum of buildings. For the purpose of this thesis, the following criteria have been established in order to better define the American open-air museum:

Criteria for Evaluation

A. The museum must be founded on the principle of relocation, not reproduction. At least fifty percent of the building stock within the museum proper must be of relocated historic structures.

B. The museum must be designed as an ensemble of buildings on a chosen site, not a reconstruction of a pre-existing condition; however, the museum may include a few in situ buildings tied to the property’s original owner and use.

C. The museum must be an act of regional preservation, interpreting the given region’s early history through the relocation of its own vernacular building stock.

D. The museum must incorporate the concept of educational tourism as way to popularize the given region’s history for the general public.
In this sense, the idea of acquirement, relocation, and collection are sound museum practices that enable the tangible and intangible evidence of people and their environment to be displayed.

The application and wide-spread use of the open-air museum in Europe has been well documented, but the history of its transference to the United States has often been limited to the discussion of only a few select examples. The parallel yet independent growth of this museum typology in Europe and America led to the development of their individualized histories, with the latter lagging significantly behind. The written history of the American open-air museum belongs to the early history of the historic preservation movement, a product of the heroic phase of preservation cultivated by the pursuits of the wealthy few to educate the American public. Renewed interest in Americana, a way of life seemingly threatened by societal progress, and the potential audience afforded by the mass tourism of the automobile led to the privatization of preservation in its early era, beginning with Colonial Williamsburg in 1930 and ending with the chartering of the National Trust in 1949.¹ The Golden Age of the American open-air museum existed within this timeframe and epitomized the privatization of preservation as a hobby founded on individual educational interests by businessmen wanting “to show urbanized America a small slice of self-reliant rural society.”² Despite the typology’s presence in practically every state, only two American open-air museums founded within this era have come to define the museum movement – Greenfield Village (1929) and Colonial Williamsburg (1930).

The continued selection of these two open-air museums as representatives for the entire movement can be traced to their influential patrons. The wealth and success surrounding Henry Ford and John D. Rockefeller, Jr.

² Ibid, 74.
enabled them to pursue their self-interests in promoting a “very selective view of history,” leaving behind compelling stories self-determined purpose and notorious purchasing power. 3 The stories of Greenfield Village and Williamsburg are also the most accessible as each man received national media coverage, enabling the complete documentation of their educational agendas. In Williamsburg, Rockefeller’s purpose was to “supply a shrine where great events in early American history and the lives of many of the men who made it may be visualized in their proper setting,” while Ford’s calling for Greenfield Village was to create a “monument to progress, and a place to which one could make a pilgrimage and rejoice at man’s inventive ability, the blessings of technology, and the wonderful story of self-made men.” 4 5 However, when evaluated by the criteria established at the beginning of this thesis, neither museum can be defined as a significant contributor to the overall movement, leaving a skewed understanding of the typology in today’s literature and discourse.

While the bulk of the literature on the American open-air museum focuses on its Golden Age and two less than ideal examples, in reality, the typology’s development was far more encompassing, sweeping the entire nation in three distinct waves: the first in the 1930s and 40s with education tourism and the automobile, the second in the late 1950s and 60s in response to urban renewal and the threat of neglect, and the third in the late 1970s and 80s with a reinvestment in Americana in relation to the 1976 Bicentennial of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. 6 This lack of research and discussion on the museum typology as a whole is the result of the negative connotation placed by preservation authorities on the typology’s method of relocation. However, by providing an overall context for the American open-air museum movement - from its Golden Age to the

3 Hosmer, Preservation Comes of Age, 74.
4 Sten Rentzog, Open Air Museums: The History and Future of a Visionary Idea (Sweden: Carlssons, 2007), 141.
5 Ibid, 130.
6 Hosmer, Preservation Comes of Age, 74-132.
Bicentennial and from the notorious enterprises of the industrialists to the reserved regional efforts of the local historian - this thesis will claim the typology’s long-deserved place within the historic preservation discourse.

The argument for recognition has been laid out in the following chapters, beginning with an orientation to the typology’s beginnings in Sweden in the late 1800s and its subsequent wide-spread acceptance as a preservation movement based on national identity by the rest of Europe (Chapter Two). The typology’s transference to the United States following World War I will then be traced as evolving societal conditions dictated museum creation in three separate waves over a sixty year time span (Chapter Three). The next three chapters (Chapters Four, Five, and Six) look at each wave in more depth through a case study analysis – Old Sturbridge Village (1946), Nevada City, Montana (1959), and Old World Wisconsin (1976). Each case study is told through the story of the museum’s visionary and the process taken to execute this individual’s vision. The inherent complexity and contradictions involved in such curatorial undertakings are explored before looking at the museum of today. Finally, the thesis will conclude with a summary of the movement’s impact and shared themes leading to a proposed reconciliation between historic preservation and the typology’s acceptance within its realm of discourse (Chapter Seven).
2 European Origins

The Beginnings of a Typology
Embracing a Movement
Images of European Open-Air Museums
2.1 The Beginnings of a Typology

The typology of the open-air museum emerged with the construction of Skansen, “Sweden’s foremost outdoor museum and generally accorded the distinction of being Europe’s first facility of its kind” which opened in October 1891. Artur Hazelius, creator of the open-air museum concept and of Skansen, had anticipated a shift in museum culture that replaced the traditional, elitist portrayal of history with a folk-based narrative. The democratization of history allowed for the first time a shift away from the depiction of “politics, wars, and great men” towards a telling of the country’s complete cultural development, “from the nobility to the very poorest.”

By the end of the nineteenth century, this innovation in museum typology had fully embraced its ability to illustrate “a combination of culture and nature, material and spiritual history, visitors as active participants, knowledge through ‘edutainment,’ and even living history.”

While the first permanent installation of an open-air museum can be attributed to Artur Hazelius, the idea of relocating buildings – in particular log-timbered vernacular architecture – to a curated setting was not new to Europe. King Oscar II, King of Sweden and Norway, established his own collection of five relocated buildings at Bygdø in Oslo, Norway in 1881 with the intention of showing a deep interest in Norway and “thereby strengthening the ties between the monarch and the nation.” The main buildings were a Stave Church from Gol in Hallingdal and a house from Hove in Heddal in Telemark, and while the exhibit was only meant to be temporary, the collection eventually found a permanent home at the Norsk Folkemuseum, which incorporated the buildings into Norway’s own open-air museum in 1907 two years after the country gained its independence from

---

3 Ibid, 25.
Sweden (Figure 2.1). In partnership with the FNFB, Foreningen til Norske Fortidsmindesmærkers bevaring (The Association for the Preservation of Norwegian Ancient Monuments), and the King’s representative, Chamberlain Christian Holst, the plan for relocating the acquired buildings onto a rectangular site of approximately 4,000 square meters was executed. The Association’s previous interest in the preservation of vernacular architecture as a way to save the wooden buildings that made up the core of Norwegian cultural heritage naturally supported the concept of relocating said buildings into a curated setting, enabling not only the preservation of Norwegian heritage but the interpretation and enjoyment of its history for the public. In 1884, one such public patron was Artur Hazelius who was clearly influenced by the King’s collection. He immediately became interested in acquiring historic buildings after his visit and sketched the idea of placing such a grouping of structures near Stockholm. Conceived only a year before the creation of Skansen, the sketch – almost identical to a view of Bygdø – showed a Norwegian stave church, the Ornäs House, and the storehouse from Björkvik as centerpieces for the envisioned collection (Figure 2.2).

An idea had been born, and with Skansen, Hazelius fully embraced the concept of embedded nationalistic pride in a country’s vernacular architecture as put forth by King Oscar II’s collection and implemented a permanent solution to the need to “pass on to posterity the legacy of [the] old peasant cultures being threatened with destruction by spreading industrialization.” The museum has grown to seventy-five acres in size, placing 150 buildings from every province in Sweden on the rocky bluffs overlooking Stockholm. The site, situated in the royal park of Djurgården near the city center of Stockholm, boasts beautiful views of the town as well as a natural

---

5 "Oscar II’s Collection."
7 Ibid, 51.
8 Ibid.
9 Perrin, Outdoor Museums, 9.
10 Ibid, 11.
setting that promotes a sense of seclusion (Figure 2.3). The collection represents Sweden’s cultural development from 1574 to the mid-1800s, and includes individual relocated buildings – such as windmills, watermills, artisans’ shops, malt kilns, flax and wool storage buildings, many types of regional dwelling structures, and their dependencies – as well as entire farmsteads (Figure 2.4). Creating an “old Sweden in miniature,” Hazelius moved quickly to relocate buildings. Even in the first year, he was able to assemble a variety of building typologies from all over the country:

He set up the well-known Mora house, followed by a stonemason’s workshop, also from Dalarna, a farmhouse from Kyrkhult in Blekinge and a croft from the province, and charcoal burners’ huts from Småland and the iron mining Bergslagen region, as well as a Lapp camp with a tent shaped hut and three “outbuildings,” as he called them.

Hazelius even moved a complete farm, Oktorpsgården, in 1896, creating a milestone in his interpretation of an entire lifestyle. What made Skansen standout from its predecessors was its inclusion of all aspects of society from the wealthy Blekinge farmhouse to the poor crofter’s hut. “He wished to show the whole range of society, not just folk life, and therefore saw to it that Skansen had belltowers, a churchyard, and a marketplace.” The combination of both rural and urban living allowed for a contrast and level of complexity that placed history in its totality. The main purpose behind Skansen was “to provide a base for research and to stimulate public educational interest in the results of such research by giving the broadest possible exposure to everything it has to offer” – a museum of the people for the people.

---

13 Ibid.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid.
Another key aspect of the museum’s development and ideology was the inclusion of nature as an interpretive element. Hazelius promoted a linkage between the character of a given population and the natural habitat in which they lived.\footnote{Rentzhog, \textit{Open Air Museums: The History and Future of a Visionary Idea}, 8.}

Already from the beginning, some of the houses had gardens round them, with shrubs and flowers typical of the district, and beehives and hop poles. At Blekingestugan were kept live hens, geese and ducks, at Morastugan goats, and the shieling mountain cattle, while two piglets grunted away in the pigsty belonging to the stone cottage. Samples of cereals were grown in grids, and at the Lapp camp were planted alpines.\footnote{Ibid.}

Put simply, buildings that were designed for an agricultural lifestyle could not be fully understood without the presence of animals and plant life. The mutual relationship between nature and man was every bit as important as the role of costume, furnishings, and tools in the interpretation of Sweden’s culture. The museum thrived on its ability to bring history to life, not just in its life-sized display of domesticity but in its addition of live, costumed interpreters. Moving away from sculpted and staged figures, Hazelius employed people to inhabit the buildings in traditional dress. Their role as interpreters required the demonstration of traditional craft, often reviving old folk customs in the process.\footnote{Ibid, 10.} Their ability to actively engage with visitors encouraged a new concept of “edutainment” that combined the previously exclusive notions of education and entertainment into a complete museum experience. As stated in Hazelius’ own words, Skansen sought to achieve a new level of museum typology that capitalized on its understanding of public engagement with history:

Skansen’s open air museum has still wider and greater scope and even greater tasks…It seeks more and more to be a living museum, a museum which not only shows buildings and household goods, tools and implements of the most different types, and memorials such as runestones…and an endless number of other things…It tries to depict folklife through its living characteristics.\footnote{Ibid. Hazelius’ quote is taken from his book, \textit{Ur Nordiska museets hitoria. Nordiska Museets tjugofemsjutminne 1873-1898} published in 1900 in Stockholm.}
2.2 Embracing a Movement

The concept of a museum of buildings upon which a folk-based narrative could be tangibly engaged allowed, for the first time, the total picture of history to be told in a one to one scale equivalent to our very own lives. Such a sentiment is embodied within the phrase, “Känn Dig Själv” (Know Thyself), which is etched above the entrance to Skansen as a reminder that “the museum’s mirror image of people’s lives is there to create feelings of affinity between people, both between themselves and as related to earlier generations.”

The feeling of kinship and national pride promoted by the open-air museum enabled its proliferation throughout the rest of the European continent. “Soon all the capitals in the Nordic countries, and likewise many other towns, had open-air museums; Copenhagen in 1897, Kristiana (Oslo) in 1902, and Helsinki in 1909.” At Lyngby, the Danes particularly embraced “Hazelian philosophy” in the concept and execution of their museums, using “the technique of grouping buildings with ample and beautifully interspersed landscaped areas which [served] as sites for future building groups, already acquired or earmarked [to be] disassembled, moved and re-erected in accordance with the master plan.”

Built in 1901, Professor Rasmus Olsen conceived of Lyngby under these guiding principles. Located twenty-five miles outside of Copenhagen, the privately-owned museum capitalized on its adjacency to a metropolitan center, while also maintaining the ample open space necessary for expansion and interpretation. As evaluated by Richard W.E. Perrin - architect, preservationist, and founding father of Wisconsin’s own open-air museum, Old World Wisconsin:

---

21 Rentzhog, Open Air Museums: The History and Future of a Visionary Idea, 53.
22 Ibid, 33.
23 Perrin, Outdoor Museums, 13.
24 Ibid.
Lyngby covers about four times as much ground area as Skansen but its general disposition is somewhat similar, being essentially a collection of old farmsteads, cottages of all kinds, mills and other structures brought from their original sites in various parts of Denmark and the former Danish provinces of Southern Sweden and South Schleswig which is now part of West Germany. All have been given a natural setting to the highest practicable degree. Without attempting to catalog what Lyngby has to offer, it may be confidently stated that the variety of specimen buildings with all their differences – is utterly amazing and the care and scientific precision with which they have been restored is equally impressive.25

His praise continues as he notes Lyngby’s success in saving threatened, indigenous architecture from extinction as seen in the farmstead relocated from the Karup Heath in North Jutland. Such a barren and hard land required primitive housing for the poor peasants consisting of “very thin half-timber work – the upright posts standing directly on individual flat stones as a base without a continuous timber sill to tie the frame together.”26 Such a fragile architecture has been completely lost to the rugged terrain and climate of the heath except for the last remaining structure displayed within the museum.

Despite the clear economic, cultural, and historical benefits of the open-air museum, Germany was reluctant to adopt the typology over concerns of authenticity. Leaders in museology denounced open-air museums as “exercises in fantasy, lacking in integrity and conceivably leading to false historical conclusions.”27 The tactic of in situ preservation was preferred as the ideal method of preservation, but with the rapid loss of historically valuable vernacular architecture throughout the German countryside, the practicality of such a conservative approach to preservation was no longer viable. As farming became increasingly industrialized and consolidated, old, small farmsteads were being abandoned for new and efficient buildings.28 A complete genre of agricultural architecture was disappearing even before the mass industrialization and losses of World War II, and although a few individuals, such as Professor Heinrich Ottenjann, proposed an open-air museum in 1934 for the “Oldenburger

26 Ibid.
27 Ibid, 15.
28 Ibid, 16.
Münsterland — an area rich in exceptionally fine half-timber structures,” the concept was still met with intense criticism.29

Despite Germany’s reluctance, one large open-air museum was able to come into fruition during the inter-war years due to Ottenjann’s continued interest in the typology and aligning Nazi ideology. The power shift of 1933 enabled Ottenjann to finally gain political support as “Nazi ideology glorified peasants and peasant culture.”30 Apart from its late acceptance, the German open-air museum as initiated by Ottenjann also differed in its “regional rather than national scope in character.”31 The Museumsdorf Cloppenburg in Oldenburg in North Western Germany was begun in 1934 and portrayed “a typical North German Brinkdorf of the Oldenburg area — an open, unenclosed village situated in rolling meadowland with occasional groupings of old oak trees (Figure 2.5).”32 “The stated objective [was] a carefully detailed exposition of what was known as the Niedersachsenhaus (lower Saxon house) and the East Fiesian Gulfhaus” — vernacular housing types specific for the region.33 As with its European counterparts, the museum was planned to recreate a village of 150 to 300 years ago, including such necessary building typologies as a school and church to support the interpretation of the traditional homes (Figure 2.6). Ironically enough, the museum became a complete casualty of World War II with all of the buildings reduced to ashes from incendiary bombs.34 It wasn’t until after the war that “the wide-spread devastation and desolation, which was by no means limited to large urban areas,” convinced Germany “that it had lost much of an irreplaceable historical and cultural legacy with the destruction of old farmsteads and hamlets.”35 The need for a

29 Perrin, Outdoor Museums, 16.
31 Ibid, 17.
32 Perrin, Outdoor Museums, 17.
33 Ibid.
34 Ibid, 18.
35 Ibid.
renewed sense of national identity post devastation led to the acceptance of the open-air museum within German society and historic preservation circles. The typology became extremely popular, leading to the complete reconstruction of Cloppenburg in 1961 as a way to further manage the loss.36

A movement born in 1881 with King Oscar II’s collection in Bygdø, Norway had gained ideological groundings in 1891 with Artur Hazelius’ Skansen in Stockholm, Sweden leading to its adoption throughout Western and Central Europe in the years leading up to World War II. The ability to connect with one’s past on such a tangible level became a desirable quality in history education, and while the movement was born in Europe, it wasn’t until its transference to the United States during the inter-war years that “a new point of departure” was taken with a new sense of scale, greater investments in execution, and privately directed objectives.37

36 Perrin, Outdoor Museums, 18.
37 Rentzhog, Open Air Museums: The History and Future of a Visionary Idea, ix.
2.3 Images of European Open-Air Museums

Figure 2.1: King Oscar II’s collection at Bygdø

Figure 2.2: Hazelius’ proposal for an almost identical complex in Stockholm
Figure 2.3: Map of Skansen as it appeared at the time of Hazelius’ death

Figure 2.4: The rural village life as portrayed at Skansen
Figure 2.5: Quatmashof Farmhouse at Cloppenburg

Figure 2.6: Plan of Cloppenburg
3 Transference to the United States: 
A Three Wave Movement

Educational Tourism and the Automobile
The Threat of Neglect
A Reinvestment in Americana with the Bicentennial
Images of American Open-Air Museums
3.1 Educational Tourism and the Automobile

The introduction of the American open-air museum in the years immediately before and after World War II not only created a new point of departure within the overall discourse of the museum typology, but also signaled a shift in the country’s perception of historic preservation and the movement’s coming of age. The first wave of museum creation in the 1930s and 40s was a direct reaction to the ongoing trend towards amateur sponsored preservation activities whose chief aim was education. “The historical societies and genealogical groups that set aside ancestral homesteads wanted to teach some aspect of patriotism to the first sizable group of tourists who roamed the countryside.”1 The concept of educational tourism born out of this promotion of patriotism first manifested itself through the historic house museum – an individual-based portrayal of history reliant on either buildings of extreme age or the buildings in which famous people once resided or where notable events took place; however, the “concept of portraying the history of the common man, three-dimensionally and in outdoor museum form” would soon dominate educational tourism with its impact quickly revolutionized by the arrival of the automobile.2

The automobile had a tremendous effect on American life, mobilizing an entire society in a way never before conceived. By 1926, the number of visitors recorded annually by the National Park Service had jumped to 2,315,000 from the 240,000 visitors in 1914.3 The mass production of the car enabled higher ownership numbers with 19,267,000 cars on the road in 1926.4 The commodification of tourism presented by the automobile was only intensified by the introduction of increased leisure time in the workforce. “In manufacturing industries, average

---

1 Charles B. Hosmer, Preservation Comes of Age: From Williamsburg to the National Trust, 1926-1949 (Charlottesville: Published for the Preservation Press, National Trust for Historic Preservation in the United States by the University Press of Virginia, 1981), 1.
3 Hosmer, Preservation Comes of Age, 1.
weekly hours declined from 49.4 in 1914 to 45.0 in 1925, while weekly earnings increased during the same period from $10.92 to $24.38."\(^5\) However, the topic of paid or unpaid leave would continue to be contested well into the 1930s.\(^6\) With more time and money to spend, the American family packed its bags and hit the road in search of entertainment and relaxation. An unprecedented amount of connectivity between metropolitan centers and the countryside in the form of highway construction saw a population no longer relegated to a regional existence. The entire country and its cultural heritage was finally made accessible to the ordinary citizen, and many saw this as an opportunity to popularize American history for the consumption of the general public. As expressed by John D. Rockefeller, Jr., American financier, philanthropist, and founder of Colonial Williamsburg, “With the changes that time has brought, the wholesome and profitable use of leisure…is one of the great problems of the day. In its solution the cultural and uplifting value of beauty, whether apprehended with eye or ear, is playing an increasingly important part.”\(^7\)

The preservation of history and our material culture was seen as a “wholesome and profitable use of leisure” with the introduction of the open-air museum being a prime museum typology for such educational ideals.\(^8\) The years leading up to World War II saw a conscious battle between industrial growth and the rural landscape with several prominent figures – including John D. Rockefeller, Jr. and Henry Ford – investing in the privatization of preservation by promoting Americana, a way of life seemingly threatened by societal progress, to the potential audience afforded by the mass tourism of the automobile. As stated by Warren I. Sussman, cultural historian, in reference to an earnestness in searching the past, “First there was the discovery of the idea of culture and its wide-

\(^5\) Hosmer, *Preservation Comes of Age*, 2.
\(^8\) Ibid.
scale application to a critical tool that could shape a critical idea, especially as it was directed repeatedly against the failures and meaninglessness of an urban-industrial civilization…A search for the ‘real’ America could become a new kind of nationalism; the idea of an American Way could reinforce conformity.”⁹ The Golden Age of the American open-air museum capitalized on this new kind of nationalism and epitomized the privatization of preservation as a hobby founded on individual educational interests by businessmen wanting to show a now urbanized America a glimpse of rural society.¹⁰

Greenfield Village, one of the most publicized of the American open-air museums, was founded by the wealthy industrialist and philanthropist Henry Ford (Figure 3.1). “For the first time…the same towering sense of purpose as Hazelius” was implemented in Ford’s vision for Greenfield Village; “For both of them, the end was not the museum itself, but the possibility of influencing the future.”¹¹ The entrepreneur and self-proclaimed social reformer put $25 million to $30 million into consciously tracing the “progress of civilization through the mechanical arts” in a rural stretch of land near Dearborn, Michigan – the very rural landscape his industrial endeavors were helping to destroy.¹² Opened to the public in 1929, the museum clearly referenced the typology established by Skansen as was noted by Andreas Lindblom, then director of Skansen, following his visit in 1948:

“Skansen’s two most successful daughters are without doubt Maihaugen [Norway]…and Greenfield Village, created by Henry Ford senior, who drew his inspiration from Stockholm.”¹³ Lindblom’s admiration lay in the museum’s ability to make history entertaining by bringing to life the many dwellings, workshops, stores, and official buildings that came to represent the totality of industrial evolution – even meticulously relocating Thomas

---

⁹ Hosmer, *Preservation Comes of Age*, 4.
¹⁰ Ibid, 74.
¹² Hosmer, *Preservation Comes of Age*, 3.
Edison’s house and laboratories from which his great inventions were born all the way from New Jersey. Ford not only moved Edison’s laboratory, but also Lincoln’s courthouse, the cycle workshop of the Wright brothers, and other buildings attached to well-known pioneers in innovation. His own personal memories also influenced his vision, leading him to include the house where he grew up, schools he attended, and his first mechanical workshop. The museum plan embraced the relocation of up to 250 buildings from all over the country into a village-like setting with an emphasis on industrial buildings, such as “water driven sawmills, flour mills, glassworks, woolen carding mills, carpenters’ workshops and smithies – all aimed at being self-supporting.” One of the many characteristics of the open-air museums of this time period was an aim at directly educating the public on the industries of the past through live demonstrations by “craftsmen such a pewterers, shoemakers, smiths, violinmakers, candlemakers, and glassblowers” who were to make as well as sell their products on site.

