Exhibition and Ideology:
The Perpetuation of the Rural Ideal at the Wellington County Museum and Archives

by

Robyn Graham

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ABSTRACT

Exhibition and Ideology:
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Robyn Graham
University of Guelph, 2013
Advisor: Professor Alan Gordon

This thesis is an analysis of the rural ideal as it resonates through exhibition at local county museums in southern Ontario. This study brings attention to the potential for museums to perpetuate the rural ideal through the manner in which they frame artifacts and create historical displays. Through a combination of a through historiography which features public history, museums, and rural history, this thesis argues that museums work in a similar manner as text or images to identify with an ideology. Utilizing the Wellington County Museum and Archives as a case study, exhibits of the institution are deconstructed to demonstrate their association with the ideal and the potential influence this may possess on audiences.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I would like to thank the Archivist, Karen Wagner, and the entire staff at the Wellington County Museum and Archives for taking the time to help me search through their extensive collection. There were many days when I would walk into the building and have no idea what I was looking for. On those days, I relied heavily on the staff that took an interest in my research and listened intently as I tried to explain what my thesis was and use their extensive knowledge of the archives to figure out which materials would aid in my search – subsequently pushing out cart after cart of boxes for me to sift through.

I would also like to thank the staff at other local county museums in Southern Ontario that were considered for this research, including the Paris Historical Museum, Brant County Museum and Huron County Museum in particular. The individuals at these institutions gave me the opportunity to get an insight into the operations of the museums, talking with me for hours and allowing me to peak into those areas restricted for staff.

This thesis could not have been completed without the help of Professor Alan Gordon and Professor Catharine Wilson in the History Department at the University of Guelph. Attempting to dissect and explain an ideology is a quite difficult task, and for a long while, it seemed impossible to successfully determine and communicate what the intentions of my research entailed. Nevertheless, their advice and direction helped me narrow my focus and organize all of the thoughts bouncing around in my head.

Finally, I would like to thank my friends and family. These people have tirelessly listened to me talk about museum exhibits and the romanticization of rural life for two years, never complaining in spite of my inability to make sense of what I was trying to argue. They have helped me sort out my thoughts and provided much needed support, as well as a unified and constant nagging voice to finish, as they repeatedly asked: “Are you done yet?”
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**Introduction**

In the summer of 2011, on a trip to Ottawa, I embarked on my first journey through the Canadian War Museum. As an individual with a passion for history, my experience visiting museums was surprisingly limited, and to combat the constant haggling from my peers regarding this issue, I was excited to visit one of the nation’s most prominent historical collections. I was completely amazed by the architecture and the sheer size of the institution. The first exhibit was a temporary display about healthcare and medicine in warfare and was laid out chronologically throughout three separate rooms which characterized distinct eras in the growth of the field of medicine in battle. However, the person who accompanied me felt the need to read absolutely every plaque and every description as they made their way through the exhibit. Not only did I find this incredibly annoying and making it impossible to make our way through the entirety of the museum before it closed, I found myself lecturing them on how they were misinterpreting the purpose of the exhibit. I immediately saw the exhibit as a story in which the pictures (or artifacts) are intended to explain the story in a concise and visually enticing manner, enabling the capacity to skim over words in the text. Each exhibit was like a chapter and the entire museum collection was the book. In the same manner that an author constructs a narrative, persuading readers with literary prose, the curator of the exhibits were using artifacts to construct a history. Standing in the nation’s capital, I became very aware that the museum adhered to a very specific narrative, one which emphasized Canada’s heroisms while balancing the larger purpose of exploring international and transnational wars, some of which did not include Canada to any great extent. There is no question that the museum would feed off a national ideology as it had an important role in demonstrating the importance of Canada to its citizens and to international visitors.
Nevertheless, this experience immediately led me to form two questions which were to dictate my life over the previous two years: What roles are reserved for smaller, localized museums? What kinds of narratives and ideologies influence these more remote institutions?

A little over a year later, when I walked through the doors of the Wellington County Museum and Archives, I was once again overtaken by its size and beautiful architecture. However, this time I was standing in the middle of the country with beautiful fields and forests surrounding me, as opposed to thousands of pounds of concrete. In spite of the different setting of the museum, the narrative structure remained a constant. Walking up the stairs, visitors flow through the history of the county, moving from pioneer life into the modern Wellington County, watching its history unfold with every artifact and historical sketch presented. As a result, I noticed that another parallel remained when drawing a narrative throughout both the national and the local county museum, and that is the existence of an ideology. The purpose of this analysis, therefore, is to identify and engage with the ideology which can be found at the Wellington County Museum – the rural ideal.

**Introduction of Study Guidelines**

Canada was engaged in an immense transformation throughout the twentieth century. As the era of agriculturalism declined, it was encroached upon by a thriving industrial and commercial society wherein the nation’s inhabitants adapted to urbanization and technological advancement while simultaneously abandoning the laborious and toilsome days in fields across the country. In the hundred year period between 1901 and 2001, the urban population of Canada increased over forty per cent while the rural population which had served as the majority at sixty-three per cent in 1901, slowly declined to a mere twenty per cent at the onset of the twenty-first
century. Nevertheless, as Canada urbanized and modernized, an idealized image of rural life continued to underpin modern Canada’s sense of itself. Rurality was more than just Canada’s past: it was a symbol that embodied the wholesome and hardworking nature of a Canadian national identity.

In the United States, an increased interest in the history of agriculture was evident by the 1920s when the founding of the Agricultural History Society was established, with an objective to promote study and research in the broad field of agricultural history. Canada, however, was tardy in embracing similar studies. Despite the importance of agriculture in the national community, in 1946, Fred Landon, the first full-time librarian at the University of Western Ontario, argued that there was little evidence of any general interest in the subject on the part of historians and economists. He expressed concern that little had been done to assemble and conserve the primary resources of the field, with only one reasonable collection of early farm journals in the libraries of Canada. Landon argued that tendency of agricultural college libraries to concern themselves with problems of the immediate present have resulted in the neglect of building up large collections similar to what had been done in the United States. The accumulation of these resources, he stated, was preliminary to welcoming the study of agricultural history in Canada, therefore, leading to its delay in entering the field. Scholarly interest steadily increased throughout the latter half of the century, however, welcoming various new studies which concerned the history of farming, agriculture, and rural communities throughout the nation. Nevertheless, the examination of rural society did not remain within the

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confines of academia, and scholarly historians have not been the sole investigators into the lives of early settlers.

While professional, university-based history has dominated the field of research and publication, public history serves as a contrast. This latter genre of history is characterized as popular history as it is seen or read by large numbers of people and has been designed for a mass audience. Remnants of the past are everywhere, but they are not necessarily perceived as “historical” or understood as elements in a structured account of the past.³ Instead, history becomes produced and communicated through increasingly accessible means and on a level which appeals to the general population. This includes a wide array of outlets such as buildings and public spaces, documentaries, historical fiction and docu-dramas, non-specialist magazines, memorials, television, museums, and commemorative festivals. It is in this sphere which rural history has thrived.

Rural identity can be seen throughout popular media on local, provincial, and national levels. Canadian icons, such as L.M. Montgomery’s *Anne of Green Gables*, widespread television programs, such as *Road to Avonlea*, and even local annual festivals similar to the University of Guelph’s College Royal are all contextualized around a rural and historical foundation, illuminating numerous facets of early settlement, pioneer life, and agricultural living with the primary purpose of entertainment as opposed to education. In spite of this feature, these outlets deserve as much – if not more – attention as academic outlets to determine understanding of rural history as the prevalence of their influence must be balanced with an idea of what happens when academic standards of objectivity are abandoned for mass appeal and social acceptance.

Methodology

In an effort to maintain a historical component and avoid comparison with sociological methods of analysis, it is necessary to outline the methodology used throughout the research and reflection processes of this investigation. Research commenced with an in-depth examination of the relevant literature regarding the rural ideal. The resonance of this ideology through a multitude of studies led to the conclusion that it was a prevalent feature in the study of rural history; however, it lacked a discernible definition accepted throughout the larger discussion which, instead, tended to focus on one or two characteristics of the ideal.

Utilizing the existence of the rural ideal as a main premise, subsequent visits to various local county museums in southern Ontario demonstrated these institutions as prime outlets for the ideology. Following numerous visits and research into local county museums in Wellington, Huron, Brant, Haldimand, and Dufferin County, certain patterns became apparent which represented common elements throughout these establishments. These patterns mirrored certain themes echoed in the academic literature which identified with the rural ideal and resulted in narrowing the organizational structure of the exhibition analysis into four components which serve to characterize the main features of the rural ideal: community, self-sufficiency, nature, and domestic space.

While multiple museums in southern Ontario were considered and researched, a case study of the Wellington County Museum and Archives was undertaken to permit a thorough and in-depth examination of the rural ideal in museum exhibition. This has allowed for a meticulous analysis of the exhibits of the museum and the manner in which these reflect rural history and the rural ideal. The deconstruction of the exhibits, nevertheless, had to avoid personal interpretation of myself or visiting audiences to the museum as these reactions cannot be transferred across a
general population and are thus very limiting in their ability to demonstrate the potential of the rural ideal to reach large audiences. As a result, the career of the exhibits have been documented to reflect how an artifact is framed in its context and can be associated with one of the four components of the rural ideal. This does not inhibit subjective interpretation, which is actually encouraged through an inclusion of an appendix of images of the exhibits; however, offers a categorization under which elements and artifacts of each exhibit is argued to belong. This method of study is drawn from the notion of the career of museum things as proposed by Samuel J.M.M. Alberti in his article entitled *Objects and the Museum.* Alberti notes the ability to trace the career of artifacts from acquisition to arrangement to viewing and argues that different contexts and changes of value are incurred by these shifts. Furthermore, in observing the career of an artifact, relationships with the surrounding objects are subsequently capable of being analyzed. This thesis builds from the limitation presented by Alberti which stresses that the artifact is inanimate and therefore it is the insight of the collectors, curators, and audiences which attribute varied meanings and values to a display. Thus it attempts to utilize a method of categorization to offer broad themes which can be further broken down and interpreted on a subjective level.

At the Wellington County Museum, both permanent and temporary exhibits play a role in the display of historical artifacts. This separation is echoed by the analysis in this thesis. Some academics, such as Carl E. Guthe, have argued that historical subjects illustrated by an exhibit is associated, directly or indirectly, with similar ones that preceded and followed it, creating a

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5 Ibid, 560.
historical continuity which becomes a visual expression of the communities composite memory. For this investigation, therefore, utilizing the structure and proposed layout of the museum as a narrative to dissect the rural ideal was a possibility. However, in 2012, the Wellington County Museum and Archives housed five permanent exhibits and six temporary exhibits which differed so vastly that a continuous narrative was difficult to detect. On one hand, the permanent exhibits of the museum spoke directly to the history of the county, producing a larger narrative of the community and rural life, tracing the origins of the county from Aboriginal settlement, to an era of transition in the Post-War period. On the other hand, temporary exhibits were sporadic in nature, with one speaking to the variety of immigrants of the region, another to cleaning supplies, and two which commemorated anniversaries of 2012 including the War of 1812 and the sinking of the Titanic. As a result, these exhibits are considered separately in this examination, each unique in the manner they reflect the rural ideal, but both types of exhibits speaking directly to the four components of the rural ideal used in this analysis.

Highlighting the museum as a prime outlet of historical exploration in the public sphere, this study investigates how rural life is represented in displays in local county museums in southern Ontario. Although relatively few museums are directly connected with the academic discipline of history, the majority are historical and contribute to perceptions that members of the general public hold about history. In her overview of history external to academe, Ludmilla Jordanova credits museums as increasingly important in understanding attitudes to the past, as they have ceased to be a specialized area for museum professionals, and have become major cultural forces in their own right. Museums work in an insidious way. They present the past in a

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highly refined manner, which she compares to the production of manufactured foods as they display “only selected objects which have been processed, mended, restored and packaged.”

This analysis is intended to demonstrate that local historical museums in southern Ontario’s rural communities operate in the same manner as texts or images to promote and maintain an idealized and romanticized representation of rural life, otherwise known as the rural ideal. The placement of artifacts and the approaches to historical topics taken reflect four components which serve as the prominent elements of the rural ideal including economic independence, domesticity and family, a direct link with the natural world, and a strong community network.

This thesis is conducted through a particular case study of the Wellington County Museum and Archives in Elora, Ontario. This institution reflects a well designed, regulated, and institutionally organized museum in southern Ontario. The additional factor of the building as an artifact as the former location of the Wellington County House of Industry and Refuge erected in 1877, adds historical depth to the museum as it contributed to the development of the county, and thus serves as a central feature of the exhibits in the museum. In contrast to a sociological study, this analysis does not attempt to mentally deconstruct what objects potentially mean, or how they are internally received by individual visitors. Instead, focus is placed on their historical significance, and the “career of the exhibits” to demonstrate how they are reflective of the four components of the rural ideal.

As an introduction to the relatively recent emergence of public history as a distinct discipline, chapter one outlines the significance of the creation of identity through public means and the potential repercussions of history created for mass appeal. Chapter two outlines the

\[7\] Jordanova, *History in Practice*, 128-129.
differing types of museums as well as which features serve to influence the operation of the museums considered in this analysis. Chapter three attempts to tackle the complex nature of the concept of the rural ideal, enumerating and dissecting its four major components to reveal how it has been created and perpetuated in the literature of rural history. Finally, the last chapter serves as the case study and is explored in two sections, dividing the museum between its temporary and permanent exhibits.
Chapter One – An Overview of the Professionalization of Public History

In the late twentieth century, scholars began to recognize an apparent distinction between academic interpretations of history and other methods by which the public might engage with historical knowledge. On one hand, much of what interested historians and appeared in academic literature was largely inaccessible to the public and rarely reached an audience outside of professional circles or university campuses. On the other hand, public interest in history increasingly turned to more accessible and interesting expressions such as television programming, movies, re-enactments, documentaries, and of course, museums. As an awareness of this phenomenon began creeping into the historical profession, historians sought to bridge this divide to ensure that history was being accurately reflected in these popular outlets. As a result, a new discipline, known as “Public History,” was born. Scholars in this field sought to understand the outlets of public history and their relationships with popular education. Subsequently, through an appreciation of this process, new methods and techniques were developed and shared with future generations to reclaim history by those associated with academia and deliver it to public audiences in an efficient and accurate manner. Nevertheless, as a relatively new concept, much of the literature on public history has ultimately sought to propose a concise and universal definition of the discipline to eliminate ambiguity and demonstrate how this field serves to aid in the successful interaction between history and the public sphere.

The earliest explicit discussions of public history date from the 1970s in the United States. This literature defined the emergence of the genre as an attempt to reconcile the neglect which was linked with the previous handlers of history in the public sphere. While professional historians had primarily gravitated to academic institutions since the nineteenth century, other
agencies had made claims on historical authority, including government bureaucracies, corporate board rooms, local historical societies, national historical museums, and the film and television editing room. It was these public institutions which had brought history to the public while academic historians had tended to differentiate themselves from public history, which they saw as inadequate or simplistic. The “public historians” concentrated on legitimizing their contributions to historical study and the transmission of knowledge.