In an idea shared with the open-air museums of the Nordic countries, Ford saw an affinity for humanity in his museum, stating: “This is the only reason why Greenfield Village exists – to give us a sense of unity with our people through the generations, and to convey the inspiration of American genius, the resourcefulness of our people, to our youth.” While the museum’s influence on the general public has been one of enthusiasm, the field of historic preservation has often regarded Ford’s intentions as contrived, highlighting his focus on promoting his own educational ideals versus maintaining the integrity of the built environment he was recreating. Despite the contentions around the topic of authenticity and relocation, Greenfield Village was listed on the National Register

---

14 Rentzhog, Open Air Museums: The History and Future of a Visionary Idea, 127.
15 Ibid, 129.
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid, 128.
18 Ibid.
19 Ibid, 30.
of Historic Places in 1969 and became a National Historic Landmarks in 1981, making it the only open-air museum with such designations. The significance of Greenfield Village is listed as fourfold:

First, it illustrates Henry Ford’s conception that the history of American material progress is a story of the development and growth of agriculture, manufacturing, and transportation. As a reflection of Ford’s ideas, the Institute contributes to the understanding of an important figure in American industrial history. Second, the Henry Ford Museum contains one of the most important collections of Americana in the United States. As such it is an important educational resource. Third, Greenfield Village is a precedent setting open-air outdoor village museum that served as a model in the development of other such villages across the United States. Lastly, Greenfield Village influenced the historic preservation movement, first, by developing a type of historic preservation centered on preserving and interpreting historic buildings by moving them to a re-created village setting and, second, by stimulating a reaction to the museum village that lead to the extension of the historic preservation concept to include the preservation of the man built environment in situ as documents of time, place, and historical continuity.

Greenfield Village was ahead of its time in terms of generating the public’s interest in history, eventually leading to an increased acceptance of historic preservation. The New Deal encouraged the popularization of history in the late 1930s as “writers who were preparing the American Guide Series, the researchers who were compiling the Federal Records Survey, and the architects who measured structures for the Historic American Building Survey – all acted as missionaries who gave American history a new dimension.” Interest in history began to expand from the pre-Revolutionary homesteads of the founding fathers in the East to the nineteenth-century buildings in the West as the National Park Service historians traced the evolution of the western frontier and mining boomtowns. The historic preservation movement was maturing into a profession founded on scholarly investigations as proved by the chartering of the National Trust in 1949 – ending the early era of the movement’s development. As stated by Charles B. Hosmer, Jr. – author of Preservation Comes of Age, American

22 Hosmer, Preservation Comes of Age, 6.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid, 1.
Society had successfully “moved from the era of historic house museums and battlefield commemoration into the world of historic districts, outdoor museums, and preservation planning,” but the discourse on the American open-air museum was still limited to the popularized example of Greenfield Village, hindering the overall effect of the typology on American society and historic preservation. 25 To better understand the comprehensive impact of the movement’s initiation in the United States, another museum of this era – Old Sturbridge Village – will be discussed in the following chapter as a case study for the first wave of museum creation.

3.2 The Threat of Neglect

The correlative relationship between the automobile and urbanization in the post-World War II years led to an increasingly complex and rapidly evolving American landscape. The construction of high-speed roads (including the interstate highway system facilitated by the National Interstate Defense Highways Act of 1956) saw an increased level of connectivity and the rise of urban sprawl. The expansion of suburban living, while beneficial to some, contributed to “social and racial upheaval [as well as] the subsequent emptying of American cities.” Now vacant urban cores were left vulnerable to market pressures, putting much of the existing building stock at risk of demolition either by purposeful action or by neglect. While the automobile ushered in a new phase of urban development in the 1950s and 60s, it continued to operate as a catalyst for heritage tourism - creating a set of societal conditions that enabled the second wave of open-air museum creation to occur.

The 1950s saw a boom in the economy, the population, and the suburbs as the United States settled into a period of peace and prosperity. Technological innovations spurred economic growth, while the baby boom saw a dramatic increase in the number of families – both of which fueled the expansion of populations away from central urban areas into low-density, car-dependent communities. The emptying of the American city established a dual threat to the existing building stock as the push for urban renewal actively threatened historic buildings in urban centers, and the corresponding outward expansion of the suburbs and highway construction saw the demolition of rural farmsteads and communities. As was the case in Germany, the added threat of expansion and neglect fueled by the industrialization of farming placed further pressure on rural America’s built fabric. The rapid loss of family farms around the country led to a surplus in abandoned traditional agricultural buildings, many of

---

which were significant in their representation of regional, vernacular architecture.\textsuperscript{27} Regardless of the circumstances surrounding the abandonment of America’s buildings, the tactic of in situ preservation was becoming increasingly difficult, and the open-air museum was seen at the time as the only proven way to preserve the buildings of the past on a regional basis.\textsuperscript{28}

One such example of museum creation for the sake of regional preservation is Old Bethpage Village (Figure 3.2). In the early 1960s, Old Bethpage Village began to receive some of the old buildings being displaced by the rapid post-war suburbanization of western Long Island with fifty-one buildings moved on site from Nassau County.\textsuperscript{29} The Bethpage farm was one of the few to survive the subdivisions in Bethpage, New York. The Village stands as just one component of Long Island’s unique preservation history associated with the relocation of historic buildings. Howard Sherwood, founder of the Society for the Preservation of Long Island Antiquities, donated his eighteenth-century farmstead to the organization after his death, Ward Melville created the Ward Melville Heritage Trust to preserve his collection of decorative arts and architecture, and local historical societies across the island began their own open-air museum initiatives in order to store their collections of historical artifacts.\textsuperscript{30} So far, ten open-air museums have been identified on Long Island alone, representing the movement’s impact on a regional level as well as the country’s acceptance of popularized history promoted by the open air museum.\textsuperscript{31}

\textsuperscript{27} Rentzhog, \textit{Open Air Museums: The History and Future of a Visionary Idea}, 394.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid.
The threat of neglect led to a surplus in available buildings for acquisition and a growing number of regional open-air museums, but it was the continued rise of tourism in the post-war era that enabled the open-air museum movement to thrive. “Freed from the material shortages and gas rationing of the war years, more Americans than ever took to the road for leisure.”32 The roadside landscape from which the first American open-air museums in the 1940s were born continued to evolve as the spread of mass tourism in the 1960s necessitated an expanded infrastructure of motels and roadside attractions.33 In “an age characterized by speed, signage, and spectacle,” open-air museums continued to serve as society’s much need psychological escape from the pressures of modernity.34 As identified by cultural historian T.J. Jackson Lears: “As the luster of these technological achievements wore off, Americans increasingly sought psychological reassurance in heritage and the past…in a more global context, a cyclical ‘antimodernist’ impulse that rises up in moments of dramatic transformation [was taking place].”35 The desire for nostalgia coupled with the expanded understanding of American history put forth by the New Deal’s research initiatives enabled the open-air museum to occupy previously unfamiliar areas of the country, expanding to new states and once overlooked regions of vernacular architecture.

Even as nostalgia for the past principally attracted tourists to these sites, an inability to completely remove one’s self from the modern world required the addition of modern amenities to the open-air museums of this era. The rise of the motor court, as instituted in both previously established and new museums, served as a way to extend the visitor experience while catering to the needs of the tourist. Nevada City – the case study for this wave of museum creation – not only saw the conversion of miners’ cabins into on-site motel units in 1959, but the creation of a completely modern concrete-block motel in the guise of nineteenth-century false front architecture.

---

33 Ibid.
34 Ibid, 32.
35 Ibid.
called Daylight Village. Built between 1946 and 1961, the lodging, located in neighboring Virginia City, contained forty motel units as well as two gas pumps for convenience. Besides Daylight Village, many buildings in Nevada City were modern services disguised as historic buildings in order to cater to visitors searching for the western past. As mentioned earlier, even older open-air museums saw an upgrade in facilities, including Old Sturbridge Village. Museum administrators had long realized the need for overnight accommodations for visitors and guests. To satisfy the need for modern amenities while maintaining the historic character of the museum, three modern motel units were constructed in 1950 around the historic Oliver Wight House – a structure original to the property of Old Sturbridge Village. The modern upgrades seen in Nevada City and Old Sturbridge Village demonstrate that while a museum’s period of interpretation may remain static, modern day business strategies had to be met in order to maintain visitor interest and the funds necessary to manage such sites.

The second wave of museum creation saw a refinement in the American open-air museum as a commercial endeavor, as well as an educational one, that resolved the country’s contradicting desire for modernity and nostalgia. The overarching themes of expansion, neglect, and recovery in the post-war years solidified historic preservation’s role in American society, culminating with the passage of the National Historic Preservation Act in 1966. The curatorial management of the built world was now seen as a collective obligation leading to a shift away from privatized acts of preservation to regionally sponsored efforts, which can be demonstrated in the proliferation of open-air museum creation across the country during this twenty year time span.

37 Ibid.
38 Ibid, 30.
40 Ibid.
understand the expanded regional scope of the second wave of museum creation, Nevada City – Montana’s response to its threatened vernacular architecture – will be discussed in Chapter Five.
3.3 A Reinvestment in Americana with the Bicentennial

The third and final wave of museum creation in the 1970s and 80s can be characterized by a reinvestment in Americana in response to America’s Bicentennial celebration. The open-air museums of this era took on a new character as their multicultural representation reflected on the creation of America’s unique identity through the settling of foreign immigrants. The desire to showcase the ethnic diversity that came to represent various regions of the United States meant the portrayal of a history not just tied to a specific region or state but to the countries from which the settlers arrived. Such a complex agenda was born out of the world of academia where professionals from both historic preservation and folk life studies saw a lack in understanding of frontier culture and thus sponsored the creation of museums founded on disciplined research that weren’t “for the antique collector or for the historian to study, but to educate the general public….to not portray a change in architectural styles, but changes in society as they are embodied in architecture…a general sociological assemblage, as opposed to a series of houses.”42

One such man, Henry Glassie, pioneered the creation and development of several open-air museums in preparation for the Bicentennial. Glassie was a researcher and lecturer at the University of Indiana where his writings in the field of folk life studies and investigations into vernacular architecture led him into the world of open-air museums.43 His academic vision for the typology began in 1973 during his time as a doctoral candidate in folklore specializing in material culture at the University of Pennsylvania working at Plimouth Plantation.44 His reinterpretation of the house designs based on new studies of vernacular architecture revolutionized the

42 Rentzhog, Open Air Museums: The History and Future of a Visionary Idea, 267.
43 Ibid, 265.
previously held plan for the museum’s reconstruction program.\textsuperscript{45} While Plimouth Plantation differs from other museums in that it consists exclusively of reproductions and replicas, Glassie would soon take his knowledge to the development of a full-fledged open-air museum in Indianapolis. Prairietown, built in conjunction with the Conner Prairie Historic Settlement, was conceived in the 1970s as an open-air museum consisting of thirty relocated buildings.\textsuperscript{46} The intentions for interpretation were summarized by the museum’s director, Myron Vouraz in 1975:

\begin{quote}
Equally important [as the houses] is our collection of people and activities, ordinary people. They are people who are always left out of history books because they’re not remarkable, they are average. Perhaps our major contribution is the presentation of the range of lifestyles. In that way we have hopes to correct false stereotypes about pioneer existence.\textsuperscript{47}
\end{quote}

Glassie’s clear objective to rectify the image of the frontier settler became a key component in his next museum proposal for the Frontier Culture Museum of Virginia.

In 1976, Henry Glassie was approached by Eric Montgomery, then director of the Ulster-American Folk Park, requesting the creation of a formal proposal for an open-air museum in Virginia in anticipation of the Bicentennial.\textsuperscript{48} Glassie’s proposal, completed in 1978, stated that “the museum be comprised of four farms: one each from the North of Ireland, Germany, England, and the Appalachian region of the United States.”\textsuperscript{49} Stressing the importance of relocating historic buildings, he required that each building be carefully researched and identified before acquisition and then carefully restored to the earliest date possible.\textsuperscript{50} Once chosen, the buildings

\begin{footnotes}
\item[47] Ibid, 267.
\item[49] Ibid.
\item[50] Ibid.
\end{footnotes}
would be surrounded by farmland so that each site seemed like a complete, self-sustaining farming operation, offering a setting for demonstrations of rural life.\textsuperscript{51}

As was characterized by many of the open-air museums of this time period, the effort to create such a museum may have been intellectually influenced by one man but was executed through a collaboration between professionals, students, and even state officials. The Joint International Committee for a Museum of American Frontier Culture, consisting of representatives from the United States, Great Britain, and Germany, was formed in the late 1970s, later to be joined by the state of Virginia’s authorized liaison, the Jamestown/Yorktown Foundation, with the intention of making the museum proposal become a reality.\textsuperscript{52} The Jamestown/Yorktown Foundation offered a seventy-eight acre parcel of state land near Staunton, Virginia to the cause, which was approved after the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University performed land use and economic impact studies.\textsuperscript{53} The next step, creating the American Frontier Foundation, Inc., a nonprofit corporation under Virginia law, enabled the collection of money to fund the execution of the museum with the majority of funding coming from local city governments.\textsuperscript{54} The final act in the transformation from an individually sponsored proposal to a government entity occurred in 1986 when “the Virginia General Assembly passed an act creating the Frontier Culture Museum of Virginia as an independent state agency with annual appropriation.”\textsuperscript{55} The American open-air museum was no longer strictly a private ambition, but a typology fully supported by state legislation.

Besides the evolution in stewardship, the expansion in ethnic representation resulted in a new format of museum design based on the construction of ethnic enclaves and full use of the natural landscape as first

\textsuperscript{51} “Frontier Culture Museum Volunteer Handbook,” 3.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid, 4.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid.
introduced at Skansen. The focus on representing early settlement meant a layout no longer based on village design but on the placement of individual farmsteads within the landscape; each one, as Glassie stated in his proposal, was to be surrounded by ample farmland and fields so that each enclave could be understand as a self-sustaining farming operation. Each farm site would be interpreted by costumed staff as they performed daily chores associated with the agrarian lifestyle. His emphasis on interpreting the farmland meant the introduction of historic agriculture and livestock programs. The use of live animals and cultivated land was not a new concept, however. The idea, initially put forth by Hazelius in Skansen, had been transferred to the United States with the first wave of museum creation, only on a much smaller scale. Old Sturbridge Village incorporated livestock in the form of sheep, cows, and chickens, but the Frontier Culture Museum and other contemporaneous museums, such as its predecessor and case study for this wave – Old World Wisconsin scaled their operations to include multiple individual farms, each with its own livestock.

A multicultural museum also meant that each farmstead would exhibit a completely different type of vernacular architecture as well as farm typology representative of its given ethnicity and country of origin (Figure 3.3). These farmsteads would demonstrate the various ethnic populations that came to settle in Virginia. Such a tactic required research and even building acquisition from abroad. As was the case at the Frontier Culture Museum, “appropriate traditional buildings were identified in Germany, Northern Ireland, and England” with plans to dismantle and then ship them overseas to be reconstructed on the museum grounds. With the opening of the Frontier Culture Museum in 1982, the American open-air museum had come full circle with a return to its European origins. Contemporaneous museums, such as Old World Wisconsin, expanded their ethnic scope

---

57 Ibid, 5.
58 Ibid, 4.
outside of the European continent to include the representation of African-American pioneers. While executed on quite a smaller scale, the chapel and church on Pleasant Ridge are interpreted as key public buildings within an integrated community typical to Wisconsin. Contrary to popular belief, the migration of both free African-Americans and slaves into Wisconsin occurred early on with “one hundred eighty five free African-Americans and eleven slaves included in the state census in 1840 with a total state population of 30,945 residents.59

The final wave of museum creation showed a reinterpretation of the American identity through the representation of the first pioneers. These settlers, mostly farmers and craftsmen, came to the United States from communities all over the world, but all were to become Americans, and all contributed to the success of the new country.61 This return to America’s unique identity was a response to the country’s upcoming Bicentennial celebration, leading to a burst in museum creation in the 1970s and 80s. The American open-air museum had matured into an academic endeavor with state sponsorship, leading to the creation of even larger museums reliant on open land and multi-party cooperation, while a steady flow of smaller, privatized efforts continued to fill the country’s need for regional preservation. Considered one of the best American open-air museums by Sten Rentzhog - scholar, past director of one of Sweden’s leading open-air museums, Jamtli, and author of *Open Air Museums: The History and Future of a Visionary Idea*, Old World Wisconsin came from this final wave of creation and will be discussed in Chapter Six.62

60 Ibid.
3.4 Images of American Open-Air Museums

**Figure 3.1**: Plan of Henry Ford’s Greenfield Village


**Figure 3.2**: Old Bethpage Village

Figure 3.3: Frontier Culture Museum – 1700s Irish Farm

4 Old Sturbridge Village (1946)

Motivation for Collection: *The Wells Family Story*
Contextual Origins for the Museum Layout
Complexity and Contradictions
The Museum Today
Building Inventory
Images of Old Sturbridge Village
4.1 Motivation for Collection: *The Wells Family Story*

The earliest American open-air museums were the product of wealth and obsession. Belonging only to the wealthy few who could afford such an expensive hobby, the act of collection came to exemplify the early nature of preservation, allowing the museum typology to evolve into a form of collecting founded on solitary visions rather than strict curatorial practice or acts of preservation. Old Sturbridge Village is an example, “born [out] of the impulse to share with the public the burgeoning collections of two New England industrialists, Albert B. (A.B.) and Joel Cheney (J.C. or Cheney) Wells.

The wealth and connectedness of the Wells Family dates back to the family’s patriarch, George Washington Wells. Born on a farm in South Woodstock, Connecticut, in 1846, George W. Wells lacked a formal education but possessed a desire for hard work and an eagerness to stand for principle.¹ His determination led to his incorporation of the American Optical Company in 1869 – one of the largest optical manufacturers in the world.² Early on, he brought his three sons - Albert, Cheney, and Channing – into the business where the “close family relationship of a group of farm boys running a company created a standard of business performance and ethics that is seldom equaled,” as recalled by Albert’s son George B. Wells.³ He went on to state that “the Wells brothers’ close working relationship and strength of character [would later combine] to forge a new institution, Old Sturbridge Village – which, similarly, has distinguished itself as a leader among world-class museums of history” - a claim that will be investigated through the course of this case study.⁴ To receive such a perceived distinction, the brothers’ shared interest clearly lay not only in the family business but in the collecting of objects for their own joy.

---

² Ibid.
³ Ibid.
⁴ Ibid.
and as a hobby. Albert would come to develop an interest in the “often unrecognized objects that made up the fabric of daily life and activity in the past;” Cheney preferred early American clocks and timepieces; while their brother, Channing, collected fine furniture. Through Albert and Cheney’s acute business sense and Channing’s role as sympathetic advisor, all three hobbies would culminate in the creation of Massachusetts’s own open-air museum, but not without the initial motivation set forth by one brother in particular – Albert Wells.

Albert Wells’ interest in collecting began around 1918 when his friend, E.C. Wheeler, Jr., showed him his collection of “oddities and primitives” – “the simplest kind of things used in the kitchens and around farms and shops, which made life livable one hundred to one hundred and fifty years ago.” However, his purchasing of such “oddities” didn’t begin until 1926 during a trip to New Hampshire. As the story goes, recorded by Albert’s former secretary and author of the chronicle on Old Sturbridge Village, Doris Wood:

Mr. Albert Wells’ collecting in volume started in 1926, when he was spending a few days in Manchester, Vermont. A rainy day prevented his playing of golf with his friends, so, with them, he visited an antique shop in Henniker, New Hampshire. The story goes that Mr. Wells was so intrigued with the ingenuity and resourcefulness displayed by the makers of some of the simple farm implements and household appliances for sale in the shop that he bought quantities of them. It was necessary to have his chauffeur, Paul Blodgett, and George Watson collect them in two station wagons, and then return for another load.

From that point onward, collecting became an obsession for Albert with his volume of acquisitions becoming so great that rooms had to be added to his Main Street home in Southbridge, Massachusetts in order to store the entirety (Figure 4.1). In a series of letters sent to collector friends between 1932 and 1936, Albert wrote, “I can’t stop buying, especially at the present time. Never saw such values…I’ve spent an awful lot of money this summer,

---

8 Ibid, 1.
10 Ibid, 2.
but I hate to stop buying because it seems to me that each year I have been able to pick up more interesting things than the year before.”\textsuperscript{11} The collection grew to such an extent that Albert saw a need to secure its future even after his death, leading to his incorporation of the Wells Historical Museum on November 14, 1935.\textsuperscript{12} The purpose of the museum was:

> To establish and maintain a museum and collection, open to the public, of articles of historic or artistic interest. All property of the corporation and all income therefrom shall be devoted exclusively to the said museum and shall not at any time be distributed among the members of the corporation.\textsuperscript{13}

The newly incorporated museum required a home, and Albert envisioned bequeathing his Main Street house and property for such a purpose. In July 1936, Albert asked an architect friend, Joel Chandler, to devise plans for a more permanent location and setting in which to display his prized possessions.\textsuperscript{14} Albert had “envisioned building a typical New England village in the shape of a horseshoe” on his property on Main Street (Figure 4.2).\textsuperscript{15} This plan, however, was met with contempt when presented to the museum’s Trustees, particularly his son George. To quote Albert:

> It sounded hot to me, but not very hot to anybody else, I could easily tell, and certainly not to my son George, who knocked it full of holes. He pointed out the fact that the historical value of the things I’d been collecting was tremendous, provided it could be put to proper usage and used educationally to help the children who were in existence and those who would come into existence in the years to come. He suggested that to make this material valuable it would be necessary to have a village, a live village, one with different shops operating with employees who were then available, who would know how to use the old tools, the old methods. It was essential to have water power, because in 1800 or thereabouts everybody took their corn to the gristmill, and they had to go to blacksmith shops, take their lumber to a sawmill, etc. This was a revolutionary idea as far as I was concerned, and I was taken off my feet.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{11} Simmons, \textit{The Wells Family and the Early Years of Old Sturbridge Village}, 21.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid, 4-5.
The idea also struck a chord with Cheney, who offered to go in fifty-fifty on the creation of the open-air museum, even donating his collection of antique clocks and glass paperweights to the cause.17 By July 23, 1936, the two men had chosen the perfect location for their creation. The Wight property in Sturbridge was a logical choice due to its local history and siting. The Quinabaug River had been the site of many local industries including early saw and gristmills, while the nearby old town of Sturbridge had been host to boot shops, fulling mills, and early attempts in the cotton, woolen, and various metal industries.18 “It offered land enough, a sightly vista, and easy accessibility to the public,” which encouraged the brothers to purchase the property in that year for $6,583.18.19 The Wight property carried with it the Gate House, the Woodworking Shop, a carriage house, and the Tin Shop, as well as the foundation of the grist mill, all of which were to be incorporated into the master plan of the village.20

Albert and Cheney Wells had developed a vision, one based on education and shared enjoyment. The desire to give to the public a means to understand the past outside of a traditional museum setting gave a new purpose to their collection of “oddities.” The idea of using a “living village” or open-air museum to display the “often unrecognized objects that made up the fabric of daily life and activity in the past and represented the skills and inventiveness of the early nineteenth century” was a perfect solution to their vision, and without any delay, the brothers began to execute a master plan before realizing that such a conceptual undertaking would require outside assistance.21

19 Ibid.
21 Simmons, The Wells Family and the Early Years of Old Sturbridge Village, 9.
4.2 Contextual Origins for the Museum Layout

A site had been chosen and a vision ensued, but such an unfamiliar undertaking required precedents and expertise. George Wells wrote to an acquaintance, John D. Rockefeller II: “Will you please forgive my impertinence…My father, Mr. Albert B. Wells, is engaged in a restoration undertaking locally; while by no means as expensive, in many way resembling the work your father did in Williamsburg, Va. Consequently, we should appreciate any assistance you could give us in selecting architectural and engineering advice in this undertaking.” Of course George is referring to John D. Rockefeller, Jr.’s Colonial Williamsburg – part reconstruction, part renovation – that used the town of Williamsburg, Virginia to “supply a shrine where great events in early American history and the lives of many of the men who made it may be visualized in their proper setting.” Colonial Williamsburg doesn’t qualify as an open-air museum for the purpose of this thesis since the project was based on the renovation and reconstruction of an existing town, not the relocation of historic buildings; however, the museum village, which opened to the public in 1930, was nonetheless influential. The reconstructed landscape was immensely popular with the American public, and undoubtedly served as a source of inspiration for the Wells Family in their understanding of educational tourism. Their admiration led to their acceptance of Rockefeller’s suggestion to work with the architecture firm of Perry, Shaw & Hepburn of Boston – the same firm his father used in Williamsburg’s reconstruction.

In 1937, Perry, Shaw & Hepburn were hired as architects to assist in the planning of the village. On September 23, 1936, the three brothers along with the Trustees of the Wells Historical Museum met with Thomas Mott Shaw

---

to begin the planning process surrounding the structures original to the two-hundred-year-old David Wight farm. Rockefeller’s influence was proving to be valuable with the group’s first meeting ending with optimism; however, the brothers continued to interest themselves in the “course of museum development [made] by other prominent American industrial families, in particular the work of Henry Ford at Greenfield Village,” for inspiration in their own design work. In order to better understand the intentions behind the well-known open-air museum, the brothers sent the museum’s first curator, Malcom Watkins, and the Superintendent of Construction, George Watson, to Greenfield Village in 1940. Upon their return, the two men recalled their general interest in a few exhibits but were overall unimpressed by Ford’s efforts at collecting and exhibiting. Their main point of contention was the lack of “landscape and skyline” that left the place feeling “cold, dreary, and flat.” For them, the museum’s lack of incorporated landscape left the buildings with no sense of hierarchy. They preferred the rolling terrain of the New England countryside. To quote Albert, “We all agree that what we learned from going there was principally what not to do.” Aside from their American counterparts, the Wells Family also turned their gaze towards the archetypal mother to all open air museums – Skansen in Stockholm, Sweden. Cheney Wells was able to the visit the museum during an American Optical business trip to Stockholm in 1938, bringing back with him a scrapbook of photographs for the family’s inspection (Figure 4.3). The contrast in layout and design between Greenfield Village and Skansen was a clear influence on the Wells Family’s perception towards their own museum’s objectives. As described by Sten Rentzhog in more recent times, “The

---

26 Simmons, *The Wells Family and the Early Years of Old Sturbridge Village*, 27.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid.
29 Ibid, 28.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid.
buildings were situated in an unusual type of environment, neither park nor the natural landscape surroundings common to most other open-air museums.”

The manipulation of the natural landscape found at Skansen was a complete antithesis to Greenfield Village’s stark design, with the former better suiting their New England terrain and aesthetic goals.

During their time of travel and influence, the brothers continued to meet with Perry, Shaw & Hepburn, in particular the middle partner Thomas Mott Shaw, leading to a preliminary set of plans in January 1937 for the Common and the Mill Neighborhood (Figure 4.4). It was during this time that the period of interpretation was set to be around 1800, and the conversation led to the decision to have “most, if not all, of the buildings to be of modern construction and Colonial design.” The need for a stage set onto which to display their collections took priority over the act of historic preservation. To that extent, Albert specified that “each building would house not only the antiques of some dying craft-process but, where possible, the craftsman and his family, who would live above (or near) his work.” These buildings would then be placed on a common, similar to the original plan proposed by Chandler. Dwellings would be erected around a landscaped oval common, and commercial shops along a “main street,” with the water-powered saw and grist mills near the water’s edge. The Common would then be flanked by the Gebhardt Dutch Barn, which Albert had already acquired in 1936 from Fifi B. Vanfleet of Schoharie, New York for $3,500, and a yet to be designed Mansion House. In March of that year Thomas Mott Shaw began to flesh out ideas for the Mansion House with drawings and plans; however, their reception by the

---

37 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
39 Ibid.
40 Ibid.
family was less than positive George Wells wrote to his father stating, "Mr. Shaw’s colored sketch of the proposed Mansion House at the Museum, together with the floor plan sketches, arrived here this morning...Frankly, I am somewhat disappointed with the point of view that Mr. Shaw has taken, as it is rather extravagant and heavy (Figure 4.5)." Albert had very early on expressed concern for the financial boundaries of the project, and given the vision set forth by the architects, the scope of work was not only costly but also too elaborate for the village’s rural New England context. Albert wrote, “My criticism of Shaw’s work up to date is that he is too much influenced by Williamsburg where he had all the money in the world there was to spend.” Despite a back and forth, the two parties were never able to agree upon a scheme, and the relationship dissolved in 1938.

By the end of 1937, the brothers had clearly learned exactly what they didn’t want in a museum design, and moved forward by hiring Boston landscape architect Arthur Shurcliff to continue with the master plan. In Albert’s own words, “I have tried to make the picture as plain as I can that we are not Henry Ford or John D. Rockefeller.” Ultimately, the previous ambitious plan for a reconstructed stage set was scrapped for a scheme favoring modesty both in terms of design and budget. At this point in the design process, Albert realized that new construction was costly, pushing the brothers to accept the idea of relocation over reproduction. Why pay for a new building when many of the landowners in the area were happy to either donate or sell for a small price the dilapidated buildings on their property? By the end of 1937, the first building had been relocated to the site as the team began to develop the proposed industrialized riverfront. The Cheney Saw Mill, purchased in 1935 from Austin Cheney in Gilead, Connecticut for $500, was moved to the Quinebaug River as the museum’s first

---

41 Simmons, The Wells Family and the Early Years of Old Sturbridge Village, 30.  
42 Ibid, 29.  
43 Ibid, 30.  
45 Simmons, The Wells Family and the Early Years of Old Sturbridge Village, 29.  
relocated building (Figure 4.6), while Albert’s first purchase, the Gebhardt Barn, was rebuilt on its designed site near the Common in 1937.\textsuperscript{47} The museum continued to grow in size with the purchase of the neighboring Oliver Wight property on November 1, 1937, which included the Oliver Wight house and barn, the Watson cottage – the future location for the 1950s motor court – and the Boot Shop.\textsuperscript{48} Next, the machinery from the Grist Mill at Hebron, Connecticut was relocated to the original site of the Wight Grist Mill in 1938, around which a newly constructed building was built using a combination of modern and recycled material.\textsuperscript{49} By July 15, 1939, the growth in operations required the incorporation of the Quinabaug Village Corporation – the museum’s original name – with the following objectives:

To establish, maintain, and operate a model village wherein shall be exhibited and carried on for the educational benefit of the public specimens and reproductions of New England architecture and antiquities, the arts, crafts, trades, and callings commonly practiced in and about New England villages prior to the period of industrial expansion in New England; to provide means for the training of apprentices in New England crafts and trades; to deal in and dispose of articles produced or manufactured upon the property of the corporation or acquired by the corporation in the operation of said village, or consumed by the denizens of the village; to promote and carry on the arts, crafts, trades, and callings hereinbefore referred to; and generally to do any and all things necessary or proper for the foregoing general purposes. All property of the corporation shall be devoted exclusively to the foregoing educational purposes and shall not at any time be distributed among the members of the corporation nor inure to their private benefit nor to the benefit of any individual.\textsuperscript{50}

With the establishment of the corporation and the agreement with the Wells Historical Society to move the collections to the site, the need for more exposition space required the continued search for more building acquisitions.\textsuperscript{51}

---
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid, 11.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid, 13.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid, 14.
\textsuperscript{51} Ed Hood, "Timeline of OSV Architecture and Other Relevant Events – Draft" (For internal use at Old Sturbridge Village, 2001), Old Sturbridge Village Library and Archive, 3.
It’s key to reiterate here that Albert Wells originally intended for the village to be made of modern replicas of buildings that were to be laid out “as if it had been settled fairly early in the seventeenth century and had normally prosperous development to about 1800.” The plan for the village was not to be an idealized replica of a New England typology but a modest display modeled after towns in the Quinebaug River Valley. Following this plan, the display and demonstration of New England crafts and industry would be just as important, if not more so, than the architectural integrity of the village. The design and construction of the buildings was seen as just another craft representation, meaning that only one or two “carefully re-erected houses on the common would be sufficient to exhibit the skill of the housewright’s art.” Ultimately, Albert Wells gave up the idea of reproduction in favor of relocation solely because of the associated costs. According to Richard M. Candee, former architectural historian for Old Sturbridge Village:

It is my impression that the initial old buildings moved to the common represent a pragmatic solution to A.B. Wells’ belief that the designs of the architectural experts were both too grand and too expensive. Despite the ‘purist’ tendencies of his staff, his aim was personal taste and not authenticity.

Albert’s personal taste favored the concept of “localism.” Each building, whether it be a reproduction or relocation, was to reflect the local context. Thus, buildings were either modeled after hand-picked prototypes from the region, such as the Gun Shop that was inspired by an eighteenth-century gambrel farmhouse in nearby Brookfield, Massachusetts, or the buildings were relocated from nearby sites, such as the Fitch House which came from Willimantic, Connecticut in 1939.

---

53 Ibid.
54 Ibid.
55 Ibid, 8.
56 Ibid.
57 Ibid.
58 Ibid.
The shift towards relocation quickly escalated with at least six buildings and their ancillary structures re-erected on site by the onset of World War II in 1941.60 That same year, the first booklet concerning the philosophy and plans for the village was printed and distributed to the visiting members of the Walpole Society.61 Construction paused for the war, but quickly resumed in anticipation of the opening. In April 1946, concern over the name of the village – Old Quinabaug Village – was expressed by Ruth Wells, who suggested the name of Old Sturbridge Village in order to eliminate confusion on its implied association with the neighboring town of Quinabaug, Connecticut.62 The name change was approved by the Trustees, and by opening day on June 8, 1946, numerous buildings were already located on the Common including the Grant Store (Figure 4.7), the Dennison Schoolhouse (now the Brick Theatre), the Fitch House (Figure 4.8), and the Richardson House and Gebhardt Barn (now the Parsonage and Parsonage Barn).63 Tourist necessities were already appearing with the construction of the Tavern at the entrance gate, while the Mill Neighborhood saw the Grist Mill operating and the Saw Mill as a static exhibition (Figure 4.9).64 The first season saw 5,170 visitors - a success that pushed the Wells Family to continue its efforts to expand.65

By 1970, numerous other buildings were brought to the site including both meetinghouses, the Printing Office, the Fenno and Salem Towne Houses, the Blacksmith Shop, the bank, a law office, school, carding mill, pottery, and copper shop.66 The Center Meetinghouse became one apex of the Common, having been donated by the Fiskdale congregation in exchange for a Hammond electric organ in 1948 (Figure 4.10-4.11).67 The contentious

---

64 Ibid.
65 Ibid.
66 Ibid, 7.
67 Simmons, *The Wells Family and the Early Years of Old Sturbridge Village*, 52.
Mansion House from the early years was finally envisioned for the opposite side of the Common with the relocation of the Salem Towne House in 1955 (Figure 4.12-4.14). Formal departments were established for the collections, historical research, and education, all of which were supported by an increase in appreciation for accurate restorations and documentation. A return to Skansen ideology also occurred in 1950 with the introduction of a living farm program centered on the relocated Pliny Freeman Farmhouse from Sturbridge (Figure 4.15-4.16). Plans for expansion were continuously proposed with an entire village extension planned in 1969 with the acquisition of three new buildings. The Carpenter House, Phoenixville Mill, and Stratton Tavern were already dismantled and in on-site storage for the reconstruction of a textile mill when funding for the extension was scrapped, leaving the buildings to disintegrate while still in storage. The museum has never been timid in its search for acquisitions and still functions today under the assumption that expansion isn’t out of the question given the proper funds.

Old Sturbridge Village has never been viewed as a static museum collection. The museum learned to evolve over the years, and as a result, has become a symbol of ideologies and ideals concomitant with the era in which they were conceived. As contemporary concerns for preservation and museum management developed, so did the planning process for the village. The initial concept for Old Sturbridge Village may have been declared in 1936 during the first wave of museum creation, but its current management reflects an understanding of contemporary conditions, which has allowed the museum to remain relevant through all three waves of museum creation into the modern day. In the words of George Wells during his initial proposal for the museum typology, Old

68 Simmons, *The Wells Family and the Early Years of Old Sturbridge Village*, 54.
70 Simmons, *The Wells Family and the Early Years of Old Sturbridge Village*, 53.
Sturbridge Village has been put to “proper usage…..used educationally to help the children who were in existence and those would come into existence in the years to come.”

---

4.3 Complexity and Contradictions

As characterized by the initial years of the open-air museum movement, Old Sturbridge Village was the product of individual interest. Albert Wells’ obsession with the collection of everyday oddities grew to such a scale that its overwhelming presence propelled him and his family into the developing arena of the American open-air museum. The motivation for collection was a purely selfish act for personal enjoyment alone, but when faced with securing the future of his accomplishments, Albert turned to the idea of public ownership in the hope of inspiring enjoyment and education for future generations. Driven by the booming automotive industry and the equally popular use of leisure time as an educational excursion, the Wells Family members placed themselves among the ranks of Henry Ford and John D. Rockefeller, Jr. as proprietors of their own open-air museum in Massachusetts. Seeing the potential in the village-like settings already in action at Greenfield Village and Colonial Williamsburg, the Wells’ immersed themselves in the typology and began what would be a constant struggle between their affinity for their hand-held objects and the buildings necessary for their display and appreciation.

The museum’s complexity lies in the resolution of this relationship and its subsequent impact on the nature and composition of the village plan. As mentioned in the previous section, Albert saw the museum’s creation as nothing more than a glorified display cabinet for his prized collection. His initial desire for modern structures veiled in historicism was not a solution based in preservation but personal taste. He said so himself that he “did not like the idea of moving old buildings.”73 He wrote, “[An old building] has served its purpose and by the time you take it down and then rebuild it, it only means a few years when it is entirely gone.”74 For him, a reproduction held just as much merit as the original, if not more, because it had structural integrity and ease of construction. It

---

74 Ibid.
was only due to sheer numbers and cost that Albert would turn to relocation as the basis for Old Sturbridge Village; thus instituting a system of localism that would evolve in the following decades.

In the years leading up to the museum’s grand opening, localism was the guiding tool in the selection of actual buildings for relocation, although many of them were reinterpreted as different building typologies once on site. Along the Common, the Miner Grant Store was originally a home in Stafford, Connecticut before its relocation in 1939 and conversion into a general store, while the boot shop was also relocated in 1939 from the museum’s own property having been an ancillary building to the Wight House. Buildings were hastily moved on site and altered as seen fit to suit Albert’s desire for specific building typologies. As mentioned previously, the Miner Grant Store, now used a museum gift shop, was altered significantly with only the frame preserved from the original structure. Similarly, the Richardson House, re-erected in 1940, retains its eighteenth-century saltbox house exterior, but was reconfigured internally to represent a meeting place, not a house, per A.B. Wells’ direction. If not relocated then the building was a replica of a found prototype, such as the George Stone Blacksmith Shop that was built in 1942 as a copy of a shop at Gilmanton Ironworks, New Hampshire. This building would mysteriously burn down on December 7, 1956 only to be replaced a year later by a relocated blacksmith shop from Bolton, Massachusetts. In subsequent years, the original owners of this shop decided that they wanted the building back; however, with the museum’s refusal to do so, they in turn built their own replica on the original site.

---

77 Ibid.
79 Ibid.
80 Tom Kelleher (Historian and Curator of Mechanical Arts at OSV) in discussion with the author, March 2016.
Besides the continuous struggle between relocation versus reproduction, the overall rationale for the village composition was in constant flux in relation to the museum’s evolving management. The museum was struggling to attain a unique identity, a struggle that began in the early stages of the planning process with the brothers’ inability to commit to an overall master plan. From the horseshoe plan of Chandler to the elaborate colonial village of Perry, Shaw & Hepburn, it took over a year for the brothers to finally agree upon the Shurcliff proposal. The museum plan would continue to evolve at regular ten year intervals with each plan using the process of “list-making” to dictate an overall vision and the building acquisitions necessary to implement such goals. The first such plan was proposed by Ruth Wells who had taken over the role of museum director in 1945 following Albert Wells’ sudden heart trouble and ensuing move to California. The plan of 1948 introduced for the first time the idea of craft production as a self-sustaining operation, much like at Greenfield Village. As stated within the document:

The Village will go beyond merely providing a place for exhibiting early objects, which is a museum function and secondary to the project. The most important consideration is the plan by which the craftsmen who will work in the shops provided at the Village can teach their skills to young apprentices.

The main purpose of the Village, then, is educational. The young man training for an industrial job will have the chance to work in early New England crafts, and he will learn by actual experience the background of our industrial history. By handling the materials and tools available in 1800, the young man will learn gradually that an immense amount of labor and time was needed to produce a single object.

---

82 Ibid.
83 Ibid.
84 Simmons, The Wells Family and the Early Years of Old Sturbridge Village, 45.
86 Ibid, 5.
The accompanying list of building acquisitions or reproductions therefore included many craft shops such as the aforementioned blacksmith shop, the woodworking shop, the shoe shop, the gun shop, the spectacle shop, the print shop, the weave shop, the cabinet shop, and the furniture finisher’s shop.  

In the next five years, the museum’s management continued to shift, resulting in the expanding scope of applied localism. The new ten-year plan of 1958 saw a dismissal of the previously retained “twenty-mile radius as a criterion for building selection” and a desired purging of original buildings that were no longer considered relevant, such as the Gebhardt Dutch Barn and some early replicas. A new vision to interpret the village as a county seat required new building types, resulting in the relocation of the Brooks Pottery, Hapgood Carding Mill, McClellan Law Office, and Thompson Bank. However, the acquired law office and bank were never part of an actual early nineteenth-century county seat. The buildings were instead relocated from two nearby rural town commons, leading to a contradiction between the vision and execution.

The 1968 plan saw the acquisition of more land and thus an expansion in the overall scope of the museum. This led to the construction of more modern facilities such as the Visitor Center and Gift Shop. A new extension, centered on the interpretation of a textile mill, included the acquisition of the Phoenixville Mill (a cotton factory), the Carpenter House (the mill owner’s house), the Stratton Tavern, and a cider mill. As mentioned earlier, this extension was never realized and the buildings were lost to neglect.

---

89 Ibid, 12.
90 Ibid.
91 Ibid.
92 Ibid, 13.
93 Ibid.
As the decades went by and the founding family became less involved with the overall management of the site, the idea of historic preservation began to insert itself into the museum’s practice. Slowly, a new generation of museum professionals emerged with a more discerning attitude towards the act of relocation and historical accuracy. As stated by Richard Candee, “With more conscious concern for the standards of their museum peers in other parts of the country, the crafts became a method of historical interpretation; period dates and a regional context provided new criteria for exhibition; and restoration standards began to match those of other historic sites or museum houses.” Old Sturbridge Village was now viewed as “a hypothetical composite of the type of center village settlements that developed early in the nineteenth century as burgeoning commerce and trade gradually fostered centralization of dwellings and mercantile activities,” and buildings were to be selected based on two perspectives: their suitability to the theme and “whether or not the building is threatened by exigencies of demolition or maintenance to an extent that prohibit on-site preservation (Figure 4.17).” Not until the 1970s did Old Sturbridge Village finally recognize its potential as an open-air museum in its ability to not only educate the public but to save the built history of its local heritage. While late to the game in terms of the museum’s already established building collection, the museum’s staff quickly established high standards of professionalism by focusing their preservation efforts on the adoption of modern day techniques in processing the information needed to more accurately guide the removal and restoration processes.

Old Sturbridge Village has come full circle from a privatized creation to an objectively run business. While the museum’s identity has evolved over the years, it has, in fact, benefitted the most from its consequent fluidity. The museum became a direct reflection of evolving concerns over management and interpretation, always placing the

---

95 Ibid.
96 Curtis, The Buildings at Old Sturbridge Village, 2.
museum within the needs of its associated time period. The complexity in the composition of the village plan allowed for lessons to be learned and objectives to be altered in order to keep the museum relevant through the successive waves of the open-air museum movement. To this end, Old Sturbridge Village may not exist as a pristine model village of early nineteenth-century New England architecture, but instead embodies the development of the American open-air museum as an honest interpretation of the societal pressures placed on the museum typology. Based upon the pre-established criteria for evaluation, Old Sturbridge Village would be considered a significant contributor to the open-air museum movement. The museum was founded on the idea of educational tourism as it related to its given time period of creation. The Wells Family saw the educational potential in their vast collection of early American artifacts and the need to interpret them in their appropriate architectural and horticultural contexts for the public’s enjoyment. The museum as a designed ensemble speaks clearly to the founding visionaries as well as the overall evolving vision for the collection’s interpretation. While Old Sturbridge Village struggled to establish a consistent mode of acquisition, wavering between relocation and reproduction for many years, the methodology of “localism” was always a key aspect to maintaining the museum’s regional charm. Creative liberty, in terms of repurposing or completely reproducing buildings for the sake of attaining specific building typologies, may have taken place, but for the benefit of the museum’s design intent, which was always to represent a pre-industrial New England society. If Old Sturbridge Village were to be nominated to the National Register of Historic Places, then any building, whether it was relocated or reproduced, would be deemed contributing to the museum’s overall design. To quote Richard Candee, “Devoid of the specific historical association of any one community, it can speak to the process of change in a section of New England
representative of many such inland towns. Rather than a model village, it evolves a village model applicable to the analysis of similar places in the real world.”97

4.4 The Museum Today

Old Sturbridge Village continues to function beyond the Wells Family’s influence as a private nonprofit organization consisting of a twenty-one member Board of Trustees.98 It stands as “the largest outdoor history museum in the Northeast” with more than forty historic buildings and two hundred forested acres.99 The museum is a member of the New England Museum Association (NEMA) and has with an annual budget of approximately seven million dollars gained through admission, memberships, donations, and the sale of goods onsite, including in-house made crafts as originally proposed by Ruth Wells in her 1948 plan.100 According to its current mission statement, “Old Sturbridge Village, a museum and learning resource of New England life, invites each visitor to find meaning, pleasure, relevance and inspiration through the exploration of history.”101

With more than fifty years of history and over twenty million visitors from across the country and the world, the museum continues to operate at the scale now expected by American open-air museums. Completely professionalized departments have continued to grow, with sixty full-time, year-round employees, including forty-five costumed historians and artisans, forty-seven part-time, year-round employees, and 114 seasonal employees.102 Two hundred and fifty volunteers also donate their time annually. The vast collection of artifacts upon which this museum was founded serves as “the single largest holding of materials documenting the everyday life of early New England,” with more than half of the collection having been acquired by the Wells Family.103

More than 60,000 objects form the collection, with an emphasis towards craftsmen’s tools, agricultural

99 Ibid.
100 Ibid.
101 Ibid.
102 Ibid, 3.
103 Ibid, 3.
implements, ceramics, clothing and textiles, furniture, clocks, lighting, portraits, and other decorative arts.\textsuperscript{104}

Aside from the resources within the museum proper, the Research Library and Archives that are located just outside of the museum boundary hold the materials necessary to accurately research and comprehend all aspects of early New England culture, acting as a valuable source for the interpretation of the site.

In terms of education programs, the Freeman Farm exhibit continues to use the tools and skills of early farm work to harvest and raise historic varieties of crops and livestock including sixty-nine farm animals and four hundred varieties of garden plants and field crops (Figure 4.18).\textsuperscript{105} Field trips and other education programs catering to the surrounding school population bring in 55,000 students each year.\textsuperscript{106} Keeping to George Wells’ original proposal for a living village, the museum has become a committed public institution as it continues to act as an educational hub for current and future young students.\textsuperscript{107}

So how will a museum founded on constant change move into its sixth decade and the twenty-first century? According to Jack Larkin, former Chief Historian and Museum Scholar Emeritus for Old Sturbridge Village, “The more we know about our visitors and potential visitors, their experiences, and their expectations, the better we will be able to attract them and—once they are here—provide them with a rich experience of learning and enjoyment that will bring them back.”\textsuperscript{108} In an age where the societal conditions that informed the American open-air museum movement have been reversed, the question of sustainability arises. Larkin states, “We are learning that our potential visitors over the next decade will have enormous range of opportunities and choices,

\textsuperscript{104} Old Sturbridge Village, “Press Kit,” 3.
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid, 2.
\textsuperscript{106} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{108} Jack Larkin, “Celebrating 50 years of History Part 4: Progress, Challenge and Uncertainty as OSV Looks to the 21\textsuperscript{st} Century” (Sturbridge, Massachusetts: Old Sturbridge Village, 1996), Old Sturbridge Village Library and Archive, 1.
along with a scarcity of leisure time… They will be overloaded with information, increasingly sophisticated about communications media, and more demanding of the highest standards of service. To reach them successfully we will need to create a unique blend of authenticity and engagement.”\textsuperscript{109} With that in mind, a blending of twenty-first century media and the continued tradition of costumed interpreters and visitor participation will come to define the museum’s presence in the future. Such tactics as expanded programming will be the only way to get this generation’s potential visitors to see the open-air museum as a wholesome and profitable use of their now limited amount of leisure time.

\textsuperscript{109} Larkin, “Celebrating 50 years of History Part,” 1.
### 4.5 Building Inventory: Old Sturbridge Village

Note: This list has been divided into categories organized by level of authenticity and visible appearance within the museum proper. In total, there are fifty-nine historic buildings at OSV that are accessible or directly visible to visitors within the museum proper. The remainder are either not within the public area of the museum or no longer exist.