Several edited compilations such as Presenting the Past: Essays on History and the Public, and Public History: An Introduction presented a comprehensive perspective of public history. ¹ Countering those academic historians who implied that their field was unprofessional, these publications argued that public history was merely a new specialization within the historical discipline. According to Michael Frisch, public history rose from attempts to “create, legitimize, colonize, credentialize, and protect new professional, public and private sector jobs for historians at a time of decreasing academic opportunity.”² Frisch drew this insight from Presenting the Past: Essays on History and the Public. This publication saw the relationship which existed between trained historians and the public as the basic foundation of public history. With the emergence of the discipline as a distinct field of study, the professional public history movement resulted in the specific training of historians to work in such diverse settings as the corporate boardroom, the local historical society, the film editing room, the national historical museum, and the film and television editing room.

museum, and government bureaucracies. Benson, Brier, and Rosenzweig similarly defended the legitimacy of public history as a profession, noting the existence of an independent journal (The Public Historian), a professional organization (The National Council on Public History), numerous conferences, as well as multiple undergraduate and graduate courses in public histories offered at a variety of universities across America.

While some historians saw the presence of professional historians outside of academe solely as the product of narrowing academic opportunities, most historians have identified it as a deeply embedded tradition, previously unrecognized in historical studies. Patricia Mooney Melvin, Associate Professor and Director of the Public History Program at Loyola University in the late 1990s, determined that while the majority of historians worked in academic departments prior to the 1970s, there existed an alternate avenue which was gaining momentum. This avenue found some historians applying their knowledge of the past through alternative settings such as state and local historical societies, archival institutions, and the National Park Service, serving as administrators, developing educational materials, researching and writing exhibits, engaging in interpretations, as well as appraising and processing collections. These positions all relied on

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4 Ibid.
historical skills including the ability to undertake research, subject findings to analysis, and construct a narrative.⁷

In spite of the established roots which were thought to exist, public history was still associated with much confusion and a lack of an explicit and concise definition of its purpose and methods of practice. In an effort to clarify the ambiguities, historians continued to contribute to the discussion, attempting to define the characteristics of the discipline. As with academic historians who could define themselves within particular intellectual frameworks such as Marxist historians, environmental historians, and feminist historians, this predilection was mimicked in the sphere of public history. Leslie H. Fishel Jr. described a division of public history specialities including archivists, professional researchers, and corporate historians.⁸ Similarly, Stephen Hirsh notes that the ambiguity of the term “public history” inspired numerous other specific variants including ‘people’s history’, ‘community history’, ‘movement history’, ‘new museumology’ and ‘oral history’. Nevertheless, he argues that these approaches all share the unifying desire of public history “to include ordinary people in the research process and to redistribute the authority and power that comes with it.”⁹ As a result of an increasing awareness of the various components of public history, subsequent publications attempted to conceptualize the distinction between public and academic history.

Many academic historians have criticized the role of public historians, questioning the validity of the histories presented through non-academic methods. Theodore J. Karamanski explained the wider ethical concerns in an American context. In Ethics and Public History: An

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⁷ Mooney-Melvin, “Professional Historians and the Challenge of Redefinition,” 8.
⁸ Fishel, Jr., “Public History and the Academy,” 11.
Anthology,

he contrasts the moral purpose of history, which he defines as the disclosure of the complete truth about the past, and recognizes that the obligation incumbent upon historians varies with the specific niche or role they fill within the profession. Nevertheless, Karamanski argues that “all historians must be conscious of their responsibility to render service to the community to use history for the public.”

Thus, for Karamanski, the ethics of public history rest upon the question of whether public historians are more responsible to the discipline of history or to the general population. Randolph Starn embeds his perspective within the latest round of what he terms “authenticity debates,” which occurred throughout the early 1990s. He notes that “[a]n ostensibly restrictive criterion had stretched from ‘monuments’ to ‘sites’, ‘districts’ and ‘landscapes’, from high to vernacular culture, from the West to much of the rest of the culture.” He argues there has been a “heritage inflation” as a result of the efforts of nostalgia enthusiasts, conservative ideologies, elitist aesthetes, cultural marketers, and meddling bureaucrats. Paul Ruffins demonstrates this criticism further while praising public history’s role in the construction and expansion of Black History Museums in America such as the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center. He notes a variety of philosophical differences as contributing to the wide gap which exists between public and academic historians, such as the importance of good storytelling. However, he defends public history against university-based historians who make the charge that the purpose of public history is resulting in an inevitable

11 Ibid, 10-11.
13 Ibid, 8.
“Disneyfication” of history, rather than struggling with the cruel realities reflected in academic research.\footnote{Ruffins, “Embracing Public History,” 33-34.}

Despite critiques from academic scholars, recent decades have witnessed a revolution in the sphere of public history. The negative connotations attributed to history constructed for a general population initially dampened enthusiasm for public history in Canada. John English\footnote{John English, “The Tradition of Public History in Canada,” The Public Historian 5, no. 1 (Winter 1983): 46-59.} was amongst the first to adopt the debate from its American birth place and place it in a Canadian context. In *The Tradition of Public History in Canada*, which appeared in 1983, English outlined the basic premise of public history as “relating to the large society” and further limited his definition to the role of historians employed in the Canadian government.\footnote{Ibid.} While a restrictive focus, this premise ultimately led to individuals from differing fields of study, as well as extraneous to the world of academia, to pick up the torch in an effort to provide audiences with historical knowledge. Jack Granatstein\footnote{Jack Granatstein, *Who Killed Canadian History?* (Toronto: Harper Perennial, 2007).} argued in his controversial *Who Killed Canadian History?* that Canadians undoubtedly want to know their history, “[t]hey don’t want bureaucrats, ideologues, or historians telling them what to believe. They want their nation’s history to be presented straight, unvarnished, with the good and the bad laid out.”\footnote{Ibid, 151-153.} Conversely, as journalists and government officials took up the challenge of providing Canadians with their much desired history through various mediums, particularly film and television, historians have sought to demonstrate the limitations of these interpretations. As President of the Canadian Historical Association in 2007, Margaret Conrad surmised the fear which has aided in an increasing acceptance of historians participating outside of the academy:
the view that anyone can be a historian nevertheless sits awkwardly with those of us who have spent a decade or more mastering a discipline that has standards for practitioners. The most fundamental of these is that historians must deal responsibly with the dimension of time, that historical analysis must follow the rules of evidence, that reflection on our own assumptions must be part of the research process and that past events must be situated in their contexts.20

As a result, professionally trained historians have commenced the process of reclaiming the public sphere.

Historians such as Phyllis K. Leffler and Joseph Brent21 have recently commended publicly oriented history. They stress that in addition to providing trained historians with much needed occupations, it makes it possible for the discipline to re-enter the world of global affairs and participate directly in the construction of new historical syntheses to account for and provide meaning to great and profoundly unsettling changes which transform the world.22 Conrad has also expanded on the possibilities of public history stating that it, “like any field in the humanities and social sciences has value as a way of understanding the place of human beings in the world and therefore has a role to play in the education of citizens.”23 She advances the skills of historical investigation as central to identifying, interpreting, and sharing the values upon which civil society depends. This kind of knowledge, she argues, has been discounted in a society driven by stock market swings, the clash of civilizations, and doomsday scenarios, but remains “important, and perhaps crucial, to our well-being as a species.”24 The presence of

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22 Ibid, 3.
24 Ibid, 5.
historians in the public sphere has begun to be warmly received as a result of their skills of interpretation which were perceived as deficient in the absence of these professionals.

With amateur scholars and civil servants serving as the bearers of history to the general public, the larger population was being inadequately educated in the discipline as the leaders were untrained in the techniques of historical research and analysis. The establishment of public history in universities through universal and specific training sought to lead a consistent transmission of skills which characterizes this distinct method of study. Public history programs have begun to enter universities across the North American continent, resulting in an increasing distancing of “public history” from the negative connotation as non-professional. This has led to a new generation of public historians equipped with the technical skills and knowledge to widen the reach of historical study while avoiding the compromising costs which some academics have suggested is associated with presenting it to a general audience. Conrad bluntly concludes that “‘Public History’ is a term now used to describe a profession and an academic discipline...the difference between public and academic historians boils down to the manner of delivery and audience.”

Recently, public historians have made invaluable contributions to the historical discipline through an in-depth examination of how historical knowledge is presented, manipulated, and adopted as public identities and engrained in a public memory. The significance of the evolution of this field of study thus remains in an understanding of the controversial nature through which it entered into a scholarly standard, resulting in its role as a bridge between the public and the academic populations. Differences do remain between public and academic history, reflecting the audiences for which they are presented. This has led to numerous studies by public historians

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in Canada which have demonstrated the difficulties and inaccuracies that may occur when historical events and individuals are presented to a general audience, undoubtedly affected by political and social agendas. As demonstrated by the literature, these studies have reflected on differing presentations of history including commemoration, festivals, and tourism, and document the creation and maintenance of Canadian identities such as the Folk, Acadians, and the Westerner.

Public History and the Contextualization of Historical Ideologies in Public

Ian McKay introduced the discussion of heritage and folklore in Canadian history with a dissection of the popular conception of the Nova Scotian population as a purer, simpler, and more idyllic people. In *The Quest of the Folk*, McKay traced the use and abuse of the ideal simple life in promotional literature for tourists as well as a massive dissemination of a rural folk image. The “Folk” were essentially those who preserved an older way of life alongside an urban society which violated the vital nucleus of the Folk idea: the *essential and unchanging solidarity* of traditional society. He focused his analysis on the role of Helen Creighton, the Maritime region’s most famous folklorist, and Mary Black, an influential handicrafts revivalist, in addition to numerous middle-class cultural producers such as writers, visual artists, promoters, and advertisers in creating the Folk identity. Throughout the province, the period from 1927 to 1960 was characterized by a widespread fascination with rural ways, and the “Folk” became an enigmatic phrase which many observers of Nova Scotian culture considered to be self-evident. This was largely associated with a broader anti-modernity movement within the province during

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the same period, and engaged the myth of innocence as a new way of imaging the community – innocent of the complications and anxieties of twentieth-century modernity. The significance of the image, McKay argued, was its presence in the tourist literature, which increasingly imposed the notion of Nova Scotia as a “therapeutic space”, removed from the stresses and difficulties of modern life. Tourist materials made possible a fully commercialized antimodernism, turning the innocence of the province into marketable commodities.27

McKay further elaborated on the myth of the Folk in a later collaboration with Robin Bates entitled *In the Province of History: The Making of Public Past in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia*.28 This text featured a thorough examination of the differentiation between heritage and history, summarized in his statement that “heritage is not history, even when it mimics history.”29 In a chronological analysis, the relationship between tourism and history as part of a rampant commodification of history was traced from the interwar period in Canada, into present popular conceptions. Expanding on McKay’s previous interpretation, Nova Scotia was described as particularly predisposed to commodifying its past as a result of its geopolitical location as an underdeveloped province on the margins of the world’s most dynamic capitalist economy.30 Utilizing the term “public history” to mean “a politics of the past – inventing traditions, imposing interpretations that suited the ruling order, marginalizing alternative accounts and highlighting the continuous national traditions that supposedly shaped every citizen”31, McKay and Bates used this volume to demonstrate the myths and misconceptions that were related to historical interpretation in the public sphere. They demonstrate the emphasized characteristics of the

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27 McKay, *The Quest of the Folk*, xi-9, 12,30, 31-35.
29 Ibid, 18.
31 Ibid, 21.
“Folk” as fictional, an image of pre- or anti-modern Nova Scotia that is reinforced by the local cultural elites and an ambitious provincial government. McKay and Bates approach the concept of the “Folk” as a unifying principle of the society in eastern Canada, nevertheless, it is similarly deconstructed as a manufactured illustration of an iconic population or lifestyle. The claim of a mythical identity maintained by McKay and Bates in this early literature is one which demonstrates a theme that has been adopted by subsequent historians who have analyzed the construct of myths in varying Canadian identities utilizing history as the foundation upon which these constructed images are presented to public audiences.

In 2003, Ronald Rudin provided another interpretation of public history pertaining to a specific population in *Founding Fathers*. He examined commemorative events staged in Quebec City in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century celebrating the secular and sacred fathers of Quebec, Samuel de Champlain and Mgr François de Laval. He concluded that there was nothing inevitable about the celebration of these events. Leaders invested significant amounts of time, energy, and money to promote some events, with others left completely marginalized. This occurred after considerable debate and was the product of intense negotiation, presenting the public with a particular image of remembrance and establishing a public memory engrained with contemporary political and social motives. The discussion of the actual individuals who fashioned a particular presentation of the past was limited by the destruction of relevant documentation, which resulted largely in a reliance on newspaper accounts. His approach, however, was remedied with the dawn of a series of commemorative events with an

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32 McKay and Bates, *In the Province of History*, 21.
34 Ibid.
Acadian theme organized in 2004 and 2005 which served as an additional opportunity to demonstrate a historical myth in the public sphere.

Rudin’s *Remembering and Forgetting in Acadie: A Historian’s Journey Through Public Memory* focuses on the development of a particular Nova Scotian identity by placing a spotlight on the Acadian population and the commemoration and public memory of the *Grand Dérangement*. Rudin engaged in fieldwork through participation in several commemorative events beginning with the quadricentenary in 2004 of the founding of the settlement at Ile Ste-Croix and ending in 2005 with the 250th anniversary of the deportation. He used stories told by numerous individuals in attendance to understand why some aspects of the past had been remembered while others had been forgotten and how this was a reflection of the varying uses of the past in the twenty-first century. He also gained testimonies from community organizers and government officials who were, as he describes, “passionately engaged with the past in a way that is difficult for professional historians, trained as [they] are, to provide the appearance of objectivity.” The commemorative events of 2004-2005 had adapted to the social, political, and economic contexts in which they found themselves as he compared them against presentations of the Acadian past produced by such creators as writers, lyricists, and film-makers. Furthermore he made reference to how depictions of the events are similar to, or depart from, those presented by individuals not involved with representing the past in public space. As a result, he identifies how the current depiction of the Acadian population in commemorative events is not a historically accurate representation, engrained in objective facts, but is a manipulated account of events,

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36 Ibid, 6.
37 Ibid, 7.
mythical in its association with heroic and romantic attributes and its disassociation with the harsh realities of the events themselves.

Turning attention from the Maritimes, Norman Knowles brought the notion of a constructed public memory to Ontario in his work *Inventing the Loyalists: The Ontario Loyalist Tradition & the Creation of Usable Pasts* published in 1997. Inventing the Loyalists deploys anthropologist Clifford Geertz’s notion of ‘thick description’, an in-depth and detailed consideration of particular contexts and conditions which demonstrates the working of the ‘complex forces’ that shape a society’s culture. Knowles explored celebrations, the formation of the United Empire Loyalist Association, the erection of Loyalist monuments, and the popularity of Loyalist publications as public manifestations of a trend denoted as the “Loyalist Tradition”. The term is exclusively associated with southern Ontario. Knowles argued that the popular conception of the Loyalist population and their descendents who settled in the area reflected an unfailing devotion to the British Empire, elite social origins, conservative social vision, sacrifice and suffering ensured for the sake of principle, as well as a strong and pervasive anti-Americanism. The values and ethics embodied by the term, thus, are held as socially and principally superior to the preceding and successive settlers of the region. Knowles maintained that the Loyalist Tradition was not inherited, but was continually re-invented by groups seeking to create usable pasts that spoke to contemporary circumstances and concerns. In the public sphere, the Loyalists were identified on a popular level as hard-working pioneers who cleared the wilderness and laid the basis for Ontario’s progress and prosperity, as well as an increasingly recent portrayal of the population as Ontario’s first refugees and the founders of

39 Ibid, 3.
40 Ibid, 12.
While Knowles does not expand on the characteristics or repercussions of the Loyalist image as presented to popular society, he focused on the motivations of the depiction. This is traced to the first Loyalist settlement, when subsequent division in Upper Canadian politics between conservative and reform factions led the Tory establishment to emphasize the Loyalists’ devotion to the British constitution, anti-Americanism, and distaste for the Republican government. The Loyalist myth continued to reflect the political context through the nationalism of the nineteenth century and into modern culture which continues to manipulate and influence the perception of this historic population, detracting from an authentic representation of an identity into one which is laden with mythic proponents to adhere to political and social agendas.

Alternatively, Frances Swyripa transported the discussion of identities to Western Canada. Instead of attempting to address a particular population, such as the Métis of southern Manitoba, Swyripa analyzed the manner in which the entire prairie population has been characterized over the preceding 150 years as one of unique and remarkable ethno-religious diversity. Ultimately, it is argued by Swyripa that:

[i]n no other region of the country was settlement not just accompanied but defined by the simultaneous arrival of many different peoples who established themselves on the land in distant enclaves. That this diversity emerged in conjunction with the formative period of the modern era on the prairies, and revolved around ownership and occupation of the lands, was crucial to the subsequent identity of both the region and individual groups.

In spite of the diversity which characterized the settlement of Western Canada, Swyripa maintains that the “western identity” which exists in popular culture essentially eradicates the

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41 Knowles, Inventing the Loyalists, 6.
42 Ibid, 5.
43 Frances Swyripa, Storied Landscapes: Ethno-Religious Identity and the Canadian Prairies (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2010).
44 Ibid, 6.
history of different peoples and emphasizes a single population. Swyripa places the creation of identities both in physical places as well as places of the mind. As a result of the multitude of differing cultures and the layered communities which appeared throughout the process of migration, the Western identity was created, or to echo Benedict Anderson, “imagined”. In a similar fashion to McKay, Bates, and Rudin, Swyripa is not presenting a lateral history of a population, but rather how people perceived themselves and others as individuals and members of ethno-religious groups whose immigrant ancestors settled the Canadian prairies and created a particular type of westerner. Completed through a study of the people, myths, symbols, commemorative traditions, and landmarks which underpin an identity, Swyripa deconstructed the public conception of a westerner and demonstrated how the perception of a single identity is a myth and the history of Western Canada is actually a carefully crafted tale of diversity.

Historian Alan Gordon contributed some of the most recent publications of a similar nature including his examination on the creation of public memories and historical identities in the context of Quebec. He argued that memory is crucial to establishing and maintaining identities, yet he maintained a distinction between memory and public history as he stated, on the one hand “[p]ublic history is often a world of recovering the past. Memory, on the other hand, captures specific events and individuals unhistorically.” However, in the process of internalization by individuals, public history transforms into public memory, using the myth of history in its formation to guide adherents.

Gordon explored this concept of memory in the context of Montreal between 1891 and 1930 in his earlier publication and further elaborated this discussion in his later work entitled The

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45 Swyripa, Storied Landscapes, 10-11.
"Hero and the Historians: Historiography and the Uses of Jacques Cartier." He addressed the creation of the myth of Jacques Cartier in the founding and establishment of Canadian settlement in this 2010 study. In the historiographical analysis, he demonstrated how the image and celebration of Jacques Cartier was “related to the way in which historical studies developed during the nineteenth century but were also connected to the cultural and political currents of nineteenth century nationalism.” As a result, historical evidence became entwined with political motivations to select particular characteristics and adventures concerning Cartier, creating a popular memory which, while engrained in history, possessed cultural and political motivations distinctive to the era of writing. The final repercussions of this are a constructed memory, as opposed to an explicitly factual understanding of Cartier for the Canadian population. Ultimately, Gordon recognized the recurrence of this process throughout history as it appears in the public sphere. His conclusion was blunt:

historians, both amateur and professional, produce history in more than textbooks and learned articles. History is found in public places, in monuments, and in festivals and pageants...Taken together, these recollections combine with the more formally written history to create a popular historiography, or perhaps even a popular memory, of the past that defies traditional critiques because it is not overtly expressed. What develops out of this memory is a set of assumptions or premises that form the starting place for popular thinking about the past.

This process is replicated across Canada, with specific reference to various populations, cultures, and traditions as demonstrated by McKay, Bates, Rudin and Swyripa.

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48 Ibid, 9.
Published simultaneously, and along similar lines of Swyripa, was James Opp and John C. Walsh’s *Placing Memory and Remembering Place in Canada*[^49], a collection of essays which above all asserted “the significance of *place* as a site made meaningful by memory and commemorative practices.”[^50] Amongst others, Gordon’s essay brought focus to the manner in which museums produce similar results in the creation and maintenance of memory through place and context. Gordon focuses on the perpetuation of a romantic or anti-modern image of the Highland Scottish heritage of Nova Scotia in the Highland Village Museum. Built for the purpose of drawing modern, international tourists to Nova Scotia while also drawing out local folk memories of Scottish ancestry through the Highland Village Museum, the chapter draws on the theoretical perspective of “imagined communities” associated with Benedict Anderson.[^51] Ultimately, Gordon demonstrated how the Highland Village Museum connected a global Scottishness to a local narrative of migration as betterment. Nevertheless, the memory of the community, while integral to creating a cohesive communal memory, was largely characterized as “a fiction of the imagination”. The museum merely blended elite ideals of antimodernism and folk innocence with local memories to help the people remain connected to their ancestral ties.[^52] As a result, Gordon illuminated the manner in which mythical elements had been combined in an effort to portray an image which was reflective of the larger community in the institutionalized setting of the museum.

[^49]: James Opp and John C. Walsh, eds., *Placing Memory and Remembering Place in Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010).
[^50]: Ibid, 4.
[^52]: Ibid, 124-125.
These examples demonstrate the multitude of studies created by Canadian historians who have analyzed how representations of history can be manipulated and constructed, diluting any authenticity and creating fictional myths as a result. Numerous identities that aid in defining the Canadian nation including the Maritime “Folk”, the Acadian, the Loyalist, and the Westerner, are shaped by the contemporary social and political motives of the period and, as a result, alter and adapt over time as these contexts change. Through the varying outlets examined in the literature which include commemorative events and tourist literature, the perspective taken by Gordon with a focus on museums demonstrates the potential for these institutions to possess a unique relationship in their interaction with history in the public sphere, and therefore, invites further study.

**Museums as an Example of Public History**

From this broad overview, it becomes apparent that the relationship between history and the public is one which requires attention on various levels. The examples provided in the previous section enlighten the fact that public interpretation occurs throughout numerous outlets and the general population has an opportunity to engage with their past through many different occasions and events, as well as on a day-to-day basis. Arguably, one of the most prominent and convenient of these outlets is the museum.

Tony Bennett’s *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics*, written from a cultural studies perspective, has been one of the most influential works on museum history. Bennett explored the world of museums and art galleries to present an overtly theoretical examination, evoking both Foucaultian and Gramscians paradigms. Through a series of case

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studies of museums and exhibits at local fairs and international exhibitions, Bennett argued that museums organized more than just their collections. They also served to reform visitors’ manners as well as a wide range of regulated social routines and performances. For example, in the late seventeenth and eighteenth century, a shift occurred in the display of artifact with the interjection of the middle class whose professional status depended on their reputations as discoverers. Doctors and apothecaries would collect, for example, exotic spices and herbs which served as exotic cures for the upper-classes of society. Amassing collections, and publicizing their extent, increased their status, therefore making the display of collections a vehicle for career advancement for upper middle-class professionals. Bennett further describes an era of transition in the eighteenth century, when collections started to detract from the exclusivity of audiences characterized by the earlier forms of cabinets of curiosities. In this period, royal collections were translated into more public domains, which involved a transformation in their operation. The objects contained in displays assumed the function of embodying a representation of the power of the king. In the nineteenth century, the doors to the museums had burst open to the public. For the working-class, however, the exhibition had been regulated into appropriate forms in the early history of the Mechanics Institute exhibitions. Devoted largely to the display of industrial objects and processes, they nonetheless sought to tutor their visitors on the modes of deportment required if they were to be admitted. Instruction booklets advised working-class visitors how to present themselves, placing particular stress on the need to change out of their working clothes – not to detract from the pleasures of the overall spectacle; but indeed, to

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become part of it.\textsuperscript{56} He traced the evolution of the museum through its construction, the policies and politics which determined its administrative processes, as well as the variation which occurred in terms of what the museum was designed to portray.\textsuperscript{57}

Much of the subsequent literature adopted several of Bennett’s premises. Following Bennett, museum scholars investigated the means by which museums engaged various audiences drawing on in-depth case studies and a range of international examples.\textsuperscript{58} These studies do not simply trace the transformation of the museum from the early cabinets of curiosities into the immensely public institutions they are today. Instead, these publications take key areas of focus which define the museum as their organizational structure. The artifact, for example, serves as the key focus of many publications seeking to identify the purpose of the museum.\textsuperscript{59} The placement of the artifact in the museum implies interesting possibilities for researching and theorizing people and events. Furthermore, the implications of artifact arrangements reflect distinctive strategies and histories which commence with the object itself and trace this through the career of the object as an artifact in an exhibit. Historians have also studied the history of the museum through the lens of globalization.\textsuperscript{60} Ivan Karp et al, for example, sought to understand how global opportunities and constraints affected the goals and practices of museums and how

\textsuperscript{56} Bennett, \textit{The Birth of the Museum}, 72-73
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid, 72-73.
local needs were acknowledged and served while being balanced in an increasingly diverse and contradictory global environment. They ultimately used case studies to illustrate how relationships among museums, public cultures, and globalizing processes were being realized through exhibition.\(^{61}\)

Other authors included discussions of the practical considerations of museums including management and the guiding principles of ethical consideration within the context of the twenty-first century.\(^{62}\) For instance, Michael A. Fopp\(^ {63}\), Director of the Royal Air Force Museum in London, surveyed the day-to-day issues of time management, delegation, and recruitment in the context of the museum as modern business management. He argued that for over 150 years, museums were managed with little or no attention being paid toward staff management. However, during recent decades of contracting subsidies for the arts/heritage generally, and greater competition from an increasing number of museums and other leisure attractions, those working in the museum profession have been forced to acknowledge their shortcomings in the areas of organizational control and management.\(^ {64}\) Janet Marstine\(^ {65}\), a Professor of Art History, also participated in the discussion of the management of museums; however, she placed this within a delicate balance between the museum as an elitist shrine and a paradigm as “authentic” and the alternative, which is to become market-driven as part of an “industry” which caters to its


\(^{64}\) Fopp,  *Managing Museums and Galleries*, 1-3.

“clients”. As a result, Marstine examined the potential for museum operations to develop democratically, unsullied by commercial concerns.66

Further literature has been situated within a strictly Canadian context possessing a particular focus on the theory and politics of museums. While Archie F. Key67 originally undertook the task of surveying the origins and development of Canadian museums as influenced by both public opinion and political infrastructure, others - for instance, Ruth Phillips - traced the ideological influences present in artifact collection and exhibition with reference to the prevalence of indigenous culture throughout Canadian museums.68 Phillips embraced the controversial nature of the museum as one which has facilitated Canada’s long struggle to define its own image with apprehension regarding issues of identity, diversity, and public representation, all of which requires an explanation for the role museums possess in broader political and social movements.69 While the majority of these publications focused on the larger purpose and theoretical underpinning of museums, they have tended to neglect the role of the more obscure, and local community, museums. These have appeared in American literature which has focused largely on the educational nature of these institutions.

Additionally, numerous publications emerging from the 1960s and 1970s abandoned theory and essentially served as manuals for the curators and administrators of small museums. These smaller-scale institutions allowed for an opportunity to demonstrate the step-by-step process which occurs in the operation of a museum. Carl E. Guthe in The Management of Small

66 Marstine, New Museum Theory and Practice, 1-10.
69 Ibid, 4.
History Museums\textsuperscript{70} and Arminta Neal’s Exhibits for the Small Museum: A Handbook,\textsuperscript{71} for example, analyzed the procedures which were conducted to successfully establish a museum from the collection and organization of artifacts, to the design of the floor layout and marketing. The significance of this literature remains in its facility to articulate - through text - the actual process and formula which contributed to the construction and success of museums across North America. Nevertheless, as these publications are simply manuals, they are not intended to incorporate an analysis of the significance of representation offered through museum exhibits, leaving a gap in the literature. There exists limited discussion on the perpetuation of ideological constructions explicitly within museums and the implications of this on the perceptions of the public audience for whom these depictions are addressed.

Conclusion

The significance of public history’s emergence as a key component of the larger discipline rests with its ability to define the extent to which history is embedded beyond the academic discourse and into popular society. Public history is not necessarily characterized by the strict professionalism and obligation to factual support of the scholarly field. In academic history, processes of referencing and the necessity of extensive research and collected evidence are required to adequately argue a hypothesis. In the public sphere, however, there is arguably a higher obligation to entertainment over education. While the two can coexist quite harmoniously,


certain elements and features of history become emphasized or overshadowed depending on their potential reception amongst public audiences.

As Canadian historians identify where education and entertainment clash, they have encountered images, identities, and representations which commemorate certain elements or populations within the nation. Utilizing history has promoted desired images, whether that is the Folk or the Acadians in Nova Scotia, Jacques Cartier in Quebec, the Loyalists in southern Ontario, or the multi-cultural settlement of the Prairies. These populations become most recognized through studies of commemorative festivals, public events, monuments, songs and prose, film, and tourism literature. While based on key events and individuals, over time these identities have been altered and manipulated to reflect the political and social climate of the period. As a result, they reach a point which becomes partially – if not totally – fictionalized, idealized and romanticized to the point of compromising authenticity.

Historical representations are increasing throughout Canada, which leads to two significant questions to consider: What other identities are created and promoted through history? What outlets or mediums best demonstrate where identities have been presented to a public audience? The literature on museums in the historical discipline has demonstrated a gap which exists for exploration of what exhibits symbolize and what identities they help to propagate by presenting artifacts in a specific manner. The following chapter discusses which factors influence the basic functioning of museums and the relationship between the institution and the audience.
Chapter Two – The Characteristics of the Museum

As an analysis of local museums in North America, it seems necessary to relieve the ambiguity and define the specific characteristics of the “county museum” which serves as the basis of this study. Foremost, these museums are located in the rural counties whose history they are meant to preserve and exhibit. They are predominately funded by government grants and encompass large artifactual collections solely through donation. Living history museums, in contrast, are a variety of costumed performances offered by museum guides, memorializing past events by staging them in authentic or recreated settings offering subjective experiences to ritualistically link the individual to the collective.\(^1\) While an interesting method of exhibition, living-history museums are excluded from this investigation for the purpose of attempting to limit the scope to a reasonable comparison and avoid grand generalizations which would hinder the accuracy of a study attempting to include such different manners of public historical representation. Furthermore, when analyzing county museums, this study focuses on actual, physical exhibits as opposed to virtual exhibits which have recently claimed a larger role in presenting historical artifacts. Virtual exhibits are only used if they provide insight into current or past exhibits that have been physically present in the museum. Finally, these museums are not proprietary museums, but instead are dependent on donations and government grants. By presenting a focused perspective on representations of history in the limited sphere of “county museums” as described above, this study hopes to differentiate itself from previous publications

on museums and derive an understanding of the significance and consequence of an exhibition of historical objects and contexts.