#### Structures Original to the Property of OSV

Note: These historic structures are original to the property and were acquired with the purchasing of the land.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>001</td>
<td>Herb Shed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>002</td>
<td>Rural Industries/Hands-On Craft Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>003</td>
<td>Oliver Wight House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>004</td>
<td>Personnel Office (David Wight Low House)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>005</td>
<td>Shoe Shop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>006</td>
<td>Fuller Conference Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>007</td>
<td>Motel Office</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Historic Structures

Note: These are actual early buildings maintained as exhibit buildings and/or which are visible within the museum proper.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>001</td>
<td>Bixby House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>002</td>
<td>Blacksmith Shop (Moses Wilder)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>003</td>
<td>Brooks Pottery Shop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>004</td>
<td>Carding Mill (Oliver Hapgood)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>005</td>
<td>Center Meetinghouse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>006</td>
<td>Cider Mill (Lyford-Hutchins)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>007</td>
<td>Cooper Shop (James Nash)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>008</td>
<td>Dummerston Covered Bridge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>009</td>
<td>Fenno House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>010</td>
<td>Privy at Fenno (Rhode Island)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>011</td>
<td>Fitch House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>012</td>
<td>Cornbarn at Fitch (Rhode Island)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>013</td>
<td>Cornbarn at Freeman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>014</td>
<td>Barn at Freeman Farm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>015</td>
<td>Freeman Farmhouse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>016</td>
<td>Smokehouse at Freeman Farm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>017</td>
<td>Friends Meetinghouse (Bolton)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>018</td>
<td>Herb Shed/David Wight Cornbarn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>019</td>
<td>Knight Store</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>020</td>
<td>Law Office (John McClellan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>021</td>
<td>Miner Grant Store</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>022</td>
<td>Parsonage (Solomon Richardson House)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>023</td>
<td>Parsonage/Gebhardt Barn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>024</td>
<td>Powder House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>025</td>
<td>Printing Office (Isaiah Thomas)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>026</td>
<td>Rural Industries/Hans-On Crafts Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>027</td>
<td>School/Candia District School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>028</td>
<td>Privy at School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>029</td>
<td>Shoe Shop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>030</td>
<td>Thompson Bank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>031</td>
<td>Tin Shop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>032</td>
<td>Towne House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>033</td>
<td>Wight (Parsonage) Well House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>034</td>
<td>Yorke Shope (Freeman Carriage Shed)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Reproduction Buildings
Note: These structures are either reproductions or highly modified historic structures maintained as exhibits or museum facilities visible within the area of the museum proper.

001 Animal Pound 018 Lighting Exhibit
002 Asa Knight Woodshed 019 Mill Lounge
003 Bake House/Little Cakes 020 Playground Barn
004 Bixby Privy 021 Playground Privy
005 Blacksmith Coal Shed 022 Playground Shed
006 Brooks Pottery Kiln 023 Quinebaug Covered Bridge
007 Brooks Pottery Woodshed 024 Sawmill
008 Brick Theatre 025 Shoe Shop Woodshed
009 Bullard Tavern 026 Small House
010 Center Meetinghouse Horseshed 027 Small House Woodshed
011 Fenno Barn 028 Snack Shed/Simple Machines Shed
012 Fenno Cattle Shed 029 Sugar Shack
013 Fitch Barn 030 Sugar Camp Woodshed
014 Fitch Woodshed and Privy 031 Towne Barn and Overshed
015 Glass Exhibit 032 Towne Privy
016 Grist Mill 033 Towne Sheep Shed
017 Gun Shop/Firearms and Textiles Exhibit

Historic Structures (Not Within the Museum Proper)
Note: These historic structures are highly modified structures that are not maintained as exhibit buildings and are not in the museum proper.

001 Housekeeping 005 Personnel Office
002 Langdon 006 Rice Wood Shed
003 Lincoln Mansion (Country Curtains) 007 Fuller Conference Center
004 Oliver Wight House 008 Mashapaug House

Reproduction Buildings (Not Within the Museum Proper)
Note: These reproduction buildings are not open or maintained as exhibits and are not in the museum proper.

001 Interpretation Workshop 003 Office Services
002 1840 Building 004 Costume Office
## Deaccessioned or Lost Historic Structures

- 001 Auburn Barn
- 002 Blacksmith Shop No. 1
- 003 Blacksmith Shop No. 3
- 004 Kelly Cornbarn
- 005 Mashapaug Barn
- 006 First Sawmill (Cheney)
- 007 Herb Barn
- 008 Freeman Farm Lean-To Shed
- 009 Sheep Shed

## Modern Facilities

- 001 Administration Building and Library
- 002 Collections Storage
- 003 Greenhouse
- 004 Horse Barn
- 005 Horse Shed Beyond Freerman
- 006 Hydro-Electric Plant
- 007 Liberty Cap Motel Units
- 008 Machinery Storage
- 009 Maintenance Buildings
- 010 Museum Education Building
- 011 Museum Education Wood Shed
- 012 Museum Gift Store
- 013 Outside Inn
- 014 Security Garage
- 015 Visitor Center
- 016 Vending Machine Shed

## Acquired Buildings Never Rebuilt and/or Lost

- 001 Carpenter-Capen House
- 002 New Braintree Tomb
- 003 Phoenixville Mill
- 004 Stratton Tavern
4.6 Images of Old Sturbridge Village

Figure 4.1: Antique-filled Main Street house, 1930s
Source: David M. Simmons, The Wells Family and the Early Years of Old Sturbridge Village (Sturbridge, Massachusetts: Old Sturbridge Village, 2000).

Figure 4.2: Chandler plan for the exhibition buildings to display the collections of the Wells Historical Museum on Main Street
Source: David M. Simmons, The Wells Family and the Early Years of Old Sturbridge Village (Sturbridge, Massachusetts: Old Sturbridge Village, 2000).
Figure 4.3: Scrapbook of images from Cheney Wells’ trip to Skansen

Source: David M. Simmons, *The Wells Family and the Early Years of Old Sturbridge Village* (Sturbridge, Massachusetts: Old Sturbridge Village, 2000).
Figure 4.4: Perry, Shaw & Hepburn preliminary plan

Source: David M. Simmons, *The Wells Family and the Early Years of Old Sturbridge Village* (Sturbridge, Massachusetts: Old Sturbridge Village, 2000).
Figure 4.5: Thomas Mott Shaw’s sketch proposal for a brick mansion house, 1937
Source: David M. Simmons, *The Wells Family and the Early Years of Old Sturbridge Village* (Sturbridge, Massachusetts: Old Sturbridge Village, 2000).

Figure 4.6: Cheney Saw Mill
Figure 4.7: Miner Grant Store, 1940

Source: David M. Simmons, *The Wells Family and the Early Years of Old Sturbridge Village* (Sturbridge, Massachusetts: Old Sturbridge Village, 2000).

Figure 4.8: Stephen Fitch House

Source: David M. Simmons, *The Wells Family and the Early Years of Old Sturbridge Village* (Sturbridge, Massachusetts: Old Sturbridge Village, 2000).
Figure 4.9: The Mill Pond

Figure 4.10: Center Meetinghouse on the Common
Figure 4.11: Reassembly of the Center Meetinghouse, 1948
Source: David M. Simmons, *The Wells Family and the Early Years of Old Sturbridge Village* (Sturbridge, Massachusetts: Old Sturbridge Village, 2000).

Figure 4.12: Salem Towne House and Gardens, 1956
Source: David M. Simmons, *The Wells Family and the Early Years of Old Sturbridge Village* (Sturbridge, Massachusetts: Old Sturbridge Village, 2000).
Figure 4.13: Salem Towne House in its original location, 1934
Source: Old Sturbridge Village Library and Archive

Figure 4.14: Salem Towne House move to Old Sturbridge Village, 1952
Source: Old Sturbridge Village Library and Archive
Figure 4.15: Freeman Farm

Figure 4.16: Freeman Farm House move to Old Sturbridge Village, 1951
Source: Old Sturbridge Village Library and Archive
Figure 4.17: Village Common Aerial

Figure 4.18: Old Sturbridge Village
4.7 Map of Old Sturbridge Village
5 Nevada City, Montana (1959)

A Chance Discovery
Motivation for Collection: The Charles Bovey Story
Contextual Origins for the Museum Layout
Complexity and Contradictions
The Museum Today
Building Inventory
Images of Nevada City, Montana
5.1 A Chance Discovery

Tucked within the Rocky Mountains near the southwest corner of Montana, Nevada City continues to live on not just as a memory of a past long gone, but as a physical reminder of one man’s effort to bring this past to life. Unlike the other case studies within this thesis, Nevada City rests upon the foundations of a once living and breathing community born from the gold-enriched landscape of Alder Gulch. Nevada City, the bustling mining town, existed almost a century before its heir and namesake - Nevada City the open-air museum. Chance brought economic growth to Alder Gulch, but the true story of self-made history didn’t begin until Charles Bovey brought the American open-air museum to Nevada City.

Within one year, in 1864, a fourteen-mile stretch of rugged terrain through the heart of southwest Montana witnessed the settlement of 10,000 miners, forming a string of boomtowns along the gold enriched streams of Alder Gulch. The very nature of the boom economy allowed for this phenomenon to concentrate the physical and cultural development of entire towns in an unprecedented short amount of time. The resulting architecture is a true reflection of the expedited urban development of the western frontier and offers an eclectic vernacular style built upon the abundance of raw building material, the capitalist drive of the Gold Rush, and the desire for the once familiar urban streetscape.

In 1863, a group of prospectors, Tom Cover, Henry Edgar, Bill Fairweather, Barney Hughes, Mike Sweeney, and Harry Rodgers, took a pause in their travels and set up camp in a gulch deep within the southwestern territory of Montana. As a means to pass time, they began to do what they did best and panned the stream alongside their camp for any type of profitable material. Much to their surprise, the bottoms of their pans glistened with gold, and

---

2 Ibid, 8.
with that discovery, the men staked their claim and established Alder Gulch soon to be followed by the settlement of Virginia City. The cry of gold in the Big Sky State spread like wildfire, and soon droves of both professional prospectors, who had already been following the Gold Rush through the West, and amateur prospectors, who were typically poor immigrants looking for immediate wealth, flooded the region. The influx of miners spread across the state, bringing with it the same community design, construction methods, and mining techniques that had been perfected in previous mining settlements and imported by the experienced prospectors. From this point on, Virginia City and the surrounding towns that made up the fourteen-mile stretch, including Summit City, Pine Grove, Highland City, Bear Town, Central City, Nevada City, Adobetown, and Junction City, would continue to grow out of the previously untamed wilderness and come to exemplify the goldfield culture in their subsequent years.

The typical mining town developed in three phases - the settlement phase, the camp phase, and the town phase. Virginia City was founded in 1863, soon followed by Nevada City, with Fairweather’s territorial claim. The original camp that had been established by the Fairweather group quickly evolved into a haphazard layout of make-shift shelters surrounding Alder Gulch, signifying the beginning of Virginia City and Nevada City’s settlement phase. Initial shelters consisted of shallow huts or dug caves, while some men just rolled up in their blankets and slept under the stars. “Economics shaped the crude nature of initial shelters and businesses.” Construction of more permanent dwellings required time and money, neither of which miners were willing to

---

3 Canfield, *Virginia City and Nevada City*, 8.
5 Canfield, *Virginia City and Nevada City*, 8.
6 Ibid, 9.
7 Feider, “Boomtown to Outdoor Museum,” 33.
8 Feider, “Boomtown to Outdoor Museum,” 34.
spare during this phase of development. Comfort and aesthetics fell to the wayside as the miners focused all of their energy on the extraction of gold. It wasn’t until the service industry, which was always two steps behind the frontier settler, arrived in Alder Gulch that semi-permanent structures were erected along developing main streets.

The camp phase was ushered in with the expansion of retail business, brought on by the growth of the mining industry’s supportive service industry. The temporary utilitarian dwellings which had been made of earth and vegetation were replaced by milled-lumber structures as miners began to make a profit and establish roots.

Gable-ended, dirt floored log structures (some with river stone fireplaces) were common among the miners. Generally, a cantilevered roof protected the entry from snow and gave shelter to firewood and butchered meat. The interior often had untreated cow skins for rugs, bunk beds to conserve space, and an assortment of furniture pieced together from saplings and shipping crates.9

Merchants were quick to set up the delivery of highly demanded supplies, such as canned beans, flour, tobacco, and liquor, which were hard to come by in the isolated region.10 In order to conveniently sell their overpriced goods, merchants favored the building of their home and store in one structure.11 These structures replicated the domestic gable-ended architecture of the miners’ dwellings, providing little visual distinction between the residential and commercial sectors of the town other than the location of these stores/houses on a roughly laid out main street.12 One of Virginia City’s oldest structures, called the Kramer Building, which was built shortly after the settlement phase began in June of 1863, exhibited the V-notched round logs that were commonly used on the first hastily built gable-ended cabins.13 Right next to this building stood the Goldberg Store which was built only a few

---

10 Ibid, 25.
11 Ibid.
months after the Kramer building but already showed the beginnings of the integration of milled lumber with the rough round logs, marking a strong shift towards the camp phase. Purely commercial architecture wasn’t made until the development of the log, shed-roof structure. These structures lined Virginia City’s main street with their large, rectilinear facades facing onto the street and their roofs sloping to the back. “This form appears to be an early example of rectilinear false front, only at this stage the rectilinear facade was structurally integral.” The design allowed for a larger facade onto which signage could be tacked and also provided a more spacious interior display space for the merchant’s goods. During the camp phase, well finished materials were hard to come by as they were rare and expensive in the still developing town. Therefore, planed sheathing was seen as a sign of progress and prosperity and was often nailed onto the facades of these log structures in an attempt to upgrade the stores. This idea of putting only enough time and money into embellishing the public main street facade would eventually evolve into the concept of the false front.

The development of the false front along Virginia City’s main street signified not only a change in the local vernacular architecture but a change in the mining town’s cultural perception. Profits were being made, and the town’s population was booming. The sudden coming of wealth to Virginia City meant that miners could now indulge in luxuries that had previously been abandoned in the search for gold, such as aesthetics and permanent structures. “The false front made its debut, for the prospect of large economic returns pushed shopkeepers into building structures that exhibited architectural ambitions.” It was now perceived that the better the quality of the

14 Ibid, 67.
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid.
building materials on the store, the better the quality of the merchandise inside, and it was this cultural perception that drove the use of the false front for commercial businesses.19

Virginia City had completed its transformation into a sprawling economic center. A population of initially 200 men had expanded to 10,000 men, women, and children.20 The rapid progression through the three phases of development led to an overlap of architectural development in the city, illustrating the impact of the physical demands of the mining industry by leaving behind a visual history of boomtown expansion. While Virginia City’s story is one of prosperity, one can’t forget that this urban center rested on a network of smaller boomtowns along Alder Gulch, all of which relied on one another to keep a steady flow of money in the miners’ pockets. Only 1.5 miles away, Nevada City – the topic of this chapter – became intertwined with Virginia City’s history early on and has maintained that connection into the present as they are the only two remaining boomtowns of the fourteen-mile stretch of Alder Gulch.21 While the two towns sat on the “largest placer gold deposits in Montana,” Nevada City failed to gain a prosperous service industry, relying on Virginia City for such specialized and nonessential services as boot and shoe makers, jewelers or watch makers, tailors, dressmakers, gunsmiths, and photographers.22 Nevada City’s architecture also remained stagnant as it never progressed past the camp phase. Although this abrupt halt in Nevada City’s urban development was not uncommon among the contemporary boomtowns of the West, the town stood as an archaic symbol of mining next to the thriving Virginia City.23 Virginia City’s fully developed false fronts “reflected Victorian ideals and hopes for the permanence of the towns,” while Nevada City’s gable-ended log cabins “reflected the impermanence of its transient mining populace.”24 The boom of 1865

19 Ibid, 28.
20 Feider, “Boomtown to Outdoor Museum,” 42.
21 Ibid, 43.
22 Ibid, 23.
23 Feider, ”Boomtown to Outdoor Museum,” 44.
24 Ibid.
quickly transitioned into a bust once the gold deposits had been depleted, with the population of Nevada City dropping to one hundred residents by 1869. By 1872, the economic development of the town had significantly declined leaving behind one miners’ store, a brewery, a blacksmith shop, a butcher shop, a livery stable, and a Masonic hall. As with all the mining towns associated with this boom and bust economy, architecture was the true expression of economic stability, or lack thereof, on the western frontier, and Nevada City’s remaining utilitarian building stock denoted the township’s inability to progress both architecturally and economically into the town phase.

The glitter of gold no longer marked the rugged terrain of Alder Gulch, signifying the beginning of the end of the fleeting Gold Rush. Nevada City had all but disappeared by 1923 as new and more destructive forms of mining wiped out the town save for a few remaining residents who held onto their property and their original homes. The Conrey Placer Mining Company ushered in this final phase of Nevada City’s development and ultimate demise. In order to extract the last remaining gold from the gulch, the company transitioned to dredging operations where the gravel and dirt of the landscape was removed and processed to extract the gold. In this process, the vast majority of Nevada City was lost as the operations “directly and indirectly led to the destruction of all but about a dozen original mid 1860s buildings.” Saved from this destruction was the Finney homestead – the longest inhabited household by a single family and the home of the last remaining citizen of Nevada City.

---

26 Ibid.
27 National Register of Historic Places, Finney House, Nevada City, Madison County, Montana, National Register #02000104, 6.
28 National Register, Finney House, 6.
29 Ibid.
Frank Finney and his family came to Alder Gulch in 1864, which is when they purchased the property along with a modest miner’s cabin. Their three children, William, Cora, and Alfred, continued to live in the home after their father passed away in 1915 and their mother, Mary, in 1922 - both in the house. William passed away in 1935, but Cora and Alfred continued to stay in the home, making them the last residents of Nevada City. The family refused to sell their home to the dredgers, and thus saved their area of Nevada City from destruction. Alfred passed away in the home in 1951, while his sister, Cora, passed away in 1958. Nevada City had finally succumbed to economic pressures, fulfilling its destiny to become a ghost town. However, the dawn of Nevada City’s rebirth was fast approaching as an affluent and self-proclaimed preservationist named Charles Bovey sought to reclaim Montana’s rugged past in the form of an open-air museum.

31 National Register, Finney House, 6.
32 Ibid.
33 “Cora Finney Obituary.”
5.2 Motivation for Collection: The Charles Bovey Story

The story behind the inception of Nevada City’s final phase of development is one that teeters on the edge of amateur preservation and the authentic revival of the site’s boomtown development. What grew out of a niche hobby has become a cornerstone of Montana’s early history - “an unparalleled collection of Western American material culture” – and only one man was able to envision and execute such a curatorial undertaking.34

Charles A. Bovey, an heir to the Minneapolis-based General Mills fortune, was a collector of early Americana. Born on May 1, 1907 in Minneapolis, Minnesota, Bovey was afforded a privileged upbringing – a lifestyle that fostered an appreciation for history and its objects.35 His family’s wealth enabled him to travel abroad to Europe where the rich layers of history instilled in him a sense of nostalgia and responsibility that influenced his future notions on preservation. As recounted by John Ellingsen, Bovey’s former employee and right-hand man, “He had this idea of preserving things, restoring them, having this idea fostered from his trips to Europe.”36

While Bovey was born to wealth, he appreciated hard work and physical labor. He moved to Great Falls, Montana in 1926 in order to learn firsthand the roots of the family business.37 He began working on a wheat farm just outside of the city, and it is there that he would meet his future wife, Sue Ford, the daughter of a wealthy bank president and member of a pioneer Montana ranching family.38 Together, they developed a deep love and appreciation for Montana’s rugged landscape and the architecture that tried to tame it. They filled their time traveling across the state, all the while amassing a collection of historic artifacts depicting the day-to-day life of the western frontiersman and the commercial enterprises that supported such a lifestyle.

36 Feider, “Boomtown to Outdoor Museum,” 51.
37 Progressive Years: Madison County, 14.
38 Feider, “Boomtown to Outdoor Museum,” 52.
Always fascinated by the tangible objects of nineteenth-century life, Bovey’s penchant for collecting escalated from the handheld object to buildings with one fateful trip to Fort Benton, Montana. Here, Bovey made his first building acquisition on September 18, 1940 with his purchase of the Joseph Sullivan Saddlery.39 The building, which had been built in 1863, had been continuously used for a variety of community needs, from the signing of an influential Native American treaty to housing one of Montana’s most famous saddlers, Joseph Sullivan. When Bovey was introduced to the building and all its original saddle-making contents upon a chance meeting with Sullivan’s daughters, he showed such enthusiasm for its history that the sisters gave him the building and its contents.40 Originally set on restoring the building in situ, the town of Fort Benton showed no interest in retaining a historic structure on its progressive Front Street and threatened to demolish the building if left on site.41 As with much of the building stock across the United States, the historic buildings on Fort Benton’s Front Street were in a vulnerable state. “Attempts to preserve the soft, locally produced brick utilized before 1890 and the desire to update the appearance of business blocks resulted in the modification of many of the historic buildings of the town.”42 The quality of the brick left the buildings structurally unsound, while their nineteenth-century aesthetic directly contradicted the town’s desire to embrace modernity. Preservation wasn’t even within the vocabulary of Fort Benton’s community until 1992 when John G. Lepley, Executive Director of the River & Plains Society and operator of the Montana Agricultural Center and Museum in Fort Benton, led the reconstruction and preservation of the fort.43 As was becoming increasingly common in the years of World War II, historic structures had out-lived their original purpose at their original locations leading to their destruction by modern-day owners.

39 Feider, "Boomtown to Outdoor Museum,” 54.
40 Ibid, 55.
41 Jim Jarvis, “Historic Resources Survey and Inventory of Nevada City, Montana in Madison County, Montana” (Montana State Historic Preservation Office, 2001), Montana Heritage Commission.
43 Simmons, “Fort Benton Historic District.”
and developers. The past was viewed as impeding progress, and these historic structures were the physical reminders of the world we wanted to leave behind.