Museums were established for public audiences in Canada as early as 1827 when Thomas Barnett established the Niagara Falls Museum, and have been a topic of contention since the early twentieth century. While large national museums currently depend on a combination of donation, both personal and corporate, as well as purchasing valuable items, small local museums rely predominately on donation. This differs greatly from the first museums of the nation such as Barnett’s Niagara Falls Museum which operated from 1827 until 1999 as a for-profit entity. Similar establishments also shared this characteristic, such as the museums of Delvecchio in Montreal, Chasseur in Quebec City, Abraham Gesner in New Brunswick, and Reverend Thomas McCulloch at the Pictou Academy in Nova Scotia. Each of these museums was characterized by the struggle that the individual owners had to undergo to put their operations on firm footing. In each, the balance between the serious and the entertaining was a preoccupation for the founders, usually tending to err on one side or the other. Nevertheless, beyond Barnett’s successful operation, under financial pressure, proprietary museums were either transferred to other authorities, such as Chasseur’s to the legislature of Lower Canada, or had to change business strategies to opt for more titillating and theatrical forms of entertainment. Few lasted longer than the lives of their original founders and the succeeding generation.² While for the most part, modern museums avoid many of these unique complications, the concept and accessibility of funding for these public institutions leaves museum management and curators seeking to address a similar balance between blunt accuracy and mass appeal.

² Lynne Teather, ““Delighting the Eye and Mending the Heart”: Canadian Proprietary Museums of the Early Nineteenth Century,” Ontario History 94, no. 1 (Spring 2002), 49, 55, 59, 60.
As the museum altered and adapted throughout different periods of Canada’s history, it gradually developed defined characteristics which would form the institution into its current state. A National Report on the Museums of Canada conducted by Sir Henry Miers and S.F. Markham\(^3\) in 1932 demonstrated that the focus of local county museums mirrored that of “the ideal sequence” for a general museum of local character of the era including: “1. The land – its soil, minerals, and topographical features.; 2. The vegetable products – grasses, vegetables, fruits, timbers.; 3. The fauna of the area.; 4. The effect of these three factors upon the history of the area – en. Indian...early pioneer developments and more recent economic features.; 5. The cultural characteristics of the area – e.g. Art, education and government.”\(^4\) While this does not discount the evolution of museums which has occurred over the last century, this suggests a level of continuity in the history of local county museums in which patterns and techniques have been developed and can subsequently be traced.

In the comprehensive examination of the genealogy of public museums from the cabinets of curiosities of the eighteenth century to the emergence of the museum in its modern form of the nineteenth and twentieth century, Tony Bennett offers valuable advice to other scholars engaging in similar attempts to trace the history of public museums. Bennett states that “the museum’s formation – whether understood as a developmental process or as an achieved form - cannot be adequately understood unless viewed in the light of a more general set of developments through which culture, in coming to be thought of as useful for governing, was fashioned as a vehicle for the exercise of new forms of power.”\(^5\) This sentiment is echoed in contemporary research, such as a recent thesis by Mary Tivy on local history museums in


\(^4\) Ibid, 50.

Ontario. Tivy examines the reorganization of local museums which took place following the two World Wars; however, she commences with an interesting note on the state of ownership of current museums. Today, many of these museums receive subsidies for their operations from the Province of Ontario, and approximately three-quarters of Ontario’s local history museums are owned by municipalities, and, in decreasing numbers, by non-profit organizations including historical societies, conservation authorities, and Indian Band Councils. The museum, therefore, can only be understood within the larger context of its construction and leadership, as social and political motives exist behind the necessity to finance and preserve these institutions. As a result, the following questions arise regarding how museums can function as an instrument of power: What is the significance of appealing to a public audience? How can history be seen as a tool to be utilized and manipulated? Which individuals possess key roles in the ability of museums to express influence? What factors must be considered in the creation of exhibits and how does this reflect the way that artifacts are used to present a particular image?

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Franz Boas analyzed the museum as an institution which may possess three objectives. They may be designed to furnish healthy entertainment, they may be intended for instruction, and they may be intended for the promotion of research. He notes a North American tradition of twentieth-century museums which continued into the Post-War era to engage primarily in the basic tasks of gathering, preserving, and studying the record of human and natural history. The fact that the public might benefit from physical and intellectual access to the collection and information accumulated was merely an

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7 Ibid, 3.
9 Ibid, 921.
advantage. However, recent decades have seen the worldwide museum community being reshaped wherein these institutions have shifted their principal focus outward to concentrate on providing primarily educational services to the public.\(^\text{10}\) Despite the sweeping restructuring of the museum, even Boas knew that “[t]he value of the museum as a resort for popular entertainment must not be underrated.... [Visitors] want to admire, to be impressed by something great and wonderful; and if the underlying idea of the exhibit can be brought out of sufficient clearness, some great truths may be impressed upon them without requiring in that moment any particular effort.”\(^\text{11}\) Thus, regardless of the stages of evolution that the museum has passed through in the last century, consistent public access has been a definitive trait which speaks to the potential to influence various populations. In addition, recently the general public across North America appears to be increasingly interested in learning about history, whether it is as a result of, or a reflection of, the many media which make this possible. People watch movies, television shows and read literature with historical themes, look at photographs and interact with a cultural environment rich with reference to the past on a daily basis. Monuments, street names, buildings, celebrations, and commemorations all evoke relationships between regular individuals, their heritage and history.\(^\text{12}\) It is essential, then, to determine what different types of individuals are most highly represented in the population of museum visitors.

\(^\text{10}\) Stephen E. Weil, “From Being about Something to Being for Somebody: The Ongoing Transformation of the American Museum,” *Daedalus* 128, no. 3 (Summer 1999), 229.

\(^\text{11}\) Boas, “Some Principles of Museum Administration, 921.

Foremost, students make up the majority of visitors to historical museums, whether as a result of intrigue, research, or particularly at a young age, class fieldtrips. The attempts to educate youth on their national history became the fuel which drove the expansion and reassessment of the usefulness of museums. There exists a current perception of Canadian youth as lacking in an awareness of their country’s history. In 1998, historian Jack Granatstein found an explanation in his controversial notion that Canadian history was dead in the youth of Canada. He argued, quite bluntly, that “[t]he simple truth is that Canada’s public and high schools have not only stopped teaching most world history, but have given up teaching anything we might call Canadian or national history. As a result, Canadian students rarely learn anything of their country’s past or its place in world history.” Following Granatstein’s impetuous remarks, the teaching of history entered the public view attracting discrete attention from the federal government in 1999 when Prime Minister Jean Chrétien declared that if history was taught well, the nation would be in a healthier state. Schools failed to do justice to the romance and excitement inherent in the story of Canada, leaving the majority of youth to discredit it and abhor the study all together. The same year which saw recognition from Prime Minister Chrétien also saw the first national conference on history teaching under the McGill Institute for the Study of Canada, as well as the creation of Historica, a multimillion dollar foundation devoted in part to the improvement of history teaching. Informal learning experiences were increasingly sought

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15 Ibid, 11.
16 Ken Osborne, “‘Our History Syllabus Has Us Gasping’: History in Canadian Schools – Past, Present, and Future,” Canadian Historical Review 81, no.3 (September 2000), 407.
17 Ibid, 407.
out, as seen in the growth of tourist-oriented attractions such as heritage centres and heritage theme parks. Museums simultaneously benefited from the expanding interest. Museum popularity among Americans has grown along with tourism, with about 60% of Americans visiting museums annually in the early 2000s, compared with 25% in the 1960s.\textsuperscript{18} Statistics Canada has reported a steady increase of museums and heritage institutions over the decade preceding 2003 with the addition of close to 400 new institutions over such a short period.\textsuperscript{19}

An apparent increase in the number of people who attend museums as a cultural or recreational activity has led to a discussion amongst scholars as to what role is to be played by visitors over the course of their learning experience. History presented in museum exhibits mirrors the concept of “public memory” presented by Alan Gordon in 2001 as he stated that it “is undeniably difficult to speak of a singular public memory.”\textsuperscript{20} He continues to explain how public memories can be created when individuals come together in groups and use shared memories to support their position in the negotiation of legitimacy in collective life, noting that it is often formed by competing interests, using official channels to enshrine a singular, “official” civic past.\textsuperscript{21} Similarly, then, the general public could be seen as individuals coming together to engage with history in a subjective manner, applying their own public memories to the artifacts and “factual” information being presented.

As scholars have attempted to analyze the manner in which museum exhibits have been perceived, a divide emerges in the literature. A popular perception of North Americans is that despite frequent visits to museums, their experiences may be devoid of critical analysis. They

\textsuperscript{18} Osborne, ““Our History Syllabus Has Us Gasping’: History in Canadian Schools ,” 407.  
\textsuperscript{20} Gordon, Making Public Pa\textsuperscript{st}s, 4.  
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid, 6.
may not consider how displays are really constructed representations of history and may view these presentations as reliable, authentic, and comprehensible.\textsuperscript{22} While it may appear that public audiences do not think of museums as sites of constructed representations of history and are instead viewed as reliable, authentic, and unbiased, a new argument can be made for an increasingly self-aware museum in the North American context.\textsuperscript{23} Jo Blatti’s comprehensive exploration of public history notes that while the museum still possesses the purpose to protect and organize the raw materials of memory of the past, they are becoming more aware of their own histories, principles, and practices. As a result, they are less apt to regard visitors as blank slates and instead perceive them as individuals who carry with them their own notions and capacities.\textsuperscript{24} This was similarly stated by Victor Rabinovitch as President and CEO of the Canadian Museum of Civilization Corporation.\textsuperscript{25} He noted that within the last forty years, museums moved toward an emphasis on mass cultural tourism, purposefully built to meet the needs of many museum visitors. History museum directors recognized that while museums specialized in physical artifacts, they are really multimedia institutions that use documents, photographs, artwork, and sound and video recordings which allow for further interpretation of artifacts. This, he argued, reflected the fact that history is manifested through processes, personalities, and ideas, not just through the physical objects.\textsuperscript{26} For example, while it was thought that museums offered opportunities to enhance and build on history taught in the


\textsuperscript{26} Ibid.
classroom, it has also been argued that they create opportunities for students to think critically about the past and about history as a discipline, interpreting and understanding the knowledge presented. Museum exhibits therefore must seek to communicate by targeting a range of senses, as well as a range of intellect and the emotions of visitors.

No museum can be all things to all people. There are limitations on space, resources and collections, particularly in the context of rural, county, government-funded museums. Nevertheless, a museum must be able to provide a wide range of interesting and high-quality exhibits and programs to leave visitors satisfied, as well as provide them with adequate and accurate information about the region in which they live and its historical relationship with other societies. Museum visitors possess different backgrounds, attitudes, and belief structures. They attend museums for a multitude of reasons, with different expectations and agendas. Some attend museums frequently and are familiar with the environment of exhibition and education, and others may be less frequent or first-time visitors. Some may have preference for certain subject matter or presentation styles, while others may not recognize a distinction amongst these features. Museums have to acknowledge individual and societal values, demonstrate respect through political correctness, avoid offensive material to various ethnic groups, as well as gender groups and age groups, while remaining appealing and interesting to the whole audience. As a result, museums have the potential to influence a wide population, and these populations have the power to influence the administration and operation of museum exhibits.

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While different types of historical museums face different challenges, some difficulties common to national history can also be seen in county museums. A national history museum has a broad primary audience coming from many regions, and a secondary audience which is international in origin. On the one hand, it is essential for such a museum to affirm the “national” component of its identity and be true to its national mandate. On the other hand, they have to accurately include the international visitors who come to the national cultural site to obtain a particular perspective on the region they originate from and to examine how they are reflected in the national mirror. This tension can be seen in local county museums as well, only it is heightened to another level altogether. These museums must draw on a national image, as well as pay specific respect to their county, as well as the townships and regions which make up the county. In addition to the loyalty which must appear here, the museum must also appeal to visitors from outside the region and connect with larger societal and international values.

Furthermore, particularly in a country as multicultural as Canada, a degree of sensitivity is essential. For public institutions which rely on money from government - federal, provincial or municipal – they need to appeal to the public. John English, Canadian historian and former professor at the University of Waterloo, recognized this necessity noting that while it is possible to build a terribly politically incorrect museum, the funding would completely disappear as these public institutions depend on public support. Royal Ontario Museum director William Thorsell describes this as a “culture of avoidance” or a “culture of accommodation”. This becomes particularly relevant in Canadian history when addressing specific ethnic populations, such as

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29 Rabinovitch, “Museums facing Trudeau’s Challenge”.
30 Chris Cobb, “Our History or As You Like It: Political Correctness has made cowards of museums, say outraged historians, resulting a warped view of Canada,” Times – Colonist, Victoria, BC (17 June 2001), A3.
31 Ibid, A3.
Aboriginals. Attempts to make appeals to public audiences ultimately compromise exhibits, leading to conflict between museum administrators and historians or other scholars.

At the Canadian Museum of Civilizations’ “Canada Hall” rests a beautifully crafted gift box with the following description inscribed underneath it: “Intended for President Charles de Gaulle of France, the box was never presented.” Museum historians decided to avoid mentioning to the public that the box was never presented as a result of de Gaulle’s inflammatory speech from Montreal City Hall in 1967, stirring Quebec separatism when he shouted “Vive le Québec libre”, following which he was ordered to board the next plane to Paris by the federal government. The skimpy and politically diplomatic explanation and lack of historical context in the description of de Gaulle’s box caused much controversy, particularly with prominent and outspoken Canadian historians such as Granatstein and English. Both historians were irritated at the inadequate displays and, ultimately, the inaccurate representations of history that can occur under the pretense of political correctness.32 By attempting to appeal to all publics and avoid insulting anyone, museum staff and administration can be faulted at times for the mismanagement of history.

There is simply no pleasing all audiences who enter a museum for research or recreation. As a result, large steps are taken to avoid the offence of any particular group of people to digress from the potential labels of prejudice or bigotry. Beyond the mere retelling of history and the uninhibited display of artifacts, museums possess a responsibility to their visitors to entertain and avoid offence. Nevertheless, there are many other limitations that are a museum focus such as funding, marketing, as well as the mere limitations of collection or the building in which it is located.

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32 Cobb, “Our History or As You Like It,” A3.
In museums, the process of collection assumes knowledge of the past which guides decisions on which objects are significant enough to help us understand that past. In some cases, it is important to consider the limitations of collecting when it comes to small local county museums, specifically, since they are only able to exhibit what is donated to them. This results in obvious difficulties of working with what you have and attempting to present it in a cohesive manner. However, whether relying on donations solely or branching out in search of artifacts, it is important to consider the limitations of collecting when it comes to being able to store and preserve artifacts, which is still a prominent purpose of museums beyond merely exhibition. Decades ago, the concern rested exclusively with enough physical storage space to adequately store items; however, in the digital age of the twenty-first century, storage has multiple meanings. One of Canada’s most prominent history museums, the Canadian Museum of Civilization, opened its doors in 1990 and has been showing the country’s rich history to the world. Over five million historical artifacts spanning the past 150 years are the responsibility of this museum, which has led the institution to recently turn to using the Storage Resource Management (SRM) software to help organize its collection.

Storage in this context means much more than backup and recovery or adding storage capacity; it means having to analyze how the storage capacity is allocated, identify space capacity that is not being used and put to good use and allocate resources more efficiently. Storage also requires an aspect of organization. Artifacts are organized in a way that imposes knowledge and structure on collections. As a result, the manner in which collections are obtained and sorted influences the way they will appear in exhibits, as well as the way visitors will

33 Rabinovitch, “Museums facing Trudeau’s challenge”.
interpret their historical role. This procedure of collection also requires the skills and knowledge to attach value to artifacts. While commemoration is a laudable goal, the museum cannot be structured in a manner to accept into its collection everything that people deposit at the door. Soon the warehouse is full of artifacts that defy cataloguing, piled so high and randomly that the collection is useless and articles are unavailable to be retrieved for display purposes.

The primary feature on which the museum is constructed is the authenticity of the artifact. “Authenticity” itself remains an elusive construct, an idea which was conceived in the late eighteenth century. The term itself implies a certain objectivity in which the meaning and purpose attached to an object remains stagnant. However, this is not possible in the context of the museum, as every object utilized in an exhibit immediately evolves as it is placed in a variety of ways. Museums frame objects to control the viewing experience, to suggest a tightly woven narrative of progress, or an “authentic” mirror of history. An artifact is provided with meaning by the manner in which it is placed in a museum. For example, a mixing bowl from the 1920s used to bake and cook in a typical kitchen possesses different significance in its context. One museum might reconstruct a typical kitchen in the 1920s, placing the bowls on top of the refrigerator as part of the background to the larger image of a family living area exhibiting various ways the room would be used and occupied. Alternatively, these bowls could be placed in an exhibit entitled “Women’s Work in the Early Twentieth-Century”; situated amongst other kitchen tools. These bowls could be seen amongst farming tools that would be used by women, as well as other artifacts which represent the multitude of labour undertaken by women. This would once again change the meaning of the bowls as something which demonstrated the hard

35 See Rabinovitch, “Museums facing Trudeau’s challenge”.
work completed by a mother or daughter around the homestead. Thus, we can trace what Samuel Alberti calls the “careers of museum things”, from their acquisition to their arrangement, and finally to their interpretation. This is elaborated by material culturalists such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who suggest an object can be an intersensorial experience, since what is seen physically is also processed cognitively and emotively by the sounds, touch, smell, taste, and feelings that are evoked by the object in its specific cultural context. Thus the matter in which these objects are framed is incredibly significant to all museum staff, particularly the curator, as well as the grand population which view and interpret these artifacts.

One individual, arguably, exerts the most control over the presentation and significance attributed to artifacts in an exhibit – the curator. Even as early as the 1930s, A Report on the Museums of Canada recognized that “the most vital of all the factors that can make or mar a museum is the energy, ability, and influence of the curator. In the absence of a good curator there is no one to select rightly what is needed for the museum, or, when gifts are offered, to reject what is not needed. Everything depends on the right choice of the curator...” Curators operate these complex organizations with inadequate resources and are rarely able to acquire budget deficits to undertake the research and development necessary to improve the effectiveness of the institution. They also have to motivate the underpaid staff and volunteers to perform to high professional standards while answering to governing bodies consisting of individuals or organizations whose experience and expertise most often lie outside of the visual and heritage

40 Miers and Markham, A Report on the Museums of Canada, 19.
Extreme pressure rests upon the shoulders of the museum curator. Visitors believe that when they enter a museum the curator is a connoisseur of historical knowledge. The expertise of this one individual is thought to give assurance that museum objects are “authentic” masterpieces that express universal truths or a standard of excellence. In addition to all of these immense and intermingled concerns, the most influential feature of museums is the financial concerns as all museums need funds to operate. The work of museum directors, trustees, development officers, and even curators involves financial decision making. There are four basic funding sources of museums: government (municipal, provincial, or federal), corporation, charitable foundation, and private benefactor. Local county museums, however, largely survive on government funding. As with anything in life, nothing comes for free, and funding sources demand something in return. Government agencies want to see the museum revitalizing an urban center, marking a historical event, or reaching out to an underserved community. In blunter terms, the museum is constantly told that in order to earn its keep it requires that it be more than just an orderly storage facility.

Government funding provides the bulk of monetary support, predominately through grants. Different museums apply for and receive different grants, however, and are thus guided by varying principles. The Ministry of Tourism and Culture provides a Community Museums Operating Grant to eligible community museums across Ontario. Currently the grant funds Brantford County Museum and Archives, Dufferin County Museum and Archives, Guelph Civic Museum, Haldimand County Museum and Archives, Jordan Historical Museum, Huron County Museum, and others.

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42 Marstine, ed., New Museum Theory and Practice: An Introduction, 8.
43 Ibid, 10.
Museum and Historic Gaol and Wellington County Museums and Archives, as pertaining to this study. These museums are thought to contribute to their communities’ economic well-being as employers and tourist attractions, attracting over 2,300,000 visitors per year. They are considered the custodians and interpreters of the province’s heritage collections. To ensure that these functions are upheld, relevant museums which receive this support are required to meet certain criteria as established in Regulation 877 under the Ontario Heritage Act as well as the Ministry’s ‘Standards for Community Museums in Ontario’. The general premise of these obligations are similar, ensuring that they are non-profit and under the leadership of a municipality as well as having the primary purpose - beyond mere exhibition - to acquire, conserve, study and interpret artifacts for public instruction and enjoyment. While these museums do acknowledge and display exhibits which are national in character, particularly in periods which possess rich historical anniversaries, such as 2012 which celebrated the War of 1812 and the sinking of the Titanic, the Community Museums Operating Grant maintains that a link must be made directly with the locality. Under the Ministry’s Objective of the Exhibition Standard, it states that to procure funding, “[t]he museum’s exhibits provide an important link between the community and its heritage. In the planning and presentation of exhibitions, the museum will strive for accuracy of information, relevance to the community, effective communication, opportunities for learning, and the safe display of artifacts.” This condition influences how historical events and

artifacts are interpreted by curators and volunteers of the museum, and subsequently by the
visitors to the museum.

Other grants aid in the general funding and operation of the museums and possess similar
stipulations and obligations. In 2011, the Paris Museum and Historical Society received a grant
from the Ontario Trillium Foundation totalling $73,800 which was intended to aid in the
renovation of the museum’s new space at the repurposed Syl Apps arena. Municipal grants
have also assisted in the continual operation of this small institution, for example, the $32,500
grant contributed by the County of Brant in 2008. Similarly, in 2007, the McGuinty
Government awarded the Brant Museums and Galleries Association a grant of $14,400 to
purchase environmental monitoring and other equipment for the network of twelve museums,
heritage organizations and galleries located in Brant County, the City of Brantford and Six
Nations, including the Brant County Museum and Archives. Additional Government programs
aid in the funding of museums as well such as the Government of Canada’s Museums Assistance
Program of the Department of Canadian Heritage. This program provides funding to Canadian
museums and related institutions for projects that foster excellence in museum activities that
facilitate access to the collective heritage of the nation. In 2009, this program provided the
Wellington County Museum and Archives with $100,000 to improve the archival storage
capacity of the historic site. Furthermore, not all the museums pertaining to this analysis are
funded solely by the over-arching grants and apply for alternative grants based on special
projects undertaken by the institution.

48 Our Brant, “Paris Museum and Historical Society,” Paris Museum and Historical Society,
Between 2011 and 2013, four of these museums received financial assistance from the Museums and Technology Fund offered by the Provincial ministry to “invest in innovative projects and partnerships that help them improve public access to their collections through technology.”\textsuperscript{52} Dufferin County Museum and Archives obtained $46,472 for the “Duff-Stuff” Archival Digitization and Online Presentation Project while Wellington County Museum and Archives received $11,242 for a similar undertaking. Paris Museum and Historical Society were provided with $9,743 for the addition of a standalone theatre component, online virtual exhibits and online curriculum-based education modules. In 2012-2013, the Huron County Museum and Historic Gaol also participated in a digitization project, receiving $24,771 for photos taken by local photographer J. Gordon Henderson of the students who trained at Flying Training School No. 12 during World War II to be used to create an online exhibit and develop an educational program. With access to these grants, these museums not only reach a wider audience, but also potentially exhibit more artifacts through virtual exhibitions, instead of having them hidden from the public in boxes in the archives.

Beyond this, museums can also depend on admittance fees – not merely entrance but also the streams to be derived from shop sales and other auxiliary activities – for additional income. The greater focus is thus reinforced to making the institution attractive to visitors. Museums thus become increasingly conscious of what might be of interest to the public. In the complex multicultural society of Canada, the publicly funded institutions such as museums have at different times and in various parts of the country, been picketed, boycotted, and criticized for

perpetuating colonial ideologies and oppressive policies. The consequence of this is that museums have shifted into a purely educational mode and into a “marketing” one, where their efforts are concentrated on trying to discover and attempting to satisfy the public needs and interests. This is essentially the commercialization of historical exhibits and artifacts. Alan Gordon discussed the danger of commercialization as it relies on commercial potential for publicity in historical sites or natural environments on the tourist market. The impending consequences are in the extremities as while this commercialization may be inevitable or necessary, over-commercialization can affect the ways people interpret history and diminish the feeling of authenticity. As the museum is centralized around funding without which it cannot exist, even the basic mandate of a museum can be compromised to ensure the survival of the institution.

Conclusion

Museums have the potential to communicate a sense of authenticity and historical accuracy to the general population. Exhibits may communicate historic events, individuals and eras, but viewers have difficulty looking beyond the artifacts and into the organization and management of the museum. Furthermore, these audiences are not aware of the politics and policies which shape the institution nor do they consider the decisions and creation which occurs behind the door of the curator’s office.

Critical thinking becomes a surprising key asset into understanding museum culture. The process of creating an exhibit is synonymous with art. It requires a specific set of skills which results in a masterpiece; however, it is rarely objective. The curator is an important individual who possesses subjective interests and perspectives and are influenced by the larger political and social climate of the organization and of the larger society in general. This latter factor becomes one of the most prevalent features which define the exhibits in a museum as the entire purpose of the institution is to attract visitors. While preservation and education are important facets of most museums, they exist to present artifacts that will be viewed. The history of the community, the artifacts, and the institution, in addition to the operational functions of the museum such as funding, all play an important role in shaping the exhibits presented in the museum and the representations that are echoed through the expression of the artifacts. In addition to all of these elements, certain ideologies can affect the manner in which museums operate and curators exhibit artifacts. In large museums such as the Canadian Museum of Civilization and the Canadian War Museum, or the new Canadian Museum of Human Rights, a national ideology largely persists as a result of their purpose and primary demographic. However, in rural county museums, such as the Wellington County Museum in Elora, Ontario, an ideology more favourable to rural life can be seen as engrained in the museum’s displays, this is referred to as the rural ideal. The following chapter dissects the rural ideal into four components.
Chapter Three – The Rural Ideal

The new rural history emerged amidst a new generation of historians in the 1960s that started to move away from a focus on the influential and prominent individuals of history and began to explore the lives of “ordinary people” and the roles they played. Inspired by the new social history, the new rural history sought to illuminate the lives of rural people, the most numerous population in North America in the nineteenth and early-twentieth century. Throughout the 1960s this trend expanded rapidly into a variety of studies exploring, for example, rural ethnicity, slavery, and kinship. By the 1980s, Robert Swierenga was able to provide an overview of the “new rural history” which saw topics such as women’s lives, market consciousness and behaviour, as well as the cultural interpretation of city versus country taking a commanding focus of interest.¹ Historians of rural history incorporated alternative discourses of analysis including women’s history, labour history, Marxist history, economic and gender history, in addition to anthropology, sociology, archaeology, and political science. Within this growing historical genre and the literature which accompanied it, historians recognized the existence and identified an ideology which is referred to as the “rural ideal”. The ideology essentially romanticized the simplistic image of rural life in an association with a naturalistic mode of living, increasingly distanced from chaos and disorder which characterized the industrialized and commercialized context of the latter urban twentieth century.

The “rural ideal” is ambiguous and somewhat confusing. It can be argued that multiple ideals exist which have altered over time and across regions. It can also be argued that the “rural ideal” is prescribed with differing characteristics depending upon how it is presented and who is presenting the concept, as well as the motivations for utilizing it as a framework, whether

knowingly or not. Furthermore, the mythical element of the rural ideal has been thoroughly maintained by many historians as will be evident in the examination of the relevant literature. Nevertheless, it is not the purpose of this analysis to debunk the rural ideal as a myth, although it is recognized that this categorization is correct. Instead, this study seeks to examine the presence of the rural ideal across multiple contexts to show how it can influence certain interpretations. As a result, the rural ideal will be observed as the romanticization of rural life which gives a sense of superiority to the places, eras, or individuals of rural life.

In addition to historians, anthropologists, geographers, and sociologists appear in the literature in this historiography in an effort to present an increasingly comprehensive image of the capacity and implications of the rural ideal as an intellectual concept. The rural ideal has been simultaneously deconstructed and sometimes constructed as well as perpetuated throughout the literature. Much of the historical literature surrounding this topic can be divided into two separate spheres. First are the publications which promote and propagate the rural ideal, utilizing it to describe rural life in a romantic context. This literature predominately focuses on the superiority of the simpler life as associated with rurality. Subsequently, arguments which deconstruct the rural ideal have developed as a chronologically progressive perspective, ultimately illustrating rural life and agriculturalism as merely an evolutionary stage in the larger global sequence, inevitably leading to the economically superior capitalist culture. This perspective argues that idealizing the rural life and culture is misguided and that it is no more simple or advanced than present urban and industrial culture. The characteristics as identified by scholars are summed up through four major components which consist of economic independence and self-sufficiency, a cohesive and trusting community devoid of prejudice, a
strong domestic sphere based on family, and, finally, a direct tie to the land as symbolic of being in a distinctly natural state of humanity.

While academics may, at times, uncritically accept the rural ideal, particularly those with anti-modern leanings, this is quite rare. Instead, scholarly literature ultimately takes the rural ideal as its starting point, following which they carefully research and deconstruct the romanticized ideal. Nevertheless, as academics have identified the characteristics related to this idealistic interpretation, they also enable the extension of the concept through maintaining it as an area of interest and discussion whether they support or contest its basic principles. While this ensures the continuation of the rural ideal, it ultimately means that the rural ideal was largely perpetuated by other publications which have resulted in the need for academics to take up the discussion in the first place.

Local histories, predominately related with amateur historians, have served to perpetuate the rural ideal. In the 1980s, Royce MacGillivray noted an intensification of local histories in the preceding twenty years.  

2 Backed by the existence of more than 170 local historical societies in Ontario, MacGillivray described this as “the most dynamic intellectual and literary movements in the province.”  

3 However, this literature was defined as distinct from the history-writing which occurred in association with academia as the process of research, writing, and also publication, is usually supplied by the author indicating a labour of love driven purely by subjective interest and passion. It is a subject for which no specialized knowledge is necessary.  

4 MacGillivray notes an important feature which speaks directly to the rural ideal as he states that “local historians, like so many of their fellow citizens are influenced by the most powerful myth in Ontario – the myth

3 Ibid, 367.
of the pioneers...Research and writing in local history is a way of drawing closer to this myth, absorbing it more fully, making it, for each of us, more intimately our own.\textsuperscript{5} However, the potential growth of the myth means little to the researchers and writers. These histories, however, are arguably quite subjective, as MacGillivray argues that local history ultimately plays a role in self-analysis. By investigating the early years of a community, in effect, it is relaying individual mental and spiritual development, observing the development of previous generations, and thus the ideas and emotions which influenced the author.\textsuperscript{6} Nevertheless, these histories serve a significant function in providing society with access to local history which may have previously been overlooked. With an increasing acceptance of local history into Ontario universities, the field of study has indeed become a large area of focus within the discipline, however, the ability of these histories to develop and perpetuate a rural ideal has not disappeared and it is as a result that many academics have picked up the discussion, utilizing intensive research to pick apart the ideal (or ideals) and offer an increasingly objective approach engrained in evidence.