In order to save the Sullivan Saddlery, a threatened piece of history, from urban renewal, Charles Bovey had the building dismantled and reassembled in a large barn at the Northern Montana Fairgrounds in Great Falls. The building would be the first of several structures to enter the fairgrounds and become part of a popular indoor historic exhibit called "Old Town" that Bovey built from 1940 to 1950 (Figure 5.1). Bovey “continued to actively seek out buildings and their contents threatened with certain destruction or on-going neglect” to add to his growing collection of historical artifacts on display at the fairgrounds. The exhibit eventually grew to include twelve buildings that Bovey had rescued from across the state. The reconstructed Front Street included a jailhouse from Sun River, a fire station from Basin, a barber shop from Elkhorn, a blacksmith shop from Augusta, and the Sedman House from Junction City. In order to more accurately portray the nineteenth-century life on display and to capture the public’s interest and enjoyment, Bovey “outfitted the buildings with nineteenth-century furnishings and equipment collected and donated from around the state.” He even went so far as to display his personal collection of antique automobiles on the dirt-covered Front Street of Old Town. The exhibit was immensely popular with the public, but even Bovey couldn’t escape society’s desire for modernity. In 1959, Bovey offered Old Town as a gift to the Great Falls Fair Board, but the members failed to see the exhibit as a potential tourist attraction and asked him to remove the buildings so that a new high technology, post-World War II

---

44 Jarvis, “Historic Resources Survey and Inventory of Nevada City, 8.”
45 Progressive Years: Madison County, 14.
46 Jarvis, “Historic Resources Survey and Inventory of Nevada City, 8.”
47 Progressive Years: Madison County, 14.
48 Jarvis, “Historic Resources Survey and Inventory of Nevada City.”
50 Ibid, 22.
aeronautics display from the Air Force could be built.\textsuperscript{51} Great Falls - the home of Malmstrom Air Force Base – had become infatuated with the space age as was the rest of world with the deployment of Sputnik and the race towards supremacy in spaceflight capability.\textsuperscript{52}

By this time, Charles and Sue Bovey had already found a more secure outlet for their ad hoc preservation efforts in the form of Virginia City. During one of their many travels across the state, they witnessed firsthand the neglect that had encompassed the once bustling boomtown of Virginia City, and began purchasing buildings along Wallace Street (the town’s main street) in 1944 in the hope of preserving their original character.\textsuperscript{53} Their efforts for the next twenty-five years were seen as the first real preservation work done in Montana. Their “construction, reconstruction, rehabilitation, and restoration” of more than a hundred buildings and artifacts led to Virginia City’s designation as a National Historic Landmark in 1961 and placement on the National Register of Historic Places in 1976.\textsuperscript{54}

Nevada City took on a slightly different fate than its neighbor. In 1958, Bovey purchased the land and the few remaining structures of Nevada City to become a new holding ground for his large scale acquisitions previously on view at the Old Town exhibit. This purchase marked the establishment of Montana’s first open-air museum.\textsuperscript{55} From that point onward, Charles Bovey increased his collection efforts and began purchasing endangered historic buildings from all over the state and relocating them to Nevada City – a newly designated haven for the neglected vernacular architecture of the expansive state. Between the year of its founding (1959) and the year of Charles Bovey’s death (1978), nearly one hundred buildings were relocated to Nevada City to supplement the

\textsuperscript{51} Jarvis, “Historic Resources Survey and Inventory of Nevada City.”
\textsuperscript{52} Feider, “Boomtown to Outdoor Museum,” 64.
\textsuperscript{53} Gruen, “Ruminations on History, Tourism, and Preservation,” 18.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{55} Gruen, “Ruminations on History, Tourism, and Preservation,” 19.
approximately dozen already existing buildings from the site’s boomtown years. Exhibiting varying construction methods and architectural styles and in various levels of decay, the collection as a total referenced the western vernacular architecture associated with the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with the earliest structures dating back to Nevada City’s original founding – 1863.
5.3 Contextual Origins for the Museum Layout

The placement of each relocated structure within Nevada City was an effort to resurrect the town and instill a greater understanding and appreciation for the experiences faced by the western frontiersman in the nineteenth century. As stated in an article in the local newspaper, *The Big Timber Pioneer*, concerning the museum’s upcoming opening in 1958:

> Life is being breathed into Nevada City by the restorer of Virginia City, Charles Bovey of Great Falls. Working from the few existing photographs of the old town, the old records in the Madison County court house and from traces of old streets and crumbling foundations, once again he is following his favorite avocation – restoring Montana’s historic landmarks.\(^{56}\)

While the subtle reminders of the urban layout, i.e. old street lines, rough building foundations, and matured landscaping, provided a guide for the placement of each building, the main point of reference for the entire concept of the museum layout was the only remaining photograph of Nevada City from its heyday.\(^{57}\) The image, taken on July 4, 1865, depicts its main street (Wood Street) in all its Independence Day glory (Figure 5.2). With only the fronts of the commercially driven Wood Street exposed, the residential back streets become blurred silhouettes, leaving much to interpretation in terms of the everyday life of the mining boomtown.

Undeterred by the lack of historic record, Bovey set out to fill in the gaps between the few remaining original buildings along Wood Street with relocated buildings exhibiting similar architectural characteristics as the building typologies depicted in the photograph.\(^{58}\) Always on the hunt for new acquisitions, Charles Bovey developed a keen eye for vernacular architecture, especially in terms of the varying degree of wooden construction evident in the expedited development of Nevada City. On the main street, only five original main structures – with

---


\(^{57}\) *Progressive Years: Madison County*, 14.

\(^{58}\) Feider, “Boomtown to Outdoor Museum,” 65.
some supporting structures such as outhouses – remained standing, including the prominent Star Bakery, the
notorious George Ives Jail, the Dr. Byam House, Richard’s Cabin, and the home of the last residents, the Finney
House. The restoration of these buildings, along with a few original outlying log cabins, laid the groundwork for
the positioning of the relocated acquisitions and for the character of the town, evident in the photograph to be
reconstructed. With the photograph in hand, Bovey developed an “ever-evolving mental plan that was
[unfortunately] never put on paper.” 59 His curatorial intentions were informed by years of personal research
conducted with his staff “to create the intended historical effect.” 60 Bovey also had at his disposal the remnants of
Montana’s mining economy in the form of additional mining ghost towns scattered across the state that while
decaying had avoided the complete destruction that had befallen Nevada City. Just 80 miles west of Nevada City
stands Bannack, a now preserved ghost town that predates the founding of Alder Gulch’s mining claim. The first
discovery of gold within the territory of Montana took place in Bannack; however the gold rush proved to be of
short duration as the discovery of gold in Alder Gulch led to much richer sources of the precious metal and the
migration of the mining economy to Virginia City and Nevada City. 61 Today, the preserved ghost town “retains
much of its physical character from its days as a frontier mining camp” with forty structures still remaining along
the town’s main – and only – street. 62 Over time, Bannack and similar ghost towns across the state proved to be
historically significant resources that had benefited from their sudden vacancy and in situ preservation efforts – a
unique confluence of events that gave Bovey real life models for his research. Overall, Bovey’s diligence and
research led to the acquisition of over one hundred buildings that were painstakingly disassembled and relocated
to Nevada City within a twenty year time span. The movement of these structures occurred in two waves; the first

59 Jarvis, “Historic Resources Survey and Inventory of Nevada City,” 9.
60 Ibid.
61 Blanche Schroer, “Bannack Historic District,” National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, Historic Sites Survey,
Washington, D.C., September 1975.
62 Ibid.
wave of moved buildings arrived in 1958 with the Old Town exhibit and occupy the majority of the recreated Wood Street, while the second wave of buildings arrived between 1971 and 1978 as supplemental material to more accurately portray all aspects of the western frontier.  

The resurrected Wood Street stands today as a curation of frontier history made possible by the selection, preservation, maintenance, collection, and archiving conducted by one visionary man (Figure 5.3). Moving from east to west along the street, the first building is the Fenner Barn (N001), an original Nevada City structure that was relocated to its current location in 1910 in order to save it from the destruction of the dredging activities.  

The following four cabins (N002, N004 and N006-N007) were relocated in 1958 from various parts of Montana to represent buildings shown in the original photograph. Upon their relocation, they were converted into motel units in order to provide Nevada City with one of the many services necessary to become a tourist attraction – overnight accomodation. The adjacent two-story building (N008), belonged to Dr. Byam, and is an original building dating back to the town’s founding in 1863 (Figure 5.4). The Emporium next door (N010) was relocated from a ranch near Dillon in 1959 but was altered substantially with the addition of a false front in order to maintain the character of the original building in the photograph. The pride of Bovey’s main street is the Star Bakery (N012), an original Nevada City structure whose bold signage is clearly visible in the 1864 photograph.  

64 Andrea Tonc, “Architectural Inventory of Nevada City, Montana,” (Submitted to the Montana Heritage Commission, July 2013), Montana Preservation Alliance. This report emerged from a six-week internship at the Montana Preservation Alliance with the support of the Montana Heritage Commission. The principal objective of this project was to integrate existing documentation and create new information conveying the physical history of each state-owned structure within the Nevada City boundary from its original construction to the present day. The individual building histories were compiled from previous studies produced by Jim Jarvis (“Historic Resources Survey and Inventory of Nevada City, Montana in Madison County, Montana.” November 2001), Courtney Kramer (“Virginia City and Nevada City Building Assessment Survey.” Summer 2006), and Kate Slawski (“Virginia City and Nevada City Structures and Preservation Needs.” January 2013), as well as oral histories conducted with John Ellingsen.
(Figure 5.5). The building continues to operate as a restaurant, providing Nevada City with a necessary food service. In order to increase Nevada City’s capabilities as a tourist destination, Bovey combined two historical buildings that were moved to the site, the front of an old stage stop and the rear of an old dormitory from Yellowstone National Park, that when combined mimic the original Nevada City Hotel (N016) that once stood on the site (Figure 5.6). The building maintains the tradition of being a functional hotel, catering towards the needs of the tourist. The final, distinguishable building within the frame of the original photograph was replaced by the Music Hall (N017), which was relocated from the Canyon Lodge in Yellowstone National Park in 1959 after an earthquake prompted the National Park Service’s decision to replace their outdated log structures with more modern facilities.

Bovey made every effort possible to recreate the one piece of documentation he had in his possession – the photograph. To this end, he undertook built new construction projects, such as the Mining Office (N003) and the Gun Shop (N009), as necessary infill. As revealed by the ad hoc nature of his “mental plan” for Nevada City’s Wood Street, the environment created by Charles Bovey is one of fantasy and informed judgement with an emphasis on the unpretentious preservation of layers of history, not pristine authenticity.

With only the main street restricted by historical artifact, Charles Bovey took even more artistic and curatorial liberty in his resurrection of the back streets. Immediately behind and parallel to the main street, Bovey placed his prized possessions – the buildings from the Old Town exhibit – and dubbed the thoroughfare Brewery Street. These six buildings (N021, N054, N056-N058, and N062) depict a wider range of public architecture, from the saddlery to a fire station, as well as a varying degree of stylistic development with the inclusion of a more ornate Victorian era home at the end of the street (Figure 5.7-5.8). Without historic documentation, Bovey placed the pieces of his collection as he saw fit along the remnants of the street grid, giving his more architecturally
developed and commercially driven acquisitions from the Old Town exhibit prominent locations in the heart of
the museum. In an attempt to exploit his ability to sculpt a new landscape informed by historical traits, Charles
Bovey introduced other aspects of the traditional mining town as well as the modern needs of a tourist attraction
without any real archival basis and relation to the original Nevada City. The need for economic output often
trumped historic accuracy as seen to the east of the Old Town buildings where Bovey relocated a variety of miner’s
cabins (N042-N051), from around the state to fulfill the need for more motel units (Figure 5.9). Collectively,
Bovey relocated many common building types, including a saloon, a barbershop, a school, a post office, a
blacksmith shop, miners’ cabins, and outhouses, but he also relocated entire neighborhood concepts as with the
introduction of a Chinatown at the west end of Brewery Street.

The second wave of building relocations in 1971 resulted in the creation of a typical nineteenth century
Chinatown made up of seven buildings chosen to represent the Chinese communities of Madison County. The
result is a rather overly simplified streetscape termed Oriental Avenue. Together as an ensemble, the relocated
buildings represent an ethnic population that is often overlooked in modern interpretations of western
boomtowns. In 1870, 10% of the territorial population was Chinese.65 Consisting of a mostly male population,
territorial laws prohibited the Chinese from owning placer claims, leading them to a life of service such as
employment in laundries and homes.66 The buildings within the Chinatown are meant to represent the building
typologies typically associated with Chinese culture and the minority’s adaptation to the frontier lifestyle. The
buildings are interpreted as a temple, a grocery store, a laundry, an opium den, bachelor cabin, and smoke house.
The collection of artifacts housed within the buildings was purchased by Charles Bovey in 1946 from the Wah
Chong Tai Company and Mai Wah Noodle Parlor – a prominent Chinese institution located within neighboring

66 Ibid.
Butte’s Chinatown.67 Once home to a large Chinese population, the Chinatown in Butte was largely demolished soon after Bovey’s purchase.68 The Chinese Temple (N065) is a reconstruction using the base of a relocated structure originally built in the 1870s on a nearby ranch (Figure 5.10). Following the advice of a Chinese representative from the Mai Wah Society, Bovey modeled the building after the frontier temple typology that included a small built addition to an already established business that would have housed religious relics. The building is also loosely modeled after a Chinese Temple that once stood in Virginia City. The Chinese Laundry (N068) was relocated from Harrison with a relatively unknown history of its previous use. The Chinese Grocery (N070) has a similarly ambiguous history and was relocated from the same ranch as the Chinese Temple with both original uses unknown. The building’s reconstruction on its new site in Nevada City was centered on a large meat cooler that had been relocated from Butte along with the other Chinese artifacts. The Big Chinese Store (N071) was another acquisition from Harrison that was manipulated to include a porch with round ends similar to the architectural style of the Chinese Temple that once stood in Virginia City.

The Opium Den (N073) and the Bachelor’s Cabin (N075) were relocated from Twin Bridges where they were previously used as residences. The Opium Den had been a point of contention for Bovey and the Chinese community from the very beginning (Figure 5.11). The initial design for the reconstructed building was to include a restaurant that housed rear bunks to recreate the opium den setting; however, the Chinese representative from the Mai Wah Society was disturbed by the inclusion of an opium den in the overall depiction of the Chinese culture, leaving Bovey to drop all ideas of interpreting the cabin as an opium den and instead displaying it as a

67 Jarvis, “Historic Resources Survey and Inventory of Nevada City.”
68 “Mai Wah Society, Preserving and Interpreting Butte, Montana’s Asian Heritage,” Mai Wah Society, Accessed February 21, 2016, http://maiwah.org/. The Mai Wah Society now occupies the last remaining building of Butte's Chinatown. The not-for-profit organization was established for educational, charitable, and scientific purposes, including research and public education about the history, culture, and conditions of Asian people in the Rocky Mountain West.
bachelor’s cabin. Bovey’s attempt at cultural inclusion was well intentioned as it was a story seldom told in the overall context of the Gold Rush. By recreating a Chinatown, he meant to give recognition to the population of around two hundred Chinese immigrants who came to the area in pursuit of the wealth associated with the Gold Rush. Often built on the fringe of these boomtowns, few buildings remained standing leaving Bovey with no choice but to manipulate found buildings to suit his needs. The Chinatown stands as a complete fabrication loosely based off of photographs of once existing structures in Virginia City, some assistance by the local Mai Wah Society, and the display of real Chinese artifacts from the time period depicted. As can be assumed, the street is met with some skepticism and stands today as an often overlooked portion of the museum left without any modern interpretation of its use as a Chinatown.

Liberty was also taken in the need to accommodate the tourist with the addition of the Nevada City Railroad Yards in order to shuttle visitors between Nevada City and Virginia City and the River of Gold attraction that provides the experience of panning for gold to all visitors for a small fee. The railroad complex, located on the opposite side of Wood Street, consists of five buildings – some newly built and others relocated – in order to provide the Alder Gulch Shortline, an open-air railcar shuttle that connects Virginia City to Nevada City – a mile and half long journey (Figure 5.12). The Nevada City Depot (R001) was newly built in 1964, the design derived from the architectural drawings of the Great Northern Standard Depot in Hugo, Minnesota that Bovey frequented during his childhood. The Nevada City Engine House (R002) was relocated from Butte in the 1960s; however, that building burned down in a fire in 1991, leading to the rebuilding of a new structure in 1998. The rest of the supporting structures - the Depot Outhouse (R003) and the Motor Car Sheds (R004 and R005) were relocated in 1975 and 1964 respectively from railroad depots across the state. While the railroad never reached Nevada City or
Virginia City during the Gold Rush years, Bovey saw the construction of the yards as a business move aligned with his interest in establishing Nevada City as a tourist destination centered around education and user experience.

Aside from Charles Bovey’s more inauthentic insertions, Nevada City consists mainly of historic vernacular buildings of log construction from the late 1800s. Representative of a rural western community, the collection of both residential and commercial architecture exemplifies the western frontier boomtown and the typology’s modest attempt to translate the popular architectural styles of the time, i.e. Greek Revival, Gothic Revival, and Italiante, into the available construction techniques and material. This translation is most evident in the commercial storefronts salvaged from small towns across the state. Arguably one the most ornate relocated businesses, the false front of Sullivan’s Saddlery (N054) exhibits four wood pilasters, two recessed panels below the windows, and a protruding cornice with bracket details (Figure 5.13). In order to complete Bovey’s revival of Nevada City’s urban landscape, more modest businesses and public institutions, such as the School House (N087) and the Iron Rod Post Office (N096), were relocated mostly from neighboring towns and ranches. To supplement the museum’s commercial and civic standings, Bovey also relocated a full range of residential log architecture. Similar to the Saddlery, the elaborate, Victorian-style Sedman House (N062) was relocated from the Old Town Exhibit. The large, two-story, gable-roofed building has two gabled dormers, a front porch, and a second floor balcony (Figure 5.14). This house juxtaposed with the small, gable-roofed, log cabins of the early miners, i.e. Miss Lily’s Cabin (N037), truly reflects the expedited and often uneven development of the mining boomtown (Figure 5.15). While Bovey’s creation does not directly trace back to Alder Gulch’s nineteenth-century past and instead creates a modern perception of Montana’s early mining towns, the site still “plays an important role in

---

69 Jarvis, “Historic Resources Survey and Inventory of Nevada City.”
70 Ibid.
71 Tonc, “Architectural Inventory of Nevada City, Montana.”
72 Ibid.
raising public awareness about the history of the gulch” and represents an early history of Montana’s push for tourism as an economic force. As discussed by J. Philip Gruen, Director of the School of Design and Construction for Washington State University as well as author and researcher on American architecture and urbanism:

The architecture, signs, displays, and reenactments at these sites illuminate the gold rush history for which Alder Gulch is principally famous, but they also stage that past through scenographic displays that attempt to capture the essence of mining towns, thereby projecting a tidy, civilized image of the frontier that never quite existed in Montana or elsewhere in the American West.

While Nevada City fails to portray an accurate view of the past, this does not make it any less significant than the original buildings of the Gold Rush era left behind in Alder Gulch. Charles Bovey’s initiative for re-establishing the identity of the state through the nostalgia of the Wild West, and in particular the urban typology of the boomtown, was empowered by the post-World War II culture of rising mass tourism and expanded leisure time.

When confronted with the actual role of Nevada City in the telling of history, Gruen counters his previous statement on authenticity with the following:

Their authenticity lies in their role as consciously created sites that assisted in the preservation of Alder Gulch and supported, if not codified, the burgeoning tourist industry that raised the region’s profile and saved it from further neglect.

For these reasons, the former National Trust for Historic Preservation president Richard Moe (1993-2009) alluded to Virginia City and Nevada City as being “no less important to the settlement of the western frontier than Williamsburg was to Colonial America.”

---

74 Ibid.
75 Ibid, 21.
76 Ibid.
77 Baumler, “More than the Glory,” 64.
5.4 Complexity and Contradictions

Charles Bovey’s use of the open-air museum enabled a new type of commerce to invade Montana, one based on romanticism, the automobile, and tourism. As a physical expression of Bovey’s own understanding of historic preservation, Nevada City stands as an artificial collection based on “invented tradition.” The term “invented tradition,” coined by historian Eric Hobsbawm, denotes “a generally more comfortable, desirable, or exciting past created or favored to counter the turbulence of the present.”

In a period of time when nostalgic concern was spreading across the country, Bovey’s vision for Nevada City amplified the romanticized version of the West that had already been circulating through American culture via the Hollywood Western, and in particular, the television Western which became the most popular genre of television in the 1950s and 60s with several hundred shows aired. This yearning for a simpler time was a direct societal response to the rapidly evolving American landscape of the late 1950s and 60s fueled by the technologically advanced post-war years.

The correlative relationship between rapid expansion and the automobile only heightened the need for escapism. Modernity ushered in a need to make progress and with it a desire to renew the existing building stock in the hopes of achieving a more utopian ideal of living. Such market pressures were even evident in rural Montana, as the country’s economic expansion diminished family farms and created a surfeit of abandoned agricultural buildings as the country’s commercial farms pushed to build more modern structures. Whether it be from manmade pressures or natural ones, America’s historic buildings were under threat, and open-air museums, such as Nevada City, provided a method for their preservation as well as a psychological escape for the American public from the pressures of modern society.

---

79 Ibid.
Ironically, the automobile – a purveyor of urban renewal – was also the catalyst for the niche market of heritage tourism that enabled Nevada City to thrive as an open-air museum and spread Montana history to the general public. The roadside landscape from which the first American open-air museums grew in the 1940s continued to spread mass tourism throughout the 1960s, acting as the nexus between the American public and the country’s early history. History was no longer inaccessible and neither was the once rural landscape of Montana.

Nevada City’s architectural impact can be viewed through its simultaneous ability to preserve the fragmentary evidence of the Gold Rush’s westward expansion through the depiction of building and construction typologies as well as the urban typology of the boomtown that the former evoked. Each building in Nevada City, as an acquired artifact, was part of a significant effort to recreate an entire historical setting as opposed to the exhibition of disjointed artifacts as in a traditional museum setting. Through the act of acquirement and relocation, Charles Bovey was able to save the building typologies representative of this era of urbanism and formally depict Montana’s transition from an untamed territory to a seat of state power. “Architecturally, the construction and spatial placement of these buildings are representative of the building and community layout practices once common throughout the western United States from 1800-1900.” As further elaborated by Jim Jarvis, author of the *Historic Resources Survey and Inventory of Nevada City, Montana,*

In their simple vernacular forms, these casually arranged groups of buildings along common setbacks enable the modern observer to experience life in a typical remote frontier town – in a manner in which no traditional museum setting can allow….The true significance of these buildings and the district they from is in the sense of place that derives for being historically immersed in this large collection of appropriately constructed and positioned buildings.

---

80 Jarvis, “Historic Resources Survey and Inventory of Nevada City,” 9.
81 Ibid.
As a publicly accessible means of education, the open-air museum became a tool for conveying a period of history that had an influential impact on both a national and individual state level.

Nevada City’s impact as an open-air museum has enabled an architectural and cultural history to be told that goes beyond the insular scope of each relocated building’s original site of construction and beyond the actual history of Nevada City as a living, breathing community. Aside from conveying an architectural discourse ranging from the westward expansion of the Gold Rush to Montana’s transition to statehood, Charles Bovey was able to touch on the individual histories of each building acquired and the spheres of significance they each possessed in relation to their original sites of construction. Threatened by the spread of modernity, a vast majority of Montana’s early vernacular building stock stood vulnerable to demolition either through purposeful action or neglect due to the fragility of the architecture and its scattered nature throughout the vast landscape. Demolition was particularly rampant in Montana due to the state’s taxation of every building on private property, including those that were vacant or falling over. As with the majority of open-air museums founded within this time period, Nevada City is the product of the threat of neglect. Aware of this rapid deterioration in vernacular architecture, Charles Bovey and his crew of men - working under the name Bovey Restorations - painstakingly sought out, carefully disassembled, transported, and masterfully rebuilt over a hundred endangered buildings from within the state. Now tied to both a construction date and a relocation date, each building has acquired a dual identity. The Bovey Era of interpretation has added a new layer of history that is at once a curated interpretation the western frontier as well as an honest representation of a nationally driven preservation movement (Figure 5.16). The objective may have been simple, to revive a history lost to public consumption, but

---

embedded within this model of museum typology lies a level of complexity that grows exponentially in scale and often times in direct contradiction.

Therein lies the challenge of recognizing Nevada City as an example of preservation. The concept of relocation upon which the open-air museum typology is founded – especially in terms of Nevada City’s position within the second wave of museum creation based on the threat of neglect – immediately disqualifies any recognition on the National Register of Historic Places. Outside of the general apprehension behind the buildings’ location, the relatively recent relocation of the buildings within the 50 year age requirement has prevented any previous effort of formal nomination from taking place.83 While the idea of relocation may invoke feelings of inauthenticity, Charles Bovey’s intervention can be seen as an authentic interpretation and execution of the open-air museum typology. As stated by Kate Hampton, former National Register Coordinator for the Montana State Historic Preservation Office, in her response in 2002 to Jim Jarvis’ survey and desire to see Nevada City nominated to the register, “Undoubtedly, the significance of Nevada City lies with its association with the emergence of the outdoor museum as a preservation tool, the rise of heritage tourism, the influence of Charles Bovey, and, of course, its architecture…[however] complete comparative contextual information does not exist to make a judgement as to the exceptional nature of Bovey’s work in Nevada City, and not enough time has passed to evaluate the significance his efforts there.”84 At the time of this discussion in 2002, concern lay in the length of time between the first and second wave of building relocation in Nevada City (1958 and 1971) and the inability to include the second wave in any nomination. A possible solution to this problem, as suggested by Hampton, would be to bring the period of significance through the 1970s; however, she then rejects the idea based on the conjecture that “by the 1970s, the heyday of the building zoo had come and gone” – a statement that when viewed within the overall

84 Ibid.
context of the American open-air museum as presented by this thesis can be refuted, as the third and final wave of museum creation had yet to come, emerging in the late 1970s in preparation for America’s Bicentennial.\textsuperscript{85}

As Kate Hampton mentioned, Nevada City’s significance undoubtedly lies in its contribution to heritage tourism and the preservation of Montana’s rapidly disappearing vernacular architecture; however, when Charles Bovey’s work in Nevada City is viewed comparatively within the much larger context of the open-air museum movement, Nevada City falls short from being a significant contributor to the overall movement for two main reasons. The first being that the museum lacks a specific design intention, which partially relates to the museum’s creation on top of a pre-existing town site. Part reconstruction, part conjecture, Nevada City’s ensemble of buildings reflects Charles Bovey’s lack of any real plan. While the majority of Nevada City had been destroyed from destructive mining activity, the basic urban grid remained along with one lone photograph of the historic main street, becoming the basis for Charles Bovey’s recreation. His reasoning behind the acquisition and relocation of his buildings was based on very little knowledge of the town’s original condition, creating a fabricated landscape disguised as an accurate reconstruction of a once existing town. Teetering on the edge of museum versus reconstruction, a more designed museum layout, including an entrance sequence that signifies the transition into a curated setting versus the perceived extension of neighboring Virginia City’s historic main street would give more awareness to Bovey’s influence and Nevada City’s role as an open-air museum. The second failed criteria is the intent of educational tourism. Nevada City may have been a popular tourist destination and economic boost for the state of Montana, but the museum was never guided by a founding vision. Existing more for pure enjoyment, Charles Bovey did little to encourage education through his built environment. The aforementioned issues are largely based in the museum’s insufficient interpretation of its collection. Unlike the

\textsuperscript{85} Kate Hampton, “National Register Nomination.”
other case studies within this thesis, Nevada City resists the urge to embrace the Charles Bovey Story, and instead interprets the museum through the theme of the Vigilante Era (1863-1864), which is reflected in the museum’s living history plan. Instead of teaching the public about the day-to-day activities of the western frontiersman, the museum chooses to focus on the lively and entertaining re-enactment of vigilante justice, complete with a trial and hanging. In order to be eligible for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places, Nevada City must first reinterpret its ensemble of buildings to better reflect its intentions as an open-air museum. The Charles Bovey story must be embraced and a vision for the museum ensued.
5.5 The Museum Today

After years of public service, Charles Bovey died unexpectedly of a heart attack in Nevada City in 1978, ending an almost thirty year run of self-determined preservation efforts.86 His wife, Sue Bovey, continued to operate Bovey Restorations and managed their properties in Virginia City and Nevada City until her death in 1988, upon which their son, Ford Bovey, unwillingly inherited all property and acquisitions associated with the company and the mining towns.87 With no desire to continue to run the family business, Ford sought prospective buyers with an emphasis towards federal procurement. While the National Park Service declined the purchase due to the associated costs of maintenance and operation, the State of Montana – through a last minute act of legislation - purchased the two sites for $6.5 million in 1997.88 The state now owned thousands of artifacts, almost two hundred and fifty buildings, and one hundred and sixty acres of land, all of which require a substantial maintenance budget. To initiate this daunting task, the Legislature provided a further appropriation of $2.9 million of funding through the Cultural Trust Fund, bonds, and the accommodations tax, among other sources.89

As the new owner, the Legislature authorized the creation of the Montana Heritage Commission (MHC) with the purpose to “serve as stewards in managing, developing, and operating Heritage Commission properties by preserving, stabilizing, rehabilitating, interpreting and exhibiting buildings and artifacts; overseeing and encouraging profitable commercial enterprises while creating and maintaining credible relationships with all stakeholders and partners, and protecting these historic resources for the educational benefit and enjoyment of all.”90 “The Bovey properties are now principally under the stewardship of the MHC, although a number of other

87 Ibid.
89 Canfield, Virginia City and Nevada City, 26.
stakeholders are also involved, including the Montana History Foundation, the Montana Historical Society, the Virginia City Chamber of Commerce, the Virginia City Institute, the National Park Service, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, Madison County, and the city of Virginia City.” 91 As a state entity, the MHC “consists of fourteen members: nine appointed by the governor, one appointed by the president of the Senate, one appointed by the speaker of the House, and the remaining members broadly representing the state. The Commission’s role includes ensuring that the treatment of all historic buildings meets the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Historic Preservation; that treatment of all artifacts meets treatment and curation standards established by the American Association of Museums; and that interpretation is conducted according to standards established by the National Association for Interpretation.” 92 The MHC is organized into six departments: Collections Management, Education/Interpretation, Historic Preservation, Marketing/Business, Maintenance, and Visitor Services – all working towards the same goal of preserving the cultural, historical, and educational opportunities afforded to them by the open-air museum typology and Charles Bovey’s vision for a shared appreciation of Montana’s history. 

The task of managing such an extensive collection of artifacts ranging in scale from the handheld to the completely inhabitable across two town sites has proven to be a difficult task for the MHC. The staff, including an operations director, curators of history and of collections, a historic preservation and maintenance team, office personnel, and other seasonal staff, work hard to maintain the ability to be “economically self-supporting” – a mandate required in the Commission’s founding legislation. 93 While such a stipulation ultimately permitted the passing of the legislation necessary to purchase the historic resources, the notion of being self-supporting has

93 Ibid.
shifted the Commission’s focus to mostly finances, leaving room for improvement in the preservation and interpretation of the sites. The primary source of funds for preservation comes from MHC earned income, rents, grants, donations and long range preservation funds from the coal tax distribution;” however, the continued maintenance of the buildings quickly consumes the Commission’s income, requiring the addition of outside funds. “The National Park Service has consistently demonstrated its appreciation of the historic resources of the two towns, providing million dollar grants for historic preservation and restoration. These funds have been used to repair roofs, foundations, and other preservation work.” Aside from the monetary restraints on the management of the sites, the transition from a private, family-run business to a state-run operation has been a lesson in stewardship and freedom in preservation. The Bovey’s operated their business with only themselves to answer to, while “the state had the federal government and the population of Montana to answer to, and this changed the larger goals and responsibilities of the sites.” The shift from private to state ownership also lent itself to higher forms of regulation, especially after the creation of Section 106 in 1966 as part of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA). With the passing of the NHPA, any project, activity, or program receiving federal funding, permitting, or licensing would be subject to review and held to the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties.”

Despite Virginia City and Nevada City’s growing pains as now state-owned sites, many improvements have been made since their purchase in 1997, including the construction of the $1.1 million McFarland Curatorial Center and the administration of the sites “as public attractions for visitors, following the practices already established by Bovey Restorations” - including the “establishment of a visitor center in the Virginia City railroad

96 Ibid, 23. 
97 Ibid.
depot, a new entrance for Nevada City, the restoration of the small gasoline-powered locomotive that carries
visitors along the Alder Gulch Shortline, and the management of concessions including hotels, restaurants, two
theaters, and multiple businesses.”98 As acknowledged by Chere Jiusto, Executive Director of the Montana
Preservation Alliance, “There is tremendous dedication and great fondness by all for the unique resources held by
the MHC. Only by spending time in both of these town sites, by talking with MHC staff and commission
members and by looking closely at the buildings and artifacts housed in VC/NC can a person truly appreciate how
daunting their responsibilities are.”99 A true appreciation for Montana’s early material culture as well as the
interpretation of this history for the sheer enjoyment of the general public has always been at the heart of Nevada
City’s mission, and the site continues to operate today under Charles Bovey’s “personal philosophy that history
has an important place in our future and is worthy of preserving.”100

---

100 Jarvis, “Historic Resources Survey and Inventory of Nevada City,” 8.
### 5.6 Building Inventory: Nevada City

Note: This list has been divided into categories organized by level of authenticity and visible appearance within the museum proper. In total, there are ninety-four historic buildings at Nevada City that are accessible or directly visible to visitors within the museum proper. The remainder are either not within the public area of the museum proper or no longer exist.

#### Structures Original to Nevada City
Note: These historic structures are original to the Nevada City, which existed as an inhabited township from 1863 until 1958 when Charles Bovey purchased the land.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>001</td>
<td>(N001) Fenner Barn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>002</td>
<td>(N005) George Ives Jail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>003</td>
<td>(N008) Dr. Byam House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>004</td>
<td>(N012) Star Bakery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>005</td>
<td>(N027) Richard’s Shed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>006</td>
<td>(N028) Richard’s Outhouse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>007</td>
<td>(N029) Richard’s Cabin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>008</td>
<td>(N030) Finney House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>009</td>
<td>(N031) Finney Summer Kitchen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>010</td>
<td>(N032) Frame Shed in Finney Yard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>011</td>
<td>(N033) Log Cabin in Finney Yard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>012</td>
<td>(N034) Oil Stove Shed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>013</td>
<td>(N035) Chris Outhouse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>014</td>
<td>(N036) Log Cabin with Tin Can Roof</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>015</td>
<td>(N039) Peterson Shed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>016</td>
<td>(N040) Peterson Outhouse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>017</td>
<td>(N041) Peterson Cabin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>018</td>
<td>(N043) Cabin 15 and 16 (Motel)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>019</td>
<td>(N105) Wonderly Cabin</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Structures from the Old Town Exhibit
Note: These historic structures were originally displayed at the Old Town Exhibit in Great Falls, Montana before being relocated to Nevada City.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>001</td>
<td>(N021) Sun River Jail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>002</td>
<td>(N054) Sullivan Saddlery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>003</td>
<td>(N056) Barber Shop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>004</td>
<td>(N057) Fire Station Display</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>005</td>
<td>(N058) Eberl’s Blacksmith Shop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>006</td>
<td>(N062) Sedman House</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Historic Structures
Note: These are actual early buildings maintained as exhibit buildings and/or which are visible within the museum proper.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>001</td>
<td>(N001) Fenner Barn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>002</td>
<td>(N002) Cabin 1 (Motel)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>003</td>
<td>(N004) Cabin 2 (Motel)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>004</td>
<td>(N005) George Ives Jail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>005</td>
<td>(N006) Cabin 3 (Motel)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>006</td>
<td>(N007) Cabin 4 (Motel)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>007</td>
<td>(N008) Dr. Byam House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>008</td>
<td>(N010) Emporium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>009</td>
<td>(N015) Two Story Outhouse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>010</td>
<td>(N016) Nevada City Hotel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>011</td>
<td>(N017) Music Hall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>012</td>
<td>(N018) Dry Goods Store</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>013</td>
<td>(N010) Nevada City Emporium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>014</td>
<td>(N019) Rear Dry Goods Store</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>015</td>
<td>(N021) Sun River Jail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>016</td>
<td>(N023) Cheap Cash Store</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>017</td>
<td>(N024) Outhouse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>018</td>
<td>(N026) Molinari Organ Works</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>019</td>
<td>(N027) Richard’s Shed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>020</td>
<td>(N028) Richard’s Outhouse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>021</td>
<td>(N029) Richard’s Cabin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>022</td>
<td>(N030) Finney House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>023</td>
<td>(N031) Finney Summer Kitchen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>024</td>
<td>(N032) Frame Shed in Finney Yard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>025</td>
<td>(N033) Log Cabin in Finney Yard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>026</td>
<td>(N034) Oil Stove Shed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>027</td>
<td>(N035) Chris Outhouse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>028</td>
<td>(N036) Log Cabin with Tin Can Roof</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>029</td>
<td>(N037) Miss Lilly’s Cabin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>030</td>
<td>(N038) Mrs. Murphy’s Cabin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>031</td>
<td>(N042) Cabin 17 and 18 (Motel)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>032</td>
<td>(N043) Cabin 15 and 16 (Motel)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>033</td>
<td>(N044) Cabin 14 (Motel)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>034</td>
<td>(N045) Cabin 11 and 12 (Motel)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>035</td>
<td>(N046) Cabin 10 (Motel)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>036</td>
<td>(N047) Cabin 9 (Motel)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>037</td>
<td>(N048) Cabin 8 (Motel)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>038</td>
<td>(N049) Cabin 7 (Motel)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>039</td>
<td>(N050) Cabin 6 (Motel)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>040</td>
<td>(N051) Cabin 5 (Motel)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>041</td>
<td>(N052) Shed Behind Cabin 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>042</td>
<td>(N053) Outhouse Behind Cabin 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>043</td>
<td>(N054) Sullivan Saddlery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>044</td>
<td>(N055) Sullivan Outhouse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>045</td>
<td>(N056) Barber Shop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>046</td>
<td>(N057) Fire Station Display</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>047</td>
<td>(N058) Eberl’s Blacksmith Shop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>048</td>
<td>(N059) Assay Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>049</td>
<td>(N060) Applebaum &amp; Crabb Store</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>050</td>
<td>(N061) Charlie Bovey Building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>051</td>
<td>(N062) Sedman House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>052</td>
<td>(N063) Sedman Outhouse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>053</td>
<td>(N064) Joe’s Cabin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>054</td>
<td>(N065) Chinese Temple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>055</td>
<td>(N066) Unfinished Cabin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>056</td>
<td>(N067) Old Shop Outhouse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>057</td>
<td>(N068) Chinese Laundry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>058</td>
<td>(N070) Chinese Grocery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>059</td>
<td>(N071) Big Chinese Store</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>060</td>
<td>(N072) Big Chinese Store Outhouse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>061</td>
<td>(N073) Opium Den</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>062</td>
<td>(N074) Smokehouse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>063</td>
<td>(N075) Bachelor’s Cabin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>064</td>
<td>(N076) Joe’s Outhouse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>065</td>
<td>(N077) Law Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>066</td>
<td>(N078) Shoemaker’s Shop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>067</td>
<td>(N079) Chicken House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>068</td>
<td>(N080) Switzer House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>069</td>
<td>(N081) Switzer Outhouse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>070</td>
<td>(N082) Wagon Shop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>071</td>
<td>(N083) Lumber Yard Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>072</td>
<td>(N084) Linderman Building/Store</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>073</td>
<td>(N085) Shop Outhouse and Oil Shed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>074</td>
<td>(N086) Townsend Building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>075</td>
<td>(N087) School House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>076</td>
<td>(N090) Iron Rod House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>077</td>
<td>(N091) J.D. Ellingsen Shop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>078</td>
<td>(N092) Iron Rod Outhouse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>079</td>
<td>(N093) Edmiston House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>080</td>
<td>(N094) Edmiston Outhouse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>081</td>
<td>(N095) East Helena House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>082</td>
<td>(N096) Iron Rod Post Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>083</td>
<td>(N097) Iron Rod Post Office Outhouse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>084</td>
<td>(N098) John Ellingsen House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>085</td>
<td>(N099) Insulbrick Outhouse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>086</td>
<td>(N100) Tiny Sheridan Log Cabin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>087</td>
<td>(N101) Gallows Barn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>088</td>
<td>(N102) Forest Service Cabin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>089</td>
<td>(N104) Bob Stone Blacksmith Shop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>090</td>
<td>(N105) Wonderly Cabin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>091</td>
<td>(N106) Dimsdale School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>092</td>
<td>(N108) Cabin from South of Alder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>093</td>
<td>(N109) Cabin from John Sinerius</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>094</td>
<td>(N112) California Creek Cabin</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Reproduction Buildings**
Note: These structures are either reproductions or highly modified historic structures maintained as exhibits or museum facilities visible within the area of the museum proper.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>001</td>
<td>(N003) Mining Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>002</td>
<td>(N009) Gun Shop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>003</td>
<td>(N011) Star Bakery Patio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>004</td>
<td>(N022) Criterion Hall Livery Stable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>005</td>
<td>(N025) Depuis House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>006</td>
<td>(N088) School Outhouse Boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>007</td>
<td>(N089) School Outhouse Girls</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Historic Structures (Not Within the Museum Proper)**
Note: These historic structures are not maintained as exhibit buildings and are not in the museum proper.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>001</td>
<td>(N039) Peterson Shed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>002</td>
<td>(N040) Peterson Outhouse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>003</td>
<td>(N041) Peterson Cabin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>004</td>
<td>(R003) Depot Outhouse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>005</td>
<td>(R004) Motor Car Shed by Depot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>006</td>
<td>(R005) Motor Car Shed by Roundhouse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>007</td>
<td>(C001) Central City Depot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>008</td>
<td>(C002) Central City Outhouse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>009</td>
<td>(C003) Central City Motor Car Shed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Reproduction Buildings (Not Within the Museum Proper)**
Note: These reproduction buildings are not in the museum proper.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>001</td>
<td>(R001) Nevada City Depot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>002</td>
<td>(R002) Nevada City Engine House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>003</td>
<td>(G003) Dredge</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Deaccessioned or Lost Historic Structures**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>001</td>
<td>(N020) Bell Tower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>002</td>
<td>(N069) Chinese Laundry Outhouse</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Modern Facilities

001  (N103) Old Pump House
002  (N013) Public Restrooms
003  (N014) Fire Station
004  (N111) New Pump House
005  (G001) Gift Shop
006  (G002) “Ship”
5.7 Images of Nevada City

Figure 5.1: Old Town Exhibit in Great Falls, MT

Figure 5.2: Nevada City, 1865
Figure 5.3: Nevada City, 2016
Source: Author

Figure 5.4: Dr. Byam’s House (N008)
Source: Author
Figure 5.5: Star Bakery (N012)
Source: Author

Figure 5.6: Nevada City Hotel (N016), 1960s
Figure 5.7: Eberl’s Blacksmith Shop (N058)
Source: Author

Figure 5.8: Brewery Street
Source: Author
Figure 5.9: Cabin 10 (Motel)
Source: Author

Figure 5.10: Chinese Temple
Source: Author
Figure 5.11: Opium Den
Source: Author

Figure 5.12: Alder Gulch Shortline
Figure 5.13: Sullivan Saddler (N054)
Source: Author

Figure 5.14: Sedman House (N062)
Source: Author
Figure 5.15: Miss Lily’s Cabin (N037)
Source: Author

Figure 5.16: Brewery Street – Living History Interpretation
5.8 Map of Nevada City
6 Old World Wisconsin (1976)

Motivation for Collection: A Shared Vision
Contextual Origins for the Museum Layout
Complexity and Contradictions
The Museum Today
Building Inventory
Images of Old World Wisconsin
6.1 Motivation for Collection: A Shared Vision

By the 1960s, the American open-air museum had been flourishing in the United States for over thirty years as a private enterprise funded by philanthropist visionaries who saw money as no object when tasked with realizing their own museum objectives. The third and final wave of museum creation in the 1970s; however, would see the typology’s ability to use cultural heritage to encourage tourism and economic development begin to interest public officials and state-sponsored museums.¹ In Wisconsin, public officials also saw the potential in historic preservation, turning towards such previous examples as Old Sturbridge Village and Skansen as motivation for sponsoring an open-air museum that would salvage the state’s vanishing ethnic architecture.

The idea for Old World Wisconsin can’t be attributed to one individual alone, but a group of professionals who worked together for over ten years on the planning and construction of Wisconsin’s first and only open-air museum. Richard W.E. Perrin, Hans Kuether, and Leslie H. Fishel Jr. shared a vision that resulted from “three preservation initiatives – one nationally generated, one state generated, and one generated by individuals.”² Looking back to the early years of the historic preservation movement, the formulation of the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) in 1933 by the National Park Service, the passing of the Historic Sites Act in 1935, and finally the establishment of the National Historic Preservation Act in 1966 all brought historic preservation to the federal level as a societal obligation.³ The culmination of federal legislation as a nationally generated preservation initiative brought the topic’s attention to the State Historical Society of Wisconsin whose successive directors -

² Ibid, 15.
³ Ibid.
Clifford Lord and Leslie H. Fishel Jr. - actively pursued ways in which to incorporate a state generated preservation initiative within the Society’s goals.⁴

While the State was beginning to search for an appropriate project to promote its local history, Richard W.E. Perrin – a Wisconsin architect and preservationist – was about to embark on his own historical journey and individual preservation initiative. In 1953, Perrin was asked by the United States’ Government to be part of an eight-member study tour with the purpose of evaluating the effectiveness of the Marshall Plan following the devastation of World War II. While in Germany on the tour, Perrin had the opportunity to visit the Nordic countries, and by chance, took a trip to Skansen.⁵ He immediately fell in love with the open-air museum typology and took his opportunity abroad to visit other European museums such as Lyngby in Denmark.⁶ The resulting enthusiasm from his trip, as recalled by Perrin, “led to the personal conviction that Wisconsin simply must have an outdoor ethnographical museum, embodying the best of European experience, and having it represent as many ethnic and national groups as possible – all in a setting of spaciousness and natural beauty such as only Wisconsin could provide.”⁷ Perrin’s new personal interest in creating Wisconsin’s own open-air museum led to a self-propelled promotional tour on the topic as well as the creation of two self-sponsored student programs of the Historical American Building Survey (HABS) tasked with gathering measured drawings and historic research on possible building candidates for the museum.⁸ As a local architect and historic building enthusiast, Perrin was all too aware of the physical deterioration of Wisconsin’s vernacular architecture. His twenty-year career as a field investigator for HABS made him realize the immediacy of the situation and the need for initiating such a survey as

---

⁴ Krugler, Creating Old World Wisconsin, 16.
⁵ Ibid.
⁶ Richard W.E. Perrin, Outdoor Museums (Wisconsin: Milwaukee Public Museum, 1975), 68.
⁷ Ibid.
⁸ Ibid.
the first step towards museum creation. In this same year, Perrin was also appointed the State’s Historic Preservation Officer, giving him a position of negotiation in terms of discussing a state-sponsored museum.

Perrin wasn’t alone in his concern for Wisconsin’s vernacular architecture. An associate, Hans F. Kuether, took it upon himself to save the ethnic architecture of his native region of Pomerania in Germany. In 1956, he conceived – on his own – a plan for of an open-air museum scheme called Pomeranian Village near Lebanon, Wisconsin, to be composed of Wisconsin half-timber buildings of Pomeranian heritage, combined with reproductions of European structures to recreate a small village as it might have existed in pre-war Pomerania where he had been born and from whence he had immigrated to the United States. The plan, without any real source of funding, was never realized; however, it did validate Perrin’s interest in the open-air museum typology, giving him the encouragement to press forward with his concept in the following years.

Even though the idea of an open-air museum was being discussed within professional circles, the State Historical Society had its own plan for embracing the rise in educational tourism in the post-World War II years. Their solution was the “Wisconsin Historic Sites Project” of 1958, which under Clifford Lord’s rule as director became a modest yet successful way of promoting tourism within the State. By the end of Lord’s tenure, the Society had opened three historic sites and was looking to develop another huge tourist draw that would allow the state to surpass its competitors. By 1960, the success of the society’s management of these historic sites, the society and the nation’s growing interest in historic preservation, and the appointment of Leslie H. Fishel Jr. as

---

9 Krugler, Creating Old World Wisconsin, 25.
10 Ibid.
12 Perrin, Outdoor Museums, 68.
13 Krugler, Creating Old World Wisconsin, 27.
15 Ibid, 27.
director gave Perrin the perfect platform for bringing his idea of an open-air museum to the society’s attention.\textsuperscript{16}

His relentless advocating centered on the need to save buildings that had been seriously neglected versus relocating buildings that could be preserved in situ. During an hour and a half long meeting with Fishel, Perrin spoke to the idea of saving vernacular architecture that was near destruction and placing it within a park-like setting.\textsuperscript{17} Fishel countered by proposing the attachment of the history of the buildings with the history of their builders in the form of an ethnic park.\textsuperscript{18} From this meeting, the concept of Old World Wisconsin as a refuge for the State’s ethnically diverse vernacular architecture was born with the added promise of state sponsorship from the State Historical Society. However, the road to completion would be long and fraught, with the project continually plagued by issues of funding and support – issues instigated by the final wave of museum creation’s move into public ownership. By the 1970s, the American open-air museum was no longer dictated by strong-willed individuals, giving the movement room to grow as an academic pursuit, but without the wealth associated with these individuals, the typology would struggle to gain momentum in the public realm.\textsuperscript{19}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid, 29.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
\end{flushleft}
6.2 Contextual Origins for the Museum Layout

Once the full support of the Wisconsin State Historical Society was gained, the next logical step was to choose the museum’s location. Viewed at first as a simple task, the high number of parties involved in the decision making process complicated the situation. In June 1964, the appointed Outdoor Museum Committee (OMC) was to make site selection and acquisition its top priority.\(^{20}\) In November of that year, committee member Richard Perrin took it upon himself to visit Old Sturbridge Village as a model example of open-air museum design.\(^{21}\) After meeting with museum officials, Perrin returned to Wisconsin with a greater understanding of operational logistics. Perrin stated:

> [There are many] lessons for us in developing a Pioneer Park in Wisconsin…A similar pattern of development and of operations could be adopted. Instead of a homogenous historic entity such as Old Sturbridge Village represents, our Pioneer Park would be a collection of architecturally significant structures of various pioneer ethnic groups, and conceivably could embody activities of an arts and crafts nature which would represent these various culture, so that in many ways our undertaking could offer a much more diversified exhibit of interest to as many or possibly more people than come to Sturbridge Village….with the ingredients we have here in Wisconsin, an equally significant Pioneer Park could be developed.\(^{22}\)

After visiting Old Sturbridge Village and other open-air museums, Perrin argued that the site had to be at least five hundred acres in order to secure a buffer zone from outside development, but many committee members saw the scheme as too extravagant for their state’s undertaking.\(^{23}\) The amount of acreage was contested, but the general location of the site met with consensus with the majority of the committee feeling that the site should be in southeastern Wisconsin in between the metropolitan areas of Milwaukee and the state capitol - Madison.\(^{24}\) The Kettle Moraine State Forest sits within this triangulated zone of development near the town of Eagle, providing

---

21 Ibid.
22 Ibid, 40.
23 Ibid.
the benefits of ample landscape with nearby highway infrastructure; however, its state-ownership made acquiring the site very difficult for the Society. The land had to be purchased from the Department of Natural Resources and the Wisconsin Conservation Department, the primary agent for the acquisition of state land. The Conservation Department was reluctant to let the Society use the state forest, and consistently suggested the acquirement of other state land, but the Committee’s persistence, and the eventual turnover of leadership within the department led to a change in view. However, the Department still preferred to sell the land versus lease it to the Society, which could not be authorized under current state legislation. In 1967, the State Assembly passed a bill that would authorize the sale of the land. Legally, the Society was now clear to purchase the land, but continued bureaucracy and price negotiations stalled any progress.