**The Rural Ideal and the Rural-Urban Divide**

While the notion of the rural ideal remains ambiguous, the concept became clearly recognized as a significant feature of rural historical study, at least for French Canada, as early as 1957 by Quebec historian Michel Brunet.\textsuperscript{7} By the late 1980s, James A. Montmarquet sought to

\textsuperscript{5} MacGillivray, “Local History as a Form of Popular Culture in Ontario,”, 371.
\textsuperscript{6} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{7} Michel Brunet, “Trois dominantes de la pensée canadienne-français: l’agriculturisme, l’anti-étatisme et le messianisme,” Écrits de Canada français 3 (1957): 31-118.
reveal the nature of what he deemed the “agrarian myth”. Specializing in epistemology and philosophy of the mind, he initially asserted that “agrarianism” associated agriculture as the most honorable way of life, morally superior to those manners of living dedicated to typical urban pursuits. Subsequently, in a latter publication entitled “Agrarianism, Wealth, and Economics”, Montmarquet summarized agrarianism as the perspective that “farmers are, on the whole and as a result of their distinctive experience, more virtuous than those engaged in urban commercial activities.” Most notably, he attributed this idealistic “myth” as possessing a pervasive influence on the general population despite a lack of systematic examination of the evidence which would confirm whether or not it was factual. Montmarquet’s focus throughout this early literature remained relevant as he argued that the power of the myth remained not solely with the few scholars who explicitly endorsed it, but also in the larger community whose thought it had influenced.

The significance of examining the rural ideal as an authoritative concept lies with its influence on the larger public, on establishing and maintaining rural identities in modern times. Historian Alan Gordon has recently discussed the manner in which events and individuals in historical representations often pass into lived experience through a process of public socialization, internalized by individuals and shared as public memory. Gordon identifies these instances as “myth-history” and the rural ideal, as described by Montmarquet, can be seen as an

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8 James A. Montmarquet, “Philosophical Foundations for Agrarianism,” *Agriculture and Human Values* (Spring 1985).
9 Ibid, 5.
11 Ibid, 48.
12 Ibid, 47.
14 Ibid, 17.
example of the intellectual constructions which are legitimized through historical association and subsequently become embedded in the larger constructs of society where they are adapted and increasingly accepted as historical “truths”.

The rural ideal has been reliant on a division throughout the literature which presents rural and urban as strict dichotomies, possessed of characteristics entirely mutually exclusive to one another. For example, in *Born in the Country: A History of Rural America*, David Danbom, an agricultural historian, summarized the history of rural culture in America on the basic premise that “[t]hrough most of world history rural people have been dramatically different from urban people...They looked, talked and acted differently from urban people and they pursued an occupation that was at least as much a way of life as it was a way of making a living.” Danbom concentrates a subsequent analysis specifically on romantic agrarianism within the context of twentieth century America. He explains how the divide between rural and urban society explains the romanticizing of rural life, particularly its moral, emotional, and spiritual benefits. Danbom argues that ideas of rural and agricultural are positioned in direct opposition to the increasingly urban and industrial nature of society, the growing dominance of factory work, and commercial values in human relations, as well as the deterioration of the authority of traditional social institutions across the United States.

This distinction has been similarly noted from a gendered perspective by literary journalist Amy Mattson Lauters in her study of American farm women between 1910 and

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16 Ibid, 1.
Her sources include six central magazines some of which were directed specifically towards farm women including *The Farmers’ Wife*, *Farm Journal*, and *Country Gentleman*, as well as oral histories collected from over one hundred women. The study, however, possesses strict limitations in its dependence on a dichotomy between urban and rural women. Lauters asserts that these distinct groups of women had virtually nothing in common including language, ideology, or means of communication. The perceptions one maintained of the other is credited as the largest factor perpetuating this distinction as urban women considered rural women to be uncouth victims of patriarchy and poverty while farm women considered urban women to be frivolous and lazy.19

The dichotomy is also identified by the American Anthropological Association’s 1993 panel entitled “Constructing Cultural Hierarchies: Rural and Popular Distinctions”.20 The central focus throughout this compilation is the manner in which power relations shape the experiences of people across various cultures. Various authors argued that in the rural/urban context, there exists a rather dominant power struggle which results from the attempts to construct great distinctions between the two populations. This occurs because, in situations when visible and physical differences do not exist, cultural contrasts maybe exaggerated and similarities erased.21 Essentially the volume discusses that although these populations are not divergent in the sense of physical appearance, they are continuously separating intellectually and mentally. Urbanites often conceive themselves to be superior to rural inhabitants, as more socially and economically

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19Ibid, 1-5.
21Ibid, 2-3.
advanced. In Keith Walden’s *Becoming Modern in Toronto*, he argues that the structure and evolution of the Toronto Industrial Exhibition in the late Victorian period maintains the broad spectrum between those whose origins were purely rural and those whose origins were purely urban. However inaccurate, this remained a fundamental tool in organizing the social world. In the creation of the exhibits, urban residents tried to understand themselves by contemplating the otherness of people unfamiliar with city culture. With less inclination to question their own norms, they tended to magnify the discrepancies in values, appearances, and behaviour of rural people making them into simplistic characteristics which differentiated the urban from the rural. This led many of the country dwellers who had travelled from outlying areas to visit the fair more conscious of the fragility of their identities, and the sense of rural inferiority became more exaggerated over the years.

So heavily engrained in society is the rural-urban dichotomy that census reports are also configured to maintain the distinction. In Canada, communities with a population size of less than one thousand people are classified as rural and those with a population of one thousand or more are designated as urban. This is done in spite of the fact that such a dichotomy based on a cut-off point of population size is obviously arbitrary. Certain characteristics are associated with each of these distinctions in the Canadian context. The “rural world” can be viewed as cultivators and their families, a predominance of nature over anthropo-social environments, small of community size, low population density, homogeneous, egalitarian, less social mobility; and a predominance of personal, primary, and durable social relations. In contrast, the non-agricultural

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22 Keith Walden, *Becoming Modern In Toronto: The Industrial Exhibition and the Shaping of a Late Victorian Culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997)
23 Ibid, 189.
24 Ibid, 190.
occupants of the “urban world” are isolated from nature in a man-made environment where size of community is large, population dense and heterogeneous, social stratification and mobility, and social relations are impersonal, formal, and short-lived.\textsuperscript{26} Rural is characterized as unique, equipped with features which may be manipulated to be construed as morally and materially superior to urban life. This is highlighted through an examination of the rural ideal structured around the four key components which best exemplify the idealized interpretation.

The Four Components

Domesticity and Family

Various scholars have engaged in a historical analysis of Canadian and American culture to re-interpret rural pasts. While predominately unintentional, historians who have participated in discussing or examining aspects of the rural ideal also serve as the prominent creators or perpetuators of this stereotypical representation. The earliest publications which produced this interpretation overwhelmingly operated through a gendered perspective, specifically exploring how the domestic sphere represented the ideal as farm women were depicted as individuals who selflessly contributed to the farm family and their community. Many scholars took this as their starting point which they deconstructed to demonstrate that farm women were not mere victims of patriarchy but how women find agency, possess self-interests, and are integrated in the economy through market buying and selling, as well as serve as the backbone of society through the creation of strong networks with other women, kin, and community groups. This knowledge has, arguably, dispersed throughout popular conceptions which have, by attacking one ideal,

\textsuperscript{26} Dasgupta, \textit{Rural Canada}, 13-14.
created another. This component of the rural ideal, while not disregarding the self-sacrificing female, also embraces the independence and strength of the female gender in rural history. This challenged urban notions that rural women were drudges at the mercy of patriarchy.

The portrayal of rural women as the strength on which the superiority of farm life was established appeared in the Second National Conference on American Farm Women in Historical Perspective held in Madison, Wisconsin in October 1986, from which the edited volume, *Women and Farming: Changing Roles, Changing Structures* was compiled.²⁷ Editors Wava G. Haney and Jane B. Knowles relate how the laws and customs which emanated from the patriarchal structure of farm life served to make farm women invisible in the agricultural production record, preserving assumptions about women’s contribution to farming which restricted their labour and ownership to the modern period.²⁸ This is refuted by the larger discussions engaged in throughout the text, and reference is made to the constructive nature of women as members of movements and organizations in relation to welfare and farm economics. Single women were hired out for wages as domestic servants in the towns or to neighbouring farmers. The wages of these women, and those who taught the majority of rural school children, as well as the profits from the sale of farm women’s products, were frequently invested in the land of their fathers, husbands, or brothers. Women also contributed to agricultural labour in terms of tenancy and slavery. Both of these labour systems led to the ownership of large tracts of agricultural land by a few white males. Most of this labour, however, was not recorded in the public record on the notion that agricultural work was male work.²⁹ Additionally, the power accredited to farm

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²⁸ Ibid, 4.
women is documented in their informal and formal organizations through which they have been the primary weavers of the social fabric of rural community life, as well as shaping the social and economic base of local rural institutions.\(^30\) The idealistic image of farm women as wholly independent and strongly integrated into farm economies and rural life sought to demonstrate women as the backbone of society possessing strength lost at the onset of the impending industrialization. Farm women have been a specific focus of early literature which reflects the rural ideal, romanticized as morally and socially superior to their urban counterparts.

Women’s role as significant contributors to the farming economy resonates in more recent publications as well, such as Béatrice Craig’s *Backwoods Consumers and Homespun Capitalists.*\(^31\) The contextualizes female labour in the textile and homespun industry, particularly amongst the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth settlers from Lower Canada, New Brunswick, and New England converged on the banks of the Upper Saint John River in Madawaska Territory. The market provided women with a profitable outlet for their goods and also facilitated production. As a result, women were main participants in the rural market revolution as producers and consumers. Craig counters historian Marjorie Cohen who argued that men elbowed women out of dairy production in Ontario when it became commercialized as they perceived market activities unsuitable for women. Instead, Craig notes that Madawaskayans did not recognize women’s integration in the market as problematic. Women were savvy producers and maximized profit regardless of the workload, they responded positively but sensibly to the opportunities of the market, balancing the need for material goods with the need for time for other tasks. Nevertheless, as women sold their homespun garments directly to consumers, they

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would acquire money for cash purchases at the store, thereby hiding their participation in the market economy.\textsuperscript{32}

The appearance of women as principal members of the rural economy is further reinforced by Mary Neth in \textit{Preserving the Family Farm}.\textsuperscript{33} While Neth’s focus is distinctly associated with the Midwest, she observes that “farm women regarded their work in the field as evidence of their integral part in the farm operation. They did not resent it as a sign of drudgery or a violation of separate spheres; they were partners in a joint venture.”\textsuperscript{34} In addition to labour, however, Neth brings forth the role of women in local organizations, such as community clubs like the Homemakers’ Clubs. Farm women’s clubs often formalized pre-existing informal groups and engaged in three types of activities: self-education, community service, and activities related to women’s work. The discussion of these organizations by Neth, however, echoes the ideal by placing it in contrast with the groups when they expanded to include town and city women. She claims that by the 1930s, club programs identified all women as homemakers and neglected issues peculiar to agriculture and farm women. Instead, they commenced a formalization of the separation of men’s business from women’s homes, and discouraged women’s traditionally active role in community groups and diminished the power they exerted in fund-raising and encouraging of neighbourhood loyalty.\textsuperscript{35} The specific focus on women’s organizations is intended to demonstrate the strength these groups possessed, and a level of equality with which they were associated. Thus, rural women are depicted as more advanced than their urban counterparts who are willing to accept an inferior status amongst the male community.

\textsuperscript{32} Craig, \textit{Backwoods Consumers and Homespun Capitalists}, 180-198.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid, 237.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid, 136-139.
The image of farm women has adapted to a depiction of wholly independent and authoritative women in their integration in farm economics and rural life. The literature takes as its starting point the nature in which these women served as the backbone of society possessing strength lost at the onset of the impeding period of urbanization and industrialization. Farm women have been a specific focus of the early literature which, while perhaps not intentionally, reflects the rural ideal. Women have been documented as morally and socially superior to their urban counterparts. Nevertheless, historians have increasingly digressed from a restrictive focus of rural women and have expanded the discussion to incorporate ideologies which introduce discourses of nature and masculinity.

Nature

David Danbom’s “Romantic Agrarianism in Twentieth-Century America,” interprets the rural ideal, or as he terms it “romantic agrarianism”, as a philosophical perspective that has been well articulated since ancient times. He provides a variety of explanations for its increasing popularity at the turn of the century, but maintains that it had little to do with rural America and much to do with the social and economic changes intrinsic to urban life. Some of these features include the rise of formal associations and the decline of individual efficacy, the growing dominance of factory work and of commercial values in human relations, and the deterioration of the authority of traditional social institutions which spread disquiet in the United States. One of the main factors which allowed this romantic agrarian “phenomenon” to reach its zenith was the

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36 Danbom, “Romantic Agrarianism in Twentieth-Century America”.
37 Ibid, 2-3.
anti-modernist impulse of the back-to-the-land movement which emerged as early as the 1960s.\(^{38}\) This organized effort was ultimately a critique of modern urban industrial society. As a result, advocates of the movement implied that rural living would allow a restoration of a free and natural existence as a contrast to the urban ills which plagued the latter twentieth century.\(^ {39}\)

A similar connection is recognized through E. Melanie DuPuis and Peter Vandergeest’s edited compilation which appeared in 1996.\(^ {40}\) This publication elaborated on the manner in which environmental movements of modern society have identified rural labour and living with nature as necessary to preserve. DuPuis and Vandergeest, with their fellow colleagues, demonstrated how dominant understandings of rural landscapes and the people who inhabit them are thought of as expressions of old Euro-American stories and further encapsulate linkages between the notions of the Garden of Eden, rural communities, the American Frontier, the efficacy of the market, and national progress.\(^ {41}\) The historical image of the rural ideal became increasingly associated with larger societal movements that valued the naturalistic characteristics of agriculturalism and farming.

The direct link between nature and the work of agriculturalists in a rural society can also be traced to the early and introductory publications of James A. Montmarquet. He sought to examine the evolutionary stages of agriculturalism since its emergence in ancient civilization, into the repercussions of the Industrial Revolution. Montmarquet argued that “[a]griculture...is

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\(^ {39}\) Ibid, 6.


\(^ {41}\) Ibid, 3.
inescapably a human interference with nature, but one that relies upon the natural processes in a more direct way than do other economic transitions.”

Conceptions of masculinity have similarly been paralleled with idealistic notions of the rural male engaged in physical labour with the land, and therefore, with nature. In 2001, environmental historian Tina Loo, published “Making a Modern Wilderness: Conserving Wildlife in Twentieth-Century Canada” in which she sustained a connection between masculinity and sport culture in the sphere of wilderness and hunting. While her article is not focused on rural culture specifically, her argument captures the disassociation of the ideal male from the urban environment of the twentieth century which was characterized by a lack of physical labour and a limited relation to nature. She summarized the need for urban males, believing in a rural ideal, to retreat to the uncertainty and raw aggressiveness of nature, and detach themselves from the industrialization and technological advances of the urban environment to recapture their masculinity, if only for a short period.

A similar reclamation of the environment is documented by James Murton in Creating a Modern Countryside. Murton investigates the deep relationship between British Columbia and the environment in the context of the Canadian liberal order, following in the footsteps of Canadian historian Ian McKay. In the late 1910s and 1920s, the British Columbia state engaged in an intense effort to manufacture a new, modern countryside. The encouragement of agricultural resettlement is a theme with stretched into the postwar period as part of “new

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44 Ibid.
liberal” movement. Throughout the nineteenth century in Canada, liberal reformers challenged political and economic orders that emphasized such elements as an established social order, the inherent right of particular men to rule, and endowed rights to land. Such a liberal landscape of individual properties bounded by real law became a powerful tool of the colonial state as it removed First Nations people from their lands. However, in the early twentieth century, the ideas of the “New Liberal” order became influential, especially the central tenet that the rights of the liberal individual could no longer be the foundation of politics and social life. Instead, society needed to be safeguarded through a more active state responsible for the general welfare of its citizens. Murton argued that this shift lead to the desire to renew the province’s engagement with the environment as this was perceived as the most beneficial path for the entire British Columbian society. He summarized this sentiment by stating, “Soldiers and other settlers would benefit from living in a modern countryside: a rural (and so more healthy and moral) alternative to urban life.”

Thus, while the ideal farm woman worked for the good of the family farm and her community, the ideal rural male was naturally associated superiority over urban populations through their daily activities. The basic foundation of agricultural labour served to represent a relationship with nature unparalleled in modern culture, idealized for its manly strength and control it over nature. Many of the various disciplines which have sought to recover neglected discussions of environment, nature, women’s roles, as well as masculinity, have simultaneously recognized and adapted to an idealistic notion of rural living. This, however, serves as only one method in which the rural ideal has been identified.

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Community

A degree of community as the cornerstone of rural society is often maintained as an essential element of understanding agricultural history. Scholars undertaking studies through a variety of frameworks including gendered, feminist, Marxist, and so on, have analyzed how rural communities developed socially and economically, and in so doing, have identified an idealized perception of this component which requires further analysis.

In addition to the literature which deconstructs the rural ideal other publications have maintained the ideal without direct reference to the concept or critical evaluation. For example, Mary Neth utilized the chapter entitled “Reorganizing the Rural Community: Contested Visions of Community” in Preserving the Family Farm to scrutinize the rise of bureaucratic and government organized agricultural institutions in the early twentieth century. These institutions attempted to reorganize rural communities through attacking the information structure of farm neighbourhoods and the local character of rural institutions. Neth documented the resistance of rural families who continued to build farm neighbourhoods grounded in social and economic exchanges and the values of mutuality or the establishment of alternative organizations rooted in the values of farm neighbourhoods.47 She meticulously detailed the struggle as one to protect and conserve a traditional rural lifestyle, which was directly opposed to the industrialized commercial society. In doing so, she expressed how rural life was idealized over the impeding industrial structure.

Alternatively, scholars such as anthropologist Gerald Pocius have studied the manner in which whole communities operated.48 He examined the entire manner of living which he

47 Neth, Preserving the Family Farm: Women, 139.
presented as being morally superior, simple, and efficient. In Pocius’ documentation of his fieldwork in the small town of Calvert, Newfoundland, he sought to depict how space was perceived and utilized in an area which operated on the basis of belonging and community.⁴⁹ He summarized the character of Calvert stating “[t]he norms of individuality cannot be pushed to extreme limits...Calvert space is constructed so that socializing takes precedence over most everything else, work often requires the sharing of natural resources, and time not working is devoted to the family visit, the community Sunday mass, or the school concert, and rarely to individualistic leisure.”⁵⁰ While not the sole intention of his investigative research, Pocius represents Calvert in a romanticized image and the individuals who live there as superior in their sense of inherent trust and common identity. He contrasts this with the recent concern of the Newfoundlanders about their cultural differences with encroaching threats from “outside corrupting forces”.⁵¹ Pocius relates his interpretation of the behaviours and characteristics traditional to Calvert as those which one might think would disintegrate at the onset of developing modern capitalist and commercial society, but which did not.⁵²

A more recent undertaking by geographers John Smithers and Paul Johnson speaks to a unique feature of rural society in terms of community.⁵³ The study explores contemporary change of the farm with attention to the nature and causes of diversity in a local family farming system, with a survey of family farms in northern Huron County, Ontario. Attempting to explain the period of transition occurring in the business of agriculture, revealed trajectories range from aggressive engagement in expansion, diligent efforts to ‘hang on’, and forced or voluntary

⁴⁹ Pocius, A Place to Belong.
⁵⁰ Ibid, 272.
⁵¹ Ibid, 273.
⁵² Pocius, A Place to Belong.
contraction. The highly productive farms that dominate Canada’s agricultural system are increasingly linked with agribusiness, government, and financial institutions for their markets and critical inputs. The most significant repercussion of this appears to be a dismemberment of community interdependence which characterized the traditional farms as supportive forms of interaction between farm and community including local marketing of agricultural products, or local purchasing, neither of which continue to occur or are relegated to a less noteworthy role. Part two of this study particularly emphasizes the strength of rural communities as they argue that in traditional rural communities “there was not only a vision of shared progress but also a tangible interdependency that formed a foundation for mutually supportive interactions”. However, this communal foundation which served as the basis of rural communities across Ontario has deteriorated as a consequence of the continuing structural change in the North American agriculture and farm sector.

This component of the rural ideal is one which is expressed through an understanding of the loss of a state of living and how the modern industrial society has contributed to the complete dissolution of features which represented a progressive and efficient manner of rural living superior to individual monetary gain. While communities operated as a cohesive unit, neighbouring ties were strengthened and an ability to depend on others provided a type of insurance which has been argued to no longer exist in the capitalist society. A similar method of scholarship is employed by those with a focus on the economic state of rural life.

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54 Smithers and Johnson, “The dynamics of family farming in North Huron County, Ontario...Part I”.  
Self-Sufficiency

The component which is defined by rural self-sufficiency and economic independence is the final recurrent feature of the rural ideal considered essential in its understanding. It is so widely recognized as an element of rurality that it resonates throughout the majority of the literature which claims rural history as its basis. For example, Ruth Schwartz Cowan’s *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave*, published in 1983, featured the transformation of industrialization in the American household between 1860 and 1960.56 The pre-industrial household is established as the autonomous and self-sustaining center of rural life, features which are subsequently lost with the onset of increasing industrialization. While Cowan intends to chronologically evaluate the development of technological innovations of the American household, she ultimately demonstrates the strength of the rural household over those associated with modern, capitalist traditions. Cowan summarizes this when she states that “[t]he pre-industrial household could, if necessary, function without a supportive community...in the settlement patterns of our frontiers. Individual families were capable, when need arose, of supplying themselves with their own subsistence and protective needs year in and year out. Very few families are capable of doing that any longer.”57

An argument can be made that economic independence is widely inherited as an accepted attribute of rural society in both academic literature and popular conceptions. As a result, the most effective way to demonstrate its prevalence in the rural ideal is to present its critics. The extent to which scholars have sought to deconstruct this facet of the rural ideal demonstrates its

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57 Ibid, 6.
resonance in popular conceptions. The rural ideal has remained a definitive feature of rural
history as a result not only of those who have sought to convey and support it as an essential
feature of historical analysis, but also by those who deconstruct the concept as a mythical
ideology. These critiques largely possess a progressive structure, establishing a connection
between rural and urban as well as agricultural and commercialism and depicting this as part of
an evolutionary sequence of events which has merely resulted in the modern industrial society.
In addition to historians, academics heralding from external disciplines such as economics,
geography, and labour studies have formed the basis of this debate. These authors challenge the
preconception of rural life as self-sufficient and based solely on subsistence farming, ultimately
seeking to expose the integration of industry, commercialism, and capital throughout rural
societies.

Christopher Clark’s introductory study of rural capitalism in Western Massachusetts in
the late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth century presents a unique approach using personal
documents of early settlers. Clark examines a profound social and economic transformation
from an economy which integrated farming with a broader national market and outpost of
industrial capitalism. He argues that by the 1860s, the New England countryside was no longer
dominated by individuals who laboured in agriculture. Clark introduces a conceptualization of
rural society in the mid-nineteenth century as one characterized by an integration with capital
wherein shifts in the exchange system, the use of credit, the emergence of cash and negotiable
paper instruments, and the changing of interest on debts, all contributed to the rural economy.

59 Ibid, 7.
60 In the consideration of social structures and relationships, and not purely reflective of a quantities measurement
of the growth of markets, Clark provides a definition of the term “capital” as he intends it to be understood. He
Additionally, capital and labour markets reflected the emergence of groups of entrepreneurs capable of securing control of a proportion of the goods, credit, and labour power in the rural economy. Inequalities in the distribution of land and wealth fostered the growth of a population dependent upon wage labour. Thus, rural capitalism was defined by the accretion of a series of distinctive forms and organization that represented the economic system.\(^6\)

Similarly, historian Douglas McCalla places this argument within the confines of the economic history of Upper Canada in *Planting the Province*.\(^6\) While his dominant concern is to demonstrate the extensive growth through economic processes and calculations such as national production, he helps counter previous stereotypes which depict the farm household as a precapitalist social unit seeking autonomy. He stresses the significance of market relationships. He argues that processes of buying and selling, borrowing and lending, and creating and disposing of capital were an “integral part of the universe and strategies of even the most isolated pioneer household.”\(^6\)

McCalla’s argument which details a synthesized component of features previously characterized as distinctly rural or urban, is elaborated by Paul Craven, alongside colleagues in the 1995 compilation *Labouring Lives: Work and Workers in Nineteenth-Century Ontario*.\(^6\) They recognize the manner in which rural communities have been represented as autonomous and economically self-sufficient but argue that while waged labour was not the pivot of their

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\(^6\) Ibid, 9.
social or economic lives, “waged work was not uncommon in nineteenth-century Ontario...waged work was what they or other members of their families did to earn enough to start a farm or business, or to help out in tough times, or to supplement family incomes during seasons where there was less to do about the farm.” These scholars denote the rural ideal largely by deconstructing the rural and urban divide and drawing similarities between the two communities previously perceived as in direct opposition.

The significance of exploring the scholars who argue against rural self-sufficiency and economic independence is to demonstrate how engrained this component of the rural ideal is in the academic literature. As scholars seek to find discrepancies with this representation of rural life through demonstrating an integration of capitalistic features in the rural economy, they are simultaneously engaging in a discussion of the ideal and permitting others to interpret its accuracy or mythic proportions.

Conclusion

The rural ideal exemplifies how historical analysis is not restricted to epistemological research and reiteration of evidence, but also includes a process through which images, concepts, and representations can be conveyed. As rural history becomes a topic of increasing significance in the broader historical discipline, as well as the wider field of academic study, it is essential to evaluate the repercussions and implications of the rural ideal as it appears is deconstructed and perpetuated throughout numerous forms of study. As it becomes a recognizable facet of history, geography, labour studies and economics, it is simultaneously identified through societal

perceptions. As scholars have engaged with the rural ideal under multiple frameworks such as gender, ethnicity, nature, feminism, and masculinity, this element has been recognized and, as a result, preserved. There exist four components which encapsulate and serve to summarize the features of rural life idealized in the ideology. These include a strong domestic sphere, as well as a direct relationship with nature unparalleled in the modern industrial society. Furthermore, it includes a community which is based on mutual trust and respect, and finally, the self-sufficient family unit.

As an ideology, the rural ideal has adapted over time to emphasize certain characteristics of rural culture and agrarianism, nevertheless, maintaining the basic principles. Overall, the ideal interprets rural pasts as efficient, simplistic, romantic, and lacking the disastrous qualities of urban industrial societies. The strict dichotomies, whether accurate or harmful and artificial, which define rural and urban, agriculturalism and urbanism, are inherent and unavoidable concepts which enrich the literature on rural history. Nevertheless, it remains essential to recognize the dominance of these dichotomies and understand and employ the techniques or methods of those academics who deconstruct and define these convictions in an effort to achieve a comprehensive evaluation of rural life throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century.

Despite what may be implied by a review of the academic literature, the significance of the rural ideal is not confined to the intellectual institutions; rather its ability to transcend those boundaries is the main concern. As an ideology, the rural ideal can appear through different mediums and can apply or appeal to various audiences. Numerous outlets including documentaries, commemorative objects or events, popular television shows or films, and public displays all utilize and adapt the rural ideal through their desired representation of rural life. The
potential to connect with such a large population makes it necessary to address how the concept of the rural ideal and examine the type of influence that can occur.

This analysis speaks specifically to museums as a medium through which expressions of rural society can be transmitted to public audiences. Through deconstructing the rural ideal into four basic components, exhibits in local county museums can be seen as mimicking these concepts and thus perpetuating the ideal. In contrast to the academic literature examined in this chapter, museums possess the ability to present an idealized representation of rural society to a much larger and increasingly general population.
Chapter Four – The Wellington County Museum

Wellington County Museum and Archives: A Case Study – An Introduction

Wellington County extends approximately one hundred kilometers from just to the south of Highway 401 near the region of Hamilton-Wentworth to Clifford on the edge of Grey County in the north. Its western boundary extends to Huron County and reaches the Town of Caledon to the East. The county is comprised of seven towns and townships including the town of Erin and Minto, as well as the Township of Wellington North, Mapleton, Centre Wellington, Guelph/Eramosa and Puslinch.

Wellington County was settled between the 1820s and the 1880s. Early surveys and government incentives encouraged immigrant pioneers to quickly clear the land as they entered from the south following surveyors and road builders north and west.\(^1\) Underlain by the Guelph and Lockport formations of limestone and dolomite, it offered an abundance of resources with which to construct sturdy stone buildings. Blessed by numerous lakes, streams, swamps, and forests, its diverse physical foundation served as an excellent basis for the complex and prosperous community of early settlers.\(^2\) In the early 1800s, English and Scottish settlers migrated to the area seeking land and opportunity. When they eventually located their property, the first order of business was to clear a space and construct a shelter. Labour and loneliness characterized the first year. Dense forests were difficult to clear and were thinned by a girdling

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2 Ibid, 39.
process. The first crops were planted in the loose soil with only the simple implements such as spades, hoes and rakes, with which farmers had to cultivate their clearings. 3

Guelph remained the centre of Wellington County, representing a location of economic expansion and successful agricultural innovation. Independent townships, however, provided a testament to the hardships and accomplishments which characterized the formation of the region. People who styled themselves as farmers were different than those who engaged in the same occupation in the British Isles. While some settled members were brought up working the plough in their mother countries, the majority of those who lived by cultivating the soil were educated to some variety of trade in the early years. Nevertheless, many of them managed their farms in a creditable manner through processes of ingenuity and industry. 4 Puslinch, for example, lacking navigable streams to support freight traffic was thus limited to industrial enterprises that could be served by the poor roads. As a result, early industrialists were forced to take advantage of any water power available to them. A toll road, which commenced construction in 1849, made trade between Puslinch and Hamilton/Dundas area more convenient, encouraging the growth of surrounding townships. 5 The first industries that appeared were sawmills; there were seven in 1851. Small craft shops dominated the Puslinch industrial scene at the same time, almost one-third of which had only one worker. This was, however, analogous to the remainder of the County with an average, excluding the city of Guelph, of only 3 workers per establishment in 1871. 6

3 Dahms, Wellington County, 39-56.; Alv Koop and Sheila McMurrich Koop, Older Voices Among Us: Listening to the long time residents of Wellington County (Erin, ON: The Boston Mills Press, 1981), 11.
4 John Harland, Report on the State of Agriculture in the County of Wellington (Guelph)
6 Ibid, 59.
Elora, situated in the centre of the expanse of Southern Ontario bounded by the Great Lakes, Lake Erie and Huron, and Georgian Bay, is one of two primary communities in the township of Centre Wellington with the other being Fergus. The first settler to arrive in Elora was Roswell Matthews, a Welshman who had travelled from America in 1817. Nonetheless, this early settlement was a failure and Elora was not formed until after 1842 when Charles Allan, a carpenter, arrived from Lethendy, Scotland entering into a partnership with Alex Watt, and James and Arthur Ross. These three men bought the water rights along the Grand River and the land up to the present location of the town centre. They erected a dam and sawmill and constructed the first bridge of the area.\(^7\) Elora evolved as a backwood village, adapting to the land and increasing population. One of the prominent factors which contributed to this development was the market or fair. In April 1852, Lord Elgin, Governor of Canada, permitted a market or fair to be held in Elora on the first Thursday of April and September of each year. In 1859, the village Council decided to hold the fair on the first Tuesday of every month. The Elora fair was considered one of the best of the province with great contributions from the surrounding hamlets, towns, and townships.\(^8\)

The family farm has been the backbone of the Canadian agricultural industry, including Wellington County. However, as the agricultural industry continues to change and evolve, new demands must be met and adaptation to innovative equipment is necessary for economic success. Agriculture in Wellington County has become a business but this was not always the case. Two World Wars and major technological innovations led to revolutionary changes for the inhabitants of the county. The Post-War Era brought industrialization and the emigration of people from rural areas to cities and led farms to change from the “family farm” of mixed farming to “agri-

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\(^7\) Roberta Allan, Comp., *History of Elora* (Elora: Elora Women’s Institute, 1982), 11-12.