As the clock was ticking, the existing building stock was becoming more and more vulnerable to the pressures of neglect and deterioration, leading Fishel to make his priority to appraise forty acres of land within the Kettle Marine Forest, to purchase said land from the Department, and then begin to stockpile buildings on this acreage for relocation to the museum, all while the two state departments continued to battle over the larger sale of the five hundred acres of land necessary for the actual museum. Even this initiative was met with opposition as various state agencies continued to argue over the land’s appraisal value and even if the Eagle site within the Kettle Marine Forest was the most appropriate location. The long and arduous battle over the acquirement of land led Fishel to take another track in his realization of the project. He realized that for any real progress to be made, a

27 Ibid, 43.
28 Ibid.
29 Ibid, 48.
31 Ibid, 57.
master plan had to be conceived; however, the Society had little to no money to sponsor the creation of a proposal, leading to the involvement of landscape architect and assistant professor in the School of Landscape Architecture at the University of Wisconsin-Madison William H. Tisler and his students.32

From early on in the negotiations between the Wisconsin State Historical Society and the Conservation Department, the latter had requested a summarized plan for the museum’s creation. Turning to Richard Perrin, Leslie Fishel requested “advice on the location and size of the site, the number of ethnic groups to be represented, the number of structures available, the cost for moving them, the estimated cost for site preparation and operation, and a basic outline for the museum’s story.”33 Perrin’s first plan proposed six or seven clusters of ethnic buildings, starting with a German enclave centered on the half-timber buildings he had catalogued in previous building surveys – an estimated $30,000 would be required to make each building operational.34 The focus of interpretation would be the ethnic appearance and activities within the museum, not the chronology of the buildings, which were to be placed on a site of at least five hundred acres.35 This plan, however, was too vague once price negotiations became more detailed, requiring the enlistment of additional help to properly evaluate the site. Fishel, with no money to spend, turned to another state resource, the University of Wisconsin-Madison’s School of Landscape Architecture.36 In 1966, the Committee authorized an analysis of the site and the creation of exploratory plans to test the technical feasibility of the project to be done by William Tishler and his class of sixteen undergraduates and three master’s students.37 As part of an undergraduate Design Studio, the project

32 Krugler, Creating Old World Wisconsin, 58.
33 Ibid, 59.
34 Ibid.
35 Ibid.
36 Perrin, Outdoor Museums, 73.
37 Ibid.
benefitted both parties, providing the students with real world experience and Fishel a cheap means of reaching
his goal.

The project had four major goals to be accomplished in the course of the semester: “Students had to investigate
and report on ethnic groups that came to Wisconsin in the nineteenth century. They had to research and then
describe how comparable outdoor museums dealt with a variety of problems. They had to get to know the site and
then figure out how it could be developed to accomplish the Society’s intentions of preserving the structures
associated with the immigrant groups. Finally, the results of their work had to be analyzed and summarized in
graphic and written reports.”38 The students were assigned eleven immigrant groups, the Germans, Swiss, Irish
and English, Danish and Icelandic, Polish, Belgian and Dutch Swedes and Finns, Italians and French, Slovaks,
Norwegians, and Welsh, and five existing open-air museum to study as precedents, Greenfield Village, Mystic
Seaport, Old Sturbridge Village, The Farmers’ Museum at Cooperstown, and Colonial Williamsburg.39 The class
assumed the intended use of the Eagle site and analyzed the land through its “regional context, transportation,
geology, vegetation, slopes, water and drainage problems, climate factors, wildlife, esthetic qualities, soils, existing
land use, and land elevations.”40 The final task before developing overall schemes was to develop a list of buildings,
spaces, features, and facilities that would be necessary for the museum to achieve its outlined goals. Finally, the
class was divided into four teams of four students each to synthesize the research, analysis, and program data into
four master plan proposals.41 The following text will summarize the four proposals that were presented to the
faculty of the Landscape Architecture Program and some members of the Outdoor Museum Committee on June

38 Krugler, Creating Old World Wisconsin, 63.
39 William H. Tishler, “Heritage Village, Wisconsin – A Preliminary Proposal” (Submitted as a joint project of the
Department of Landscape Architecture and the Wisconsin State Historical Society), 1967, Old World Wisconsin Records 1968-
2011, Wisconsin State Historical Society, 2.
40 Ibid, 5-6.
41 Ibid, 7.
3, 1967 during the studio’s final review and then to the State Historical Society’s annual meeting on June 22 of that same year:

**Team One**

**Design Concept:** This team's basic concept formed a linear development pattern of ethnic farms located between two urban areas. Movement from one urban area to the other would thus stimulate activity in the somewhat remote farm areas and throughout the entire park. This concept resembles that of many shopping centers where two large department stores are placed at opposite ends of a pedestrian mall. The intersection of shoppers between the two large stores encourages business at the small store along the mall.

**Team Two**

**Design Concept:** Team two proposed a design characterized by three basic units of development portraying important aspects of life among Wisconsin’s ethnic groups: an ethnic industry unit, an urban unit, and an agricultural unit. The site analysis data was carefully analyzed in selecting locations for the three units. The areas selected fulfilled two main criteria: they had few limitations for development, and their landscape character closely resembled areas in Wisconsin initially settled by the ethnic groups. Remaining portions of the site were utilized as buffer and linking elements and left in their natural state (Figure 6.1).

**Team Three**

**Design Concept:** This team’s concept was to establish one dominant area with several subsidiary units of development on its periphery. Traffic in a circular pattern, with the urban area acting as the hub, and the various ethnic farm units serving as subordinate elements. The village would be operated on a year-round basis, with the urban area open nightly (Figure 6.2).

**Team Four**

**Design Concept:** Team four evolved their design proposal after a careful analysis of the site utilizing acetate overlays. Their basic concept forms a circular pattern of development touching the edges of the major water bodies on the site (Figure 6.3). 42

The proposals were met with great enthusiasm from the State Historical Society, giving the project momentum to move forward in the planning process in 1967 with the idea of combining the best strategies from all four proposals into one master plan. 43 At this time the name Old World Wisconsin was chosen as the museum’s title, and Tishler was assigned the job of creating an overall master plan. 44

The 1968 plan conceived by William Tishler utilized two major historical components, an urban complex and rural settlements, around which five ancillary elements would form, including a parking lot, the “Entry-Awareness

44 Ibid, 70.
Center,” the ecological-geographical area, and the restoration and work area (Figure 6.4).\textsuperscript{45} Within the first phase of development, forty-eight structures would be relocated to the site.\textsuperscript{46} The urban complex would act as the heart of the museum with structures rebuilt around three types of open-space common areas. The urban market square included a parish church with other tightly grouped buildings.\textsuperscript{47} The village common, similar to Old Sturbridge Village, would consist of a landscaped oval with a bandstand and a Victorian-style fountain.\textsuperscript{48} A main street would connect the market square with the common and was to be lined with buildings and “historic street furniture,” such as “boardwalks, hitching posts, barber poles, and other like objects.”\textsuperscript{49} Four general categories of building types would be placed in the urban complex, including service-related buildings (i.e. a hotel, a barber shop, a dance hall, etc.), professional buildings (i.e. a lawyer’s office, a mortician, etc.), public facilities (i.e. a bandstand, a theater, etc.), and industrial buildings (i.e. a wagon maker, a feed mill, a cheese factory, etc.).\textsuperscript{50} The rural settlements would represent fifteen different nationalities in nine ethnic enclaves.\textsuperscript{51} Each farmstead would include a farmhouse and any relevant outbuildings representative of that farmstead typology, including barns, sheds, granaries, corncribs, and saunas.\textsuperscript{52} Larger, rural elements like windmills, haystacks, gardens, fences, and wells would also be scattered throughout the museum’s landscape.\textsuperscript{53} The plan was approved by the State Historical Society in October of 1968, and the Conservation Department assented to the acquisition and stockpiling of buildings on the smaller allotted forty acres after their own review of the master plan (Figure 6.5).\textsuperscript{54}

\textsuperscript{45} Krugler, \textit{Creating Old World Wisconsin}, 74.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid, 74-75.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid, 75.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{54} Perrin, \textit{Outdoor Museums}, 73.
The struggle remained to acquire the state land, a problem to be inherited by Dick Erney, Fishel’s successive director appointed on June 1, 1969. No money and no site for the museum proper meant that the project was at an impasse, and certain personalities were growing tired and increasingly bitter over Old World Wisconsin’s outlook, leading to quarreling and unnecessary drama. The situation began to make a turn for the better when Dave Cronon, the State Historical Society’s new president, devised a somewhat devious plan to use the bureaucratic machine to his advantage in dealing with the Conservation Department’s head, Lester Voigt. Knowing that a shift in party politics was about to take place with the new Democratic governor Patrick Lucey taking over the previous Republican administration, Cronon used Voigt’s known allegiance to the Republican party as a turning point for negotiations over the land. Besides a shift in party control, the new governor wanted to move to a cabinet form of government, meaning that the head of the Conservation Department would now be appointed by the governor instead of the board. This left Voigt nervous about retaining his position in the face of the new Lucey administration. Cronon was able to then reason with Voigt that it would be in his best interest to convey the land to the Society as a prominent Democratic state politician (Congressman Henry S. Reuss) had just recently donated $100,000 to the museum’s cause. Voigt understood the implications and offered to permanently lease the land to the Society in 1971, ending the decade-long struggle over the site’s resolution at no appreciable cost.

Finally, the Wisconsin State Historical Society had the conditions necessary to begin the construction of Old World Wisconsin. While the Society had been slowly stockpiling buildings, the vast majority of building acquisition had yet to be done. The acquisition of buildings was a selective task that needed to be treated with the

56 Ibid, 91.
57 Ibid.
58 Ibid, 92.
59 Perrin, *Outdoor Museums*, 73.
same level of care as any traditional museum collecting activity. Questions of desirability, rarity, and condition ultimately dictated the selection of buildings. As noted by Mark Knipping, a member of the museum’s building crew, “A relatively recent development affecting ‘value’ is an active market in historic buildings, encouraged by interest in the restoration of structures as antiques, as well as by the back-to-the-land movement.” While vernacular architecture was rapidly deteriorating in the 1950 and 60s, the 1970s saw a new interest in antiques by the general market, leading to the refurbishment of old barns and log homes into residential or commercial establishments. This market trend was evident in the antique market as well with traditional museums seeing a decline in significant donations. Knipping noted, “Museums now have two choices: they can continue to rely on donations, thereby building a haphazard accumulation of castoffs, or they turn to purchase of selected items to build a representative collection.” Old World Wisconsin was no different in the curation of its collection. The museum staff expected a high level of quality in their acquisitions in order to accurately portray the museum’s given theme and period of interpretation, requiring more purchasing of buildings and tighter quality control over what donations were acceptable. With this in mind, a six step process was used with every building acquisition: The first step was to develop a list of necessary structures after a series of ethnic, farmstead, and field studies. Step two was to obtain the building, which required approaching the owners with an effort to secure the structure as a donation. Step three was to transport the building to Old World Wisconsin. The decision had to be made if the building was to be completely dismantled or relocated relatively intact. Step four was to choose the building’s

61 Ibid.
62 Ibid.
63 Ibid, 3.
64 Ibid, 2.
65 Ibid, 4.
66 Ibid.
67 Krugler, Creating Old World Wisconsin, 133.
location on the museum grounds, giving priority to “re-creating the original landscape to the extent possible within the master plan’s designated areas,” and paying close attention to the relationship between buildings, especially within a farmstead. Step five was to carefully re-erect the building, and finally, step six was to gather research on the buildings and their occupants in the context of European immigration to Wisconsin in order to appropriately interpret the site with collections and interpreters.

The rush was on to complete the construction of Old World Wisconsin by the projected opening date of June 30, 1976 – a date purposefully chosen to coincide with the Bicentennial of the United States. While Richard Perrin had conceived the idea of an open-air museum for Wisconsin in the 1960s, his vision for a multicultural museum better reflected academia’s acceptance of Ethnic Studies as an academic field in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The desire to showcase the ethnic diversity that came to represent various regions of the United States and academia’s acceptance of Ethnic Studies generated a reinvestment in Americana associated with the Bicentennial. By 1973, the museum’s impending construction coincided perfectly with the society’s planning for Wisconsin’s observance of the Bicentennial. In 1966, Congress had formed the national American Revolution Bicentennial Commission (ARBC) to plan celebrations for the nation and the states, and in 1972, the Wisconsin American Revolution Bicentennial Commission (WARBC) endorsed Old World Wisconsin as the state’s bicentennial park. Excavation for the first buildings began on July 25, 1973. In January 1974, forty buildings were projected to be on site by the opening date; however the museum staff would soon learn that re-erecting buildings was no easy task. By 1975, it had taken an eight-man crew two hundred forty-six days to dismantle and re-erect a five-building farmstead.

---

69 Ibid.
70 Ibid, 118.
72 Krugler, *Creating Old World Wisconsin*, 166.
This first phase of construction was given to the Finnish unit, which included the Ketola house – a building of architectural merit as well as a well-documented history of ownership.\textsuperscript{73}

The Ketola Farm was to be interpreted as a progressive Finnish dairy farm in the Lake Superior region from around 1915 (Figure 6.6).\textsuperscript{74} The Ketola House (built c. 1900) was originally located in the town of Oulu just seven mile south of Lake Superior before being relocated to Old World Wisconsin to stand as a central farmhouse within the Finnish unit.\textsuperscript{75} The outbuildings to be included in the recreated farmstead were the Kortesmaa Barn (built c. 1910), the Kortesmaa Granary (built c. 1915), and the Rankinson Outhouse (built c. 1895) – all relocated from the same town of Oulu (Figure 6.7).\textsuperscript{76} The Makela Stable (built c. 1911), the Ronkainen Sauna (built c. 1915), and the Lantta Hay Barn (built c. 1919) were relocated from the towns of Maple and Knight.\textsuperscript{77} As with all of the farmsteads at Old World Wisconsin, research was conducted on all aspects of the farm’s history in order to create an accurate interpretive plan. Beginning with information on the chosen ethnic group’s history in Wisconsin, the plan would go on to include the family’s personal history and finish with the farmstead’s architectural history and significance. The interpretive plan was coupled with an architectural analysis report that detailed the original conditions of the farm in terms of site and building adaptations. At Ketola Farm, the report suggested that effort be made to preserve some of the original Kortesmaa Barn siting features in the recreated farmstead by retaining the barn’s “north/south axis orientation within a somewhat squared-off courtyard building arrangement,” while the physical histories given to each outbuilding provided a timeline for reinterpreting the building’s character.

\textsuperscript{73} Knipping, Letter to John Harbour, 4.
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid, 2.
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{77} Lamb and Oberle, “Interpretive Plan – Ketola Farm,” 2.
back to the plan’s intended period. The level of detail and scholarly research promoted by the museum’s staff would give each farmstead a level of authenticity that had been previously lacking in the American open-air museum movement (Figure 6.8). Unlike Old Sturbridge Village, the buildings themselves were used to interpret the lifestyles of Wisconsin’s immigrant population, giving priority to historic preservation, not materials collection.

By June 30, 1976, Old World Wisconsin was nowhere near the intended completion point; however, with mounting pressure from donors and the public, the museum continued with its promised grand opening. From the “monumental traffic jam” to lack of toilets and signage, the grand opening was perceived as a disaster. The creation story ends in October of 1977 with much of the original plan still unfulfilled. The Crossroads Village consisting of the urban complex was greatly reduced in scale, and the last buildings of the rural complex from the Polish and African American units were modest in comparison to the rest of the established ethnic enclaves. At any given point, it seemed that Old World Wisconsin was destined for failure; however, the vision ensued in the years after 1977, and with persistent diligence, the strong-willed nature of its stewards enabled Old World Wisconsin to overcome its high ambitions and modest budget to become a highly regarded example of the open-air museum typology. The State Historical Society slowly worked towards the museum’s completion, and while the grounds may not have been ready for the public’s use in 1976, the museum was ready to fulfill its purpose to bring to the public’s attention the State’s vast and diverse history as evident in the built environment. The open-air museum was no longer a personal hobby but a part of the public domain; which for better or for worse, provided a contemporary outlet in which to preserve the country’s disappearing vernacular architecture.

79 Krugler, Creating Old World Wisconsin, 170.
80 Ibid, 200.
6.3 Complexity and Contradictions

Towards the end of the second wave of museum creation, the American open-air museum began to see freedom from dogmatic industrialist ambitions only to become fully entangled in the world of state government by the 1970s. The guidance of a single hand was replaced by a complex set of bureaucracies that were neither easy to navigate nor manipulate. The sheer number of parties involved in any one aspect of the decision making process was a procedural nightmare. In the case of Old World Wisconsin, the Wisconsin State Historical Society’s quasi-independent status meant that the agency was governed by a Board of Curators who could manage the project independently without any state oversight if no budget appropriations or legislation was needed. This implied sense of freedom gave the Society reason to believe that the museum would be best funded through other sources of income, such as other state agencies, corporations, private individuals, foundations, and the national government, when in reality, none of these sources provided nearly enough money to fund the museum’s high ambitions. Even with the best intentions, Old World Wisconsin was an enormous undertaking that pushed the Society’s limits in terms of funding and resources, leaving much of its construction haphazardly organized and executed. Richard Perrin’s objective for a scholarly-minded project based on the interpretation of the vernacular architecture gave the open-air museum movement a new sense of credibility in historic preservation and museum studies, but such lofty ambitions, when pressed by time and the bureaucratic machine, were often met only half way. As John Krugler, author of Creating Old World Wisconsin points out, the complexity in achieving the shared vision can be perfectly summarized in one particular building’s re-erection – the Koepsell House (Figure 6.9).

---

81 Krugler, Creating Old World Wisconsin, 22.
82 Ibid, 11.
83 Ibid.
The significance of the Koepsell House dates back to its discovery by Richard Perrin. Perrin had a special interest in Wisconsin’s German heritage and, in particular, twenty-five German half-timber houses that he had discovered by 1959. As a descendent of German immigrants, his professional and personal interests began to coincide with his fascination in the restoration of Wisconsin’s *fachwerk* or half-timber architecture.84 Perrin first came across the Koepsell House during his time as a HABS field researcher in 1959 when he was given the assignment to complete measured drawings for the then abandoned building.85 The building was in a ruinous state, but even then, Perrin stated that the house was “the most impressive Wisconsin half-timber house still in existence.”86 By 1961, the dream of Old World Wisconsin was beginning to take shape within the State Historical Society as the agency saw it as its obligation to rescue such spectacular but threatened vernacular architecture. In 1962, the Koepsell House was rapidly deteriorating, and the owner was willing to donate the house to the Society before its complete collapse. The Society agreed that action needed to be taken, but with no resources, the building was left to further deteriorate until 1968 when a plan for relocation began to take shape.87 Such a delicate task was outlined by Perrin who stated that log and half-timber buildings could not be moved intact but needed to be completely disassembled per strict methods and then stored onsite in a temporary enclosure before being carefully re-erected at their new location.88 In April of 1969, the dismantling of the house began, and on September 1, 1970, the Koespell House was official deeded to Old World Wisconsin by its owner.89 However, without an agreement on the sale of the state land in the Kettle Marine Forest, the building – along with several others – remained in storage until 1971 when the land was finally given to the State Historical Society for the construction of the

---

84 Krugler, *Creating Old World Wisconsin*, 141.
85 Ibid.
86 Ibid.
87 Ibid, 144.
88 Ibid, 145.
89 Ibid.
museum. In December of 1971, the now disassembled Koespell House began to make its journey to the master plan’s dictated site within the German unit. Its re-erection was a long and arduous task for a group of workers with no experience in such construction. The house would quickly become a lesson in historic preservation and authenticity for the museum staff, playing a key role in better understanding the relocation process.

Construction was stalled when the Society ran out of the funds necessary to successfully relocate the Koespell House, resulting in the need to obtain a federal grant of $41,250. The catch was that without the building’s designation on the National Register of Historic Places, the federal funds could not be released to the museum. This set of circumstances would eventually lead to the Koespell House’s nomination and subsequent listing – a task not easily done when considering the nature of the Register’s criteria. As stated in the National Register of Historic Places, in order for a property to be eligible for listing, its age, integrity, and significance must be evaluated. This evaluation is based on a set of criteria that must be met with one particular consideration stating that “structures that have been moved from their original locations, reconstructed historic buildings, properties primarily commemorative in nature, and properties that have achieved significance within the past fifty years shall not be considered eligible for the National Register.” However, such properties will be considered eligible if “a building or structure removed from its original location is primarily significant for architectural value, or is the surviving structure most importantly associated with a historic person or event.” With the help of Richard Perrin, the nomination form for the Koespell House was submitted to the National Park Service under these terms in 1971. In the nomination form, the building’s significance is listed as “architectural with strong ethnic

90 Krugler, Creating Old World Wisconsin, 146.
91 Ibid, 149.
93 Ibid.
94 Krugler, Creating Old World Wisconsin, 149.
associations.” Representative of a large influx of German immigrants to Wisconsin in the mid-1800s, the building’s half-timber construction was a clear indicator of the desire to bring their culture and architecture with them to this new land. Only a few examples of this building typology remained in Wisconsin at the time of nomination with the Koespell House being a most impressive example in the words of Perrin. The form’s concluding statement is as follows:

As a measure toward the salvage, protection and preservation of the best specimens of distinct architectural types – in this case types with solid ethnic associations – the State Historical Society has acquired, disassembled, and stored this fine half-timber house and has plans to move and restore it.

On May 5, 1978, the State of Wisconsin Historic Preservation Negotiating Board met to discuss the eligibility of the Koepsell house for nomination. Under discussion was the adverse effects of the building’s removal from its original location. As agreed upon, the effects were adverse, but with the proper mitigation, these effects could be ameliorated. The proper mitigation included that “Old World Wisconsin will document through site plans and photographs the existing conditions, siting, and environment of the structures to be moved, and present this material documentation to the State Historic Preservation Officer” and will then “reconstruct, restore, and maintain the above listed buildings.” The acceptance of the building’s current condition can be attributed to Richard Erney, the State Historic Preservation Officer, who in January of that year had determined that the state project would not adversely affect the building’s eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places. His reasoning for such determination was as follows:

1. At its new location the barn will be carefully and authentically restored, and then preserved in perpetuity.

---

96 Ibid.
97 Ibid.
99 Ibid.
2. The log walls are in deteriorated condition…and the owner does not intend to rehabilitate or restore the buildings. OWW staff estimates it will collapse in about two years if not removed and restored.

3. The historic grouping of which the barn was originally a part no longer retains integrity, as the farmstead has been altered many times over the years.¹⁰¹

The house was designated on October 24, 1973 leading to the release of the state funds and the completion of the building’s reconstruction (Figure 6.10).¹⁰²

The big question remained, however. How authentic is such a reconstruction and how does that reflect in the building’s listing on the National Register? For the inexperienced reconstruction crew at Old World Wisconsin, this was a large hurdle to overcome. Mark Knipping, the first research director, and Alan Pape, the first construction supervisor, “never intended Koespell to be an exact restoration.”¹⁰³ Little evidence remained of the original farm’s layout, however, the researchers intended to recreate a common Pomeranian cultural pattern by putting the house in the context of a courtyard or Vierkanthof.¹⁰⁴ To gain a better understanding of this contextual layout, Knipping and Pape went to twenty-six Pomeranian farmsteads and recorded the relationships between the houses and the numerous outbuildings.¹⁰⁵ The team then created a list of building acquisitions. The master plan of Old World Wisconsin was based on this method of recreating conjectured landscapes to more accurately portray each farmstead as a complex, not just individual buildings. As taken from the Skansen model, the manipulation of the landscape was key to interpretation. However, at Old World Wisconsin, the well intentioned was always undermined, and the final position of the house was rotated one hundred eighty degrees from its original

¹⁰¹ Erney, Letter to the Historic Preservation Negotiating Board.
¹⁰² Krugler, Creating Old World Wisconsin, 149.
¹⁰³ Ibid.
¹⁰⁴ Ibid.
¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 151.
orientation facing the courtyard, as was traditional in German farms, in order to have the entrance face the
approaching road – as per the commands of Society curator Jack Winn.106

Aside from the origins of the museum’s contextual layout, the authenticity of the Koepsell House itself was also
in question. When John E. Harbour was appointed the new director of Old World Wisconsin in May 1975, he had
serious concerns on the methods employed in the relocation of the buildings. He realized that the intent was there
to maintain a high level of authenticity, but in reality, many of the buildings were poorly reconstructed. He took it
upon himself to set a series of standards for future construction. He stated, “I have very serious reservations about
the reconstruction of part or all of historic buildings. I think we are in the business of restoring houses here, which
is generally accepted to mean replacement of not more than twenty-five percent of the original structure, roof
excluded. If we are to maintain any architectural or historical integrity, I do not believe we should be in the
business of reconstructing historical buildings.”107 Unfortunately with the Koepsell House, more than the ideal
thirty percent of new material was needed to complete its restoration due to the poor standards of disassembly
employed in 1969.108 In order to complete the building’s restoration, salvaged material had to be scavenged from
the state’s crumbling stock of nondescript, vernacular buildings. By the opening date, the Koepsell Farm was still
incomplete, highlighting the museum’s difficulty in accomplishing the goals it set out to achieve.

Old World Wisconsin would continue to struggle with its intentions versus execution well into the 1970s. The
contradiction in what the museum hoped to embody in the idea that preservation of the past not only enriches the
lives of society in the present but also guarantees “an environment of quality and enduring interest for the future,”
versus the scale of impact achieved by the State Historical Society was a direct reflection on the difficulty in

106 Krugler, Creating Old World Wisconsin, 152.
107 Ibid, 154.
108 Ibid.
applying a museum typology founded on individualism to a framework of public ownership. The final wave of museum creation in the United States was defined by this challenge in counteracting preconceived notions on the typology’s intentions with its application in today’s society. Ironically, this adaptation of the typology for the present required a return to the museum’s European origins. As was characteristic in the 1970s, the approaching Bicentennial celebration encouraged a reinvestment in Americana, and Old World Wisconsin executed this reinvestment by literally translating Wisconsin’s European origins through its built history. The museum itself also returned to its origins, taking many cues from Skansen and other European open-air museums in terms of nature and the interpretation of the land in relation to its buildings. As part of the final wave, Old World Wisconsin benefited from being able to respond to the typology’s already established history, and as a result, the museum knew exactly what it wanted to be. In short, Old World Wisconsin’s perceived capabilities as a state institution seriously undercut its lofty ambitions – ambitions that far outweighed any previously conceived open-air museum, pushing the typology to its absolute limit.

109 Perrin, Outdoor Museums, 83.
6.4 The Museum Today

While Old World Wisconsin has improved significantly since its opening day in 1976, it has still failed to fully achieve the master plan established in 1968. It is now the largest of the eleven historic sites operated by the Wisconsin State Historical Society’s Museums and Historic Sites Division.\textsuperscript{110} The number of buildings on the site has increased from the eighteen in 1977 to the sixty-eight that now make up the rural and urban complexes.\textsuperscript{111} The museum currently shows seven ethnic units (Norwegian, Danish, Finnish, German, Polish, African American, and Yankee) versus the proposed fifteen different nationalities in nine ethnic enclaves. Each farmstead includes a farmhouse and any relevant outbuildings representative of that farmstead typology (Figures 6.11-6.15). The larger, rural elements like haystacks, gardens, fences, and wells have been added to the landscape as well as an active agricultural program that uses this landscape for its intended purpose. Each farm is actively interpreted by a variety of farm animals, including horses, cattle, oxen, sheep, and hogs, that utilize the buildings as they were designed. A variety of crops are also grown to help support the museum’s interpretation of Wisconsin’s historic foodways.

The Ethnic Crossroad Village was dramatically scaled down in size to now include twelve buildings (Figure 6.16). The building typologies represented are service-related buildings, such as the Shoe Shop and General Store and public facilities, such as the baseball field and Harmony Town Hall. The projected professional buildings and industrial buildings were never incorporated into the urban complex. Transportation between sites has been dramatically improved to increase accessibility with the addition of motor-driven trams versus the previously used horse-drawn wagons (Figure 6.17).

\textsuperscript{111} Ibid, 202.
Four historic buildings have been renovated to include visitor amenities and educational facilities. These modern facilities have been added to fulfill the original plan’s “Entry-Awareness” Center. This included the renovation of the Clausing Barn into a modern restaurant and event space, the addition of restrooms, water fountains, and vending machines throughout the vast site, and an expanded gift shop and visitor center in the Ramsay Barn as the museum’s point of entry.\footnote{Krugler, Creating Old World Wisconsin, 202.}

Outside of the museum proper, modern facilities have also been built for the administration of the site. These facilities include an administrative building with offices for the permanent staff of ten, two museum quality curatorial centers for the storage for the museum’s artifact collection and period clothing, a greenhouse and garden center for the garden research and management division, a modern barn and storage for the offseason care of the livestock, and a restoration/work area with a fully operational fabrication shop for the maintenance of the historic buildings.

Old World Wisconsin now operates on an annual budget of $1.9 million (FY 2012-13) and employs another sixty-five to seventy people during the season as interpreters, tram drivers, janitors, and store clerks.\footnote{Ibid, 7.} The museum shows no signs of its tumultuous past and near failure. The five hundred seventy-six acre site is an impressive collection of regional history. As noted by Sten Rentzhog, Old World Wisconsin is one of the most magnificently planned of the American open-air museums and perhaps the most similar to its European counterparts.\footnote{Rentzhog, Open Air Museums: The History and Future of a Visionary Idea, 269.} Based upon the pre-established criteria for evaluation, Old World Wisconsin would be considered a significant contributor to the open-air museum movement. Old World Wisconsin was founded on the desire to properly represent Wisconsin’s multicultural history through the vernacular architecture of its European and
African-American immigrant populations – a form of educational tourism very much related to the ideas surrounding the popularization of ethnic studies in the 1960s and 70s. The museum was created for the people of Wisconsin, focusing solely on the state’s unique architecture. As a designed ensemble, Old World Wisconsin speaks clearly to the high academic standards put forward by Richard Perrin. From the very beginning, the museum was a thoroughly planned and researched endeavor, as was common in the third wave of the open-air museum movement. The concept of preservation by relocation was a key component to the museum’s creation and success, and although the standards of relocation slowly evolved over the years, bringing to question the level of authenticity, the buildings remain authentic to the overall design intent. If Old World Wisconsin were to be nominated to the National Register of Historic Places, then any relocated building would be deemed contributing to the museum’s efforts to salvage, protect, and preserve the best specimens of Wisconsin’s distinct architectural and ethnic typologies. While listing doesn’t guarantee outright benefits, it’s the first step towards legitimizing a movement that has up until now been considered dishonest. As an ambitious typology that is struggling to maintain its operations in the modern world, the promotion of their work as a valuable contribution to American Society will lead to a more secure future for the museums and their collections, and in turn, secure our American history.
6.5 Building Inventory: Old World Wisconsin

Note: This list has been divided into categories organized by level of authenticity and visible appearance within the museum proper. In total, there are sixty-seven historic buildings at OWW that are accessible or directly visible to visitors within the museum proper. The remainder are modern facilities.

Structures Original to the Property of OWW
Note: These historic structures are original to the property and were acquired with the purchasing of the land.

001 Palof Barn
002 Palof Garage
003 Palof Granary
004 Palof House (Office)
005 Palof Milk House
006 Ward Schoolhouse

Structures Listed on the National Register
Note: These historic structures are individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

001 Koepsell House
002 Schottler House (Turck House)
003 Ward Schoolhouse

Historic Structures
Note: These are actual early buildings maintained as exhibit buildings and/or which are visible within the museum proper.

001 4 Mile Inn
002 Benson House
003 Blacksmith Shop
004 Bosboen Barn
005 Breen Horse Stable
006 Caldwell Farmer’s Club
007 Clausing Barn
008 Dahlen Corn Crib
009 Fassbender Granary
010 Fossebrekke House
011 Grube Barn
012 Hafford House
013 Harmony Town Hall
014 Held Barn
015 Hilgendorf Barn
016 Hilgendorf Shed
017 Jensen Barn
018 Jung Pig Barn
019 Jung Smokehouse
020 Kaczorowski Outhouse
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>021</td>
<td>Kessel Kitchen</td>
<td>045</td>
<td>Pederson House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>022</td>
<td>Ketola House</td>
<td>046</td>
<td>Peterson Wagon Shed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>023</td>
<td>Koepke Barn</td>
<td>047</td>
<td>Pleasant Ridge United Brethren Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>024</td>
<td>Koepsell Barn</td>
<td>048</td>
<td>Pleasant Ridge Cemetary Chapel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>025</td>
<td>Koepsell House</td>
<td>049</td>
<td>Pole Horse Barn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>026</td>
<td>Kortesmaa Barn</td>
<td>050</td>
<td>Ramsey-Barrie Barn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>027</td>
<td>Kortesmaa Granary</td>
<td>051</td>
<td>Rankinen Horse Barn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>028</td>
<td>Kortesmaa Outhouse</td>
<td>052</td>
<td>Rankinen House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>029</td>
<td>Kruza House</td>
<td>053</td>
<td>Rankenen Toilet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>030</td>
<td>Kvaale House</td>
<td>054</td>
<td>Raspberry Schoolhouse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>031</td>
<td>Lanta Hay Barn</td>
<td>055</td>
<td>Rokainen Sauna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>032</td>
<td>Larsen Granary</td>
<td>056</td>
<td>Saint Peter’s Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>033</td>
<td>Lisbakken Granary</td>
<td>057</td>
<td>Sanford House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>034</td>
<td>Loomer Barn</td>
<td>058</td>
<td>Schottler House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>035</td>
<td>Lorusso House</td>
<td>059</td>
<td>Schulz-Zirbel House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>036</td>
<td>Lueskow House</td>
<td>060</td>
<td>Sissel House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>037</td>
<td>Makela House Barn</td>
<td>061</td>
<td>Sissel Shop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>038</td>
<td>Morrison Stable</td>
<td>062</td>
<td>Sorbershagen Barn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>039</td>
<td>Otteson Outhouse</td>
<td>063</td>
<td>Utica Stable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>040</td>
<td>Palof Barn</td>
<td>064</td>
<td>Veggli House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>041</td>
<td>Palof Garage</td>
<td>065</td>
<td>Ward Schoolhouse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>042</td>
<td>Palof Granary</td>
<td>066</td>
<td>Waterville General Store</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>043</td>
<td>Palof House (Office)</td>
<td>067</td>
<td>Waterville General Store Outhouse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>044</td>
<td>Palof Milk House</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Modern Facilities**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>001</td>
<td>Administration Building</td>
<td>010</td>
<td>Pole Storage Building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>002</td>
<td>Animal Encounter Shed</td>
<td>011</td>
<td>Restroom Building - Germanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>003</td>
<td>Equipment Shed</td>
<td>012</td>
<td>Restroom Building - Norwegian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>004</td>
<td>Field Office Trailer</td>
<td>013</td>
<td>Collections Building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>005</td>
<td>Finnish Rest Stop</td>
<td>014</td>
<td>Greenhouse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>006</td>
<td>Mobile Home Trailer</td>
<td>015</td>
<td>German Food Stand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>007</td>
<td>Multi-Purpose Storage</td>
<td>016</td>
<td>Harness Shed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>008</td>
<td>Norwegian Rest Stop</td>
<td>017</td>
<td>Visitor’s Market Place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>009</td>
<td>Picnic Shelter</td>
<td>018</td>
<td>Wood Shed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


6.6 Images of Old World Wisconsin

Figure 6.1: Team 2 Design Proposal

Figure 6.2: Team 3 Design Proposal

Figure 6.3: Team 4 Design Proposal

Figure 6.4: Conceptual Master Plan
**Figure 6.5:** Detailed Master Plan

Figure 6.6: Ketola Farm, 1975
Source: Wisconsin State Historical Society

Figure 6.7: Ketola House Dismantle, 1972
Source: Wisconsin State Historical Society
Figure 6.8: Ketola House Reconstruction, 1975  

Figure 6.9: Koepsell House, 1973  
Figure 6.10: Koepsell House
Source: Author

Figure 6.11: 1910s Finnish Farm
Figure 6.12: 1900s Polish Farm

Figure 6.13: Schottler House Opening, 1977
Figure 6.14: 1870s German Farm, Schottler House Complex


Figure 6.15: 1870s German Farm, Schottler House Complex

Figure 6.16: Victorian Home, The 1880s Village
Source: Author

Figure 6.17: Horse-drawn wagons as ground transportation, 1976-77
6.7 Map of Old World Wisconsin
7 Conclusion

Visions and Visionaries
Reconciling Historic Preservation and the American Open-Air Museum
7.1 Visions and Visionaries

The story of the American open-air museum is one of visions and visionaries – a lesson in persistence and entrepreneurship as it relates to historic preservation and the American identity. The concept of the open-air museum, as first introduced by Artur Hazelius in Skansen in 1891, lies in society’s identification with its material culture and affinity for the mundane. Dissatisfied with the limitations of standard museum practice, Hazelius sought to introduce a new museum typology that embraced the story of the vernacular and democratized history for public consumption. He was convinced that the artifacts of everyday life could only be understood in their architectural and horticultural contexts, thus the collection of Sweden’s built history was just as important as the collection of its material objects.¹ This realization came at a time when Sweden’s vernacular architecture was in a vulnerable state. Rural life was rapidly losing ground to industrialized society, and many were afraid that the country’s early history and traditions would be lost forever if immediate action wasn’t taken. For Hazelius, Sweden’s national identity was directly tied to the story of its people, and by relocating the very structures that defined domestic life into a curated, museum setting, the cultural development of the country could be preserved for the education and enjoyment of future generations.

In the United States, the transference of the museum typology in the inter-wars years led to a new point of departure in terms of the museum’s capabilities and the public’s perception of historic preservation. As in Skansen, the typology used its ability to popularize history to promote educational tourism through privately funded acts of museum creation. During this time period, history became an instrument for

Americanization as an attempt “to unite a multicultural and socially divided immigrant society through common values.”2 “Collecting and preservation were a means of creating the kind of understanding that was their real objective.”3 The museum’s potential lay in its versatility as a cultural institution, an educational center, and a tourist attraction - afforded by the expansion of the automobile to the general public in the 1930s and 40s. Such conditions created a perfect setting for the wealthy American businessman to realize his own version of American identity through a reclaiming of our pre-industrial past.

The American open-air museum would continue to invade the museum market through two subsequent waves of creation: the second in the 1950s and 60s in response to urban renewal and the third in the 1970s and 80s in response to America’s upcoming Bicentennial celebration. During the second wave, the repercussions of the previous decade’s sudden boom in the economy, the population, and the automobile were felt in the emptying of the American city and the development of the rural landscape. If the first wave of museum creation can be characterized by visionaries looking to reclaim the American identity, then the second wave’s visionaries were intent on saving that identity in the threat of neglect and loss. The vernacular landscape was quickly disappearing in the face of modernity, giving the open-air museum even greater purpose in its ability to save valuable examples of the country’s regional architecture through the act of relocation. However, the American open-air museum wasn’t just an act of preservation but an economic force in the growing tourist industry. Educational tourism continued to factor into museum creation with visionaries reacting to the popularization of history.

---

3 Ibid.
The third and final wave of museum creation in the 1970s and 80s saw ambitious visionaries who not only wanted to reclaim a form of American identity relevant to modern society and the impending Bicentennial, but to do so at an even larger scale of building acquisition and preservation than had been done in the previous two waves. Visions became academic pursuits as the professionalization of historic preservation and the growing popularity of ethnic studies gave the American open-air museum higher standards and expectations. Seen as a profitable business venture that no longer belonged solely to the private sector, the category of visionaries was expanded to include professionals, students, and state officials who worked collectively under a shared vision. The American open-air museum that was born from self-proclaimed patrons of history was now a mature act of state sponsorship.

The American open-air museum was founded on the principles of identity, education, and preservation - objectives that remained relevant to American society for over six decades, leading to the typology’s longstanding history. While the use of the typology would be unheard of in today’s society, the movement had a clear impact on the perception of America’s built history and continues to do so today as these museums continue to open their doors for the public’s enjoyment.
7.2 Reconciling Historic Preservation and the American Open-Air Museum

Despite the American open-air museum’s proliferation in the twentieth century, the movement has generally been dismissed by preservation authorities, particularly the National Park Service in terms of recognizing entire museums versus individual building acquisitions, due to the typology’s perception as an antiquated form of preservation that lacks authenticity. Unable to recognize that preserving buildings in situ is not the only means of historic preservation, the open-air museum – as defined by the principle of relocation – has automatically been eliminated from the historic preservation discourse. Perceived as a taboo topic, the current perception of the open-air museum can be perfectly summed up by Charles Hosmer’s opening statement in his chapter called “Outdoor Museums” in the 1981 book, Preservation Comes of Age: “Although the largest outdoor museums that opened to the public in the 1930s and 1940s are closely linked to the popularization of history it is difficult today to view these exhibition areas as historic preservation activity.” The movement’s defining characteristic has given the open-air museum a negative connotation; however, this is a misappropriation when considering its definition: a museum of buildings. In this sense, the idea of relocation and collection are sound museum practices that enable the tangible and intangible evidence of people and their environment to be displayed for education and enjoyment. Instead of focusing on the individual buildings and the credibility of their removed context, the open-air museum needs to be understood as a greater movement within historic preservation worthy of recognition and study in itself.

---

4 Charles B. Hosmer, Preservation Comes of Age: From Williamsburg to the National Trust, 1926-1949 (Charlottesville: Published for the Preservation Press, National Trust for Historic Preservation in the United States by the University Press of Virginia, 1981), 74.
When confronted with accusations of inauthenticity, museum founders have often countered with their own argument around what qualifies as authentic in the modern world. As stated by Ren Stenzhog, past director of one of Sweden’s leading open-air museums, Jamtli, and author of *Open Air Museums: The History and Future of a Visionary Idea*, “Changing habits vis a vis housing and work, new technical installations, demands for hygiene, security, fire protection, heat insulation, and triple gazing, all mean that buildings which are used and remain on site are perpetually modified. The only way of keeping buildings more or less unchanged is either to move them to museums, or create a museum where they stand.”⁵ Stefan Baumeier at Detmold, a German open-air museum founded in the 1970s, declared that “in an open-air museum, and only there, can a historical building avoid being reused, and be preserved as a piece of frozen history with all its signs of human activity.”⁶

The benefits of relocation often outweigh any perceived negative effects on the building’s significance. This is particularly true in relation to vernacular architecture, where preservation in situ is near impossible in the open landscape. Smaller, wooden structures stand vulnerable to a number of threats, meaning that more often than not, these buildings are doomed to disappear. In terms of Sweden, this meant that the “saunas, smithies, sheds, stables, summer barns, washhouses, and other outbuildings” that had come to define the country’s national identity would have been lost without Skansen’s intervention. Surprisingly enough, the National Park Service agrees that vernacular buildings are vulnerable to loss. By listing Old World Wisconsin’s Koespell House on the National Register of Historic Places on October 24, 1973, the NPS has agreed that despite the building’s dismantling and relocation to the open-air museum, the building still retained its architectural significance and would have otherwise been lost without the

---

⁶ Ibid.
museum’s intervention. This may appear to be an anomaly in recognition, but the NPS has listed two other buildings from Old World Wisconsin on the National Register – the Turck House (now known as the Schottler House) was listed on the same day as the Koespell House, while the Ward District No. Three Schoolhouse was added almost a decade later in 1981. By recognizing the significance of the ordinary, the American open-air museum has been able to save an aspect of history that was often overlooked by traditional preservation and museum practice. As argued by Artur Hazelius, the more permanent buildings of the wealthy could often be preserved in situ, but not the buildings of the poor. Traditional practice skewed the public’s perception of its own history, but the open-air museum was able to portray cultural development in its entirety, and by doing so, democratized history for the people.

While each vision for an open-air museum differed slightly from one founder to the next, common ground existed in the overall desire to create an environment for education and enjoyment - for preserving a way of life threatened by progress in order to understand where we came from, where we are, and where we might go. The popularization of history enabled the recognition of the simple, often wooden structures of the vernacular as important pieces in the American story - the original intention put forth by Skansen as a reserve for the culturally defining and fragile architecture of our early ancestry. “In open-air museums, buildings are not only preserved but also accessible and brought to the people’s attention.” This motive puts the open-air museum directly within the activity of historic preservation as one of the most prolific tools used for regional preservation. Such a role warrants a deeper, scholarly understanding of the overall context of the American open-air museum from its Golden Age to the

---


Bicentennial; from the notorious enterprises of the industrialists to the reserved regional efforts of local historian. As stated by Kate Hampton, former National Register Coordinator for the Montana State Historic Preservation Office, in relation to Nevada City’s desire for listing, “Undoubtedly, the significance of Nevada City lies with its association with the emergence of the outdoor museum as a preservation tool, the rise of heritage tourism, the influence of Charles Bovey, and, of course, its architecture…[however] complete comparative contextual information does not exist to make a judgment as to the exceptional nature of Bovey’s work in Nevada City, and not enough time has passed to evaluate the significance his efforts there.”9 The hope is that through this thesis a greater understanding of the American open-air museum’s context will be used to evaluate such significance, and that acknowledging the value of the open-air museum typology will elevate the status of their individual holdings by viewing the visions of their founders as valuable approaches to the curatorial management of the built environment. This, in turn, will enable participation in public funding opportunities, providing assistance in the maintenance and further preservation of these unique collections.

Many barriers currently exist between the American open-air museum and such recognition. The National Park Service’s National Register of Historic Places and the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards both view the relocation of buildings negatively. As mentioned earlier, in order for a property to be eligible for listing on the National Register, its age, integrity, and significance must be evaluated. The criteria for evaluation clearly negate the nomination of any relocated structures. Certain exceptions have been made for individual building acquisitions, i.e. the Koespell House, the Turck House, and the Ward District No. Three Schoolhouse at Old World Wisconsin, due to a clause stating that such properties will

---

be considered eligible only if they are of significant architectural value; however, only one open-air
museum, in its entirety, has been listed on the National Register thus far – Greenfield Village. Ultimately,
the open-air museum is a typology founded on relocation, and the current interpretation of the National
Register’s Criteria refuses to acknowledge relocation as an act of preservation despite evidence to the
contrary.

This thesis argues for an appreciation of the American open-air museum beyond its preconceived
notions of inauthenticity associated with relocation. As concluded earlier, the real story of the American
open-air museum lies in the understanding of how visionary ideas in history education were achieved
through historic preservation and tourism. We can be critical of the typology’s removal of buildings or its
fabrication of unperceived realities, but this thesis concludes that the educational landscapes generated for
the public’s entertainment by the museum founders are authentic in their own right. With the open-air
museum, the act of preserving a built heritage, while simultaneously creating a curated setting for its
interpretation has generated another layer of history outside the museum’s period of interpretation. This
imposed layer of history is a direct reflection of the museum’s educational intent and the circumstances
surrounding the era in which the museum was made. The role of curator versus caretaker doesn’t distract
from the typology’s significance or degrade the role of historic preservation, but instead enriches our
understanding of our built history and how we have perceived our American identity through historic
preservation.
Works Cited

General


**Old Sturbridge Village**


**Nevada City, Montana**


**Old World Wisconsin**