\(^8\) Ibid, 14.
business” of specialized production. For example, before 1950, virtually all businesses were located in one of the villages in the Township of Puslinch. In later years, decentralization occurred with the introduction of a major highway which reached through the Township in 1958. Variation also occurred with a new population which contributed to the demands of the land. In the 1960s land speculation, demand for hobby farms and rapid urbanization made it too expensive for young Mennonites to purchase land in Waterloo County. As a result, some Old Order Mennonites moved to the Arthur-Mount Forest area of Wellington North Township to establish new farms and preserve traditional Mennonite culture and agricultural practice.

Ultimately, the nature of development of this region has altered from early settlement with the transformation from agriculture to industry occurring within the previous sixty years. While the local economy was rooted in agriculture, with older manufacturing facilities processed locally produced foodstuffs, economic development had favoured new industrial parks and provided economic incentives for diverse industries to relocate. This has adversely affected the economy and structure of these communities. The current state of the county is characterized by a comprehensive combination of industrial, commercial, agricultural, recreational and residential developments that contribute to making a viable and self-sustaining community.

The Museum

The Wellington County Museum and Archives is located in Elora, Ontario. Reflective of its deeply engrained rural traditions and agricultural lifestyle, exhibits at the Wellington County Museum and Archives utilize artifact displays to reflect an idealized image of rural life characteristic of the four components which define the rural ideal. The small town itself has a

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9 Puslinch Historical Society, Puslinch Profiles 1850-2000, 60.
10 Dahms, 62.
unique cultural history, influenced in part by the activities of David Boyle, the founding father of modern archaeology in Ontario and Eastern Canada and renowned former curator at the Canadian Institute Museum, and who served as the principal of the public school when he moved back to Elora in August 1871 at age of twenty-nine. In addition to a local library at the Elora Mechanics’ Institute, Boyle created a school museum with the purpose of collecting and preserving biology specimens for class-room use in rural elementary schools. While the Elora School Museum contained what modern curators would dismiss as random objects merely collecting dust, the collection also incorporated such exotica as an ‘ancient’ Japanese almanac donated by a lady in California, a Chinese incense taper, assorted coins, a piece of walrus hide, and a backbone and skull of a shark. As a result of Boyle and his museum, Elorans were exposed to a unique cultural watershed in their community. Whether in the class-room or the teachers’ association, in the museum, mechanics’ institute, or the natural history society, Boyle stimulated intelligent discussion on pedagogical and controversial scientific themes. While the museum remained a feature of the community until 1912, this cultural influence can be traced to the modern historical museum which currently rests on the edge of the town.

The Wellington County Museum and Archives maintains an intriguing history as an institution. It is located in the structure which originally served as the Wellington County House of Industry, erected near Fergus, Ontario in late 1877. This establishment has distinctly impacted the history of the county as well as policies and exhibits in the current museum. As the oldest surviving example of a poorhouse in Canada, the building serves as a national historic site. From the 1830s, periodic initiatives were undertaken by successive Upper Canadian and Ontario

11 Gerald Killan, David Boyle: From Artisan to Archaeologist (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), 41.
13 Tracey Tyler, “When ‘poorhouse’ wasn't only an expression; A local museum preserves in harrowing detail the stories of a forgotten institution,” Toronto Star (Toronto, ON), 3 Jan 2009.
governments to require counties to construct poorhouses, as these asylums were commonly known. Under the House of Industry Act of 1837, the government of Upper Canada authorized the construction of a system of local institutions under public auspices, intended to accommodate poor and indigent persons incapable of supporting themselves. This included all persons able to work and without means of maintaining themselves, who refused or neglected to do so, as well as all persons living a lewd, dissolute vagrant life or exercising no ordinary calling or lawful business sufficient to procure an honest living.\textsuperscript{14} By 1903, new legislation required every county in Ontario to have a house of refuge.\textsuperscript{15}

In 1876, Wellington County officials had purchased 50 acres of land between Fergus and Elora for a poorhouse intended to function as a self-sufficient industrial farm. Residents were called “inmates”, a term used to describe anyone living in an institution at the time.\textsuperscript{16} Over a thirty year period beginning in 1877 more than one thousand admissions were recorded at the Wellington County House of Industry. Until 1889, children were a significant presence in the poorhouse, accounting for 22 per cent of all admissions. Amongst male inmates, over ninety per cent were drawn from the working class and seventy per cent were unskilled labourers. These labourers were predominately agricultural rather than industrial workers as agriculture was the dominant feature of the local economy and more farm workers were casual labourers dependent upon irregular seasonal work.\textsuperscript{17}

The building evolved with the influx of inmates. A stone washhouse was erected in 1877 and served as a laundry, a woodshed and a morgue. Subsequently, a hospital wing was added in

\textsuperscript{14} Stormie Stewart, ““The Elderly Poor in Rural Ontario” Inmates of the Wellington County House of Industry, 1877-1907,” \textit{Journal of the Canadian Historical Association} 3, no. 1 (1992), 220.
\textsuperscript{15} Tyler, “When ‘poorhouse’ wasn’t only an expression”, \textit{Toronto Star}, 3 Jan 2009.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{17} Stewart, ““The Elderly Poor in Rural Ontario””, 223-4.
1892 with the changing composition of the inmate population. The poorhouse system was the foundation for current government-funded social assistance programs which focused on reducing poverty and dependence including a children’s aid system and early forms of worker’s compensation, as well as legislation to improve workplace safety. With the development of these systems, the demographic of the House of Industry changed. While women and children continued to seek sanctuary in these institutions, they were increasingly limited to senior citizens and by 1947, Wellington County’s House of Industry and Refuge had officially been renamed the Wellington County Home for the Aged, remaining as such until 1972.18 Within this period, the etching on the front of the building which distinguished it as a poorhouse was eliminated in an attempt to erase the associated stigma. Three years later the Wellington County Museum and Archives opened in this location and in an attempt to continue this long history Curator, Susan Dunlop, along with archivist Karen Wagner and conservator Patty Whan, have documented these stories after pouring through admission and discharge records, medical files, council minutes, and old newspaper stories.19

The Wellington County Museum was originally located along the river at the corner of Metcalfe and Mill Street in Elora. The museum had resided in the small four storey structure for twenty years since the county took over the building for the Wellington County Historical Research Society. Occupied as a general store for forty-four years before it was converted to a museum in 1954, the museum store counter still stood and the shelves once used for displaying flour, sugar and tobacco held Indian war clubs, ancient scales and unmarked China. The majority of the articles dated from the 1800s, with the basement littered with hundreds of tools of pioneer craftsman of the area and the upstairs devoted to clothing worn over the previous centuries. The

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18 Tyler, “When ‘poorhouse’ wasn’t only an expression,” Toronto Star, 3 Jan 2009.
19 Ibid.
museum was originally operated by the Wellington County Historical Research Society with the aid of the County Council. In 1956, the museum was taken over by the County Council. The society continued to operate the museum; however, it is governed by a special committee of seven members, two of whom are sitting members of the council. On October 1, 1973, the museum was officially transferred to what was presently known as “Wellington Place”, formerly the County Home. In 1987, the museum underwent a $2.3 million expansion and renovation project including a new exhibit gallery with over 2,000 square feet of space in one room. The addition also entailed an environmentally controlled loading dock off the new gallery, a lounge, public reading room, and a separate microfilm reading room. This enabled the display and exhibition of a larger quantity of the museum’s artifacts and permitted the expansion of the collection with the proper storage capacity to allow for increased donation and conservation.

Over the years, visitors to the Wellington County Museum have steadily increased from approximately 20,761 in 2001 to 31,000 in 2010. These numbers demonstrate the size of the museum’s audience.

Wellington County Museum is an effective case study for this analysis for a variety of reasons. The county possesses a history which resonates throughout the majority of southern Ontario with settlement and immigration patterns which are relatively standard for the region. As with most of the surrounding counties, the area possesses an Aboriginal past. Nevertheless, this

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20 “You Won't Find Mumified Egyptians – But Dr. Groves' Operating Table is in the Basement,” Fergus News Record, Wednesday June 10, 1970.
24 These numbers have been compiled by the Wellington County Museum and recorded in their monthly newsletter “Circa” which included the attendance records starting in 2001 and ceasing in 2010 for unknown reasons. These numbers were compiled in a roughly ten-year period in an effort to demonstrate a long-term pattern with the limited records provided.
does not define the county’s history to the same degree as may be the case with Huron County or Brant County. Furthermore, the history of the poor house itself provides character and a unique perspective which is a distinct example of the history of the county and allows for insight into the popular perceptions of this dismal side of rural society. Finally, as discussed above, the museum has acquired a vast audience, not only inhabitants of the county, but also those from greater distances drawn in by the sophistication of the museum and by the services offered, including archival records, historical lectures and genealogy.

Exhibition and the Rural Ideal

Wellington County Museum and Archives has constructed and hosted a wide array of exhibitions since its permanent relocation in October 1973. These artifacts and exhibits address a multitude of themes which have ranged from the history of the county, world wars, aboriginals, ancient Egypt, and even medieval life. Numerous approaches have been utilized in the conceptual and physical creation of these displays and each exhibit incorporates elements such as textiles, clothing, recreational equipment, taxonomy, as well as artwork including paintings, wood carvings, and photographs. In an effort to evaluate the manner in which such a wide variety of subject matter perpetuates to the rural ideal, it is necessary to examine these exhibits as they relate to particular features of the ideology. The exhibits are centralized around certain elements of the rural ideal: domesticity and family; a natural relationship with the land; a trusting community operating as a singular unit; and finally, economic independence.

In an effort to incorporate and structure the exhibits of Wellington County museum, the displays will be divided into two categories: permanent and temporary exhibits. Permanent exhibits are constructed to represent the county and the museum, serving as the basis for the
primary purpose of local county museums – to preserve and present the distinct history of the surrounding region. Temporary exhibits, on the other hand, are increasingly diverse with a number of considerations for their formation including annual events, anniversaries of historical events, travelling exhibits from larger provincial or national museums, recent donations of entire collections, artifacts on temporary loan, and artifacts which have remained within the archives since their arrival, unseen to the public eye. The art gallery exhibitions hosted by the museum are not considered in this study as they reflect a level of presentism which does not parallel the history of rural life as depicted throughout the remainder of the museum.

Permanent Exhibits

In 2012, the Wellington County Museum displayed five exhibits which have retained a permanent place in the institution's historical representations. These displays include artifacts and information which relate to the county spanning from the paleo-Indian era into the early twentieth century. They are constructed from the museum and archive’s permanent collections, yet the majority of them encapsulate grand themes which can be interpreted through various perspectives.

The first permanent exhibit which is currently on display at the museum was established in the spring of 2002. This exhibit depicts the interior of a log cabin from the 1840s as well as that of a barn characteristic of the 1870s. The second began in May 2002, originally created as “Far From Home: Surviving Life at the Front”. This exhibit was a major installation for the museum on surviving trench warfare in World War I including a life-size trench and a special emphasis on the young men and women of Wellington County. The following year the exhibit

25 The name of this exhibit was later changed to “Far From Home: A Soldier’s Life at the Front 1914-1918” as late as 2005.
entitled “First Story: The Neutrals of Wellington County” was constructed to present the story of the First Nations in the area. It was not until 2006 that a new addition was made which featured the history of the building in which the museum resided: “If These Walls Could Speak: The House of Industry and Refuge 1877-1947”. Finally, in March 2009, the museum opened “A 1920s Kitchen” which followed a pattern of the museum displaying Victorian living areas. As an interpretation of changes in domestic history, this recreation of a 1920s kitchen features the components of the past and present in a pivotal decade before the modern built-in kitchen.

These displays reflect the rural ideal. The four components of the rural ideal are presented with distinctive imagery through the arrangement of artifacts, and selected information. Community, domesticity, nature, and economic independence are all evident in the exhibits at Wellington County Museum. As enduring historical representations in the museum, these exhibits deserve special scrutiny. They are a large focus and are the result of extensive hours of compilation and arrangement. Furthermore, as long-term features of the museums, they undoubtedly have influenced the largest audience.

Economic independence, a prime component of the rural ideal, is present throughout each of the ongoing exhibits at the Wellington County Museum and Archives. The domestic unit appears in two different exhibits demonstrating the perseverance of the family as the most basic and self-sustaining unit of rural county life. In the illustration of the log cabin interior, the space immediately draws attention to the center of the room where a wooden table is situated and laid with dishes sufficient for feeding a small family. With cast iron pots and skillets, as well as a large pot over the fire, the display indicates that the woman in the household were responsible for food preparation. Furthermore, the candles which appear to be drying as they hang from the mantle, in addition to the wheel located in the corner which aided in the making of clothes,
demonstrate further tasks for which women were accountable. The ladder to the left of the display indicates a loft where the remainder of the family would sleep in addition to the bed tucked away in the corner. At the foot of the bed, a series of dolls and toys are displayed solidifying the idea of the family as successfully inhabiting and growing within the small confines of the cabin (See Image 1.1 in Appendix).

Similarly, the recreation of the 1920s Kitchen expresses the character of the rural family as a cohesive entity in rural culture approximately one hundred years later. These major displays which recreate domestic space are deeply entrenched in the museum as a method of representation. In the late 1980s, the museum focused on the Victorian era in the majority of exhibits, presenting a major depiction of a Victorian era dining room with antique furnishings viewed through a large plate glass window. Developing from these previous exhibits, the construction of the early twentieth-century kitchen was intended as a depiction of the “transitional decade” between the heavy decorative features of the Victorian home and the functional technological approach of the modern age. The room maintains a focus on the family, with the dining room table positioned in the center of the room, as with the pioneer exhibit. Period artifacts are placed on the table in a manner to represent a time of the day in which meals are being prepared for the family (See Image 2.1 in Appendix). The small size of the table and the room, as well as the limited seating and the high-chair located in the corner of the room indicate a young family, independent as the singular unit of the household (See Image 2.2 in Appendix).

Establishing a parallel between the rural county life and that which existed prior to European settlement, the permanent exhibit “First Story” depicts native society and traditions while also drawing on the notion of family as a common element between these distinctive populations. In this context, however, the family unit is presented as markedly different. A mural, not artifacts, depicts a longhouse from a sixteenth century hamlet in the region. Unlike the singular family unit of the nineteenth century rural household, the longhouse is described as housing fifty people interrelated through wives, mothers, or sisters. A plaque placed in front of the mural of families notes the variety of families, not a singular family unit, but numerous families drawn from a matriarchal lineage, which inhabited the shelter and the integration of them through their daily activities (See Image 3.1 and 3.2 in Appendix).

Offering an additional alternative to the stable family unit of rural Wellington County, “If These Walls Could Speak” details the negative consequences of the lack of a secure family and economic means. For example, a plaque in the exhibit speaks directly to orphaned or abandoned children. Following their arrival to the poorhouse, homes were sought for abandoned children with many of the youth bound out as apprentices or adopted on a trial basis. In the majority of these cases, however, they “were used as house or farm labour and, because of their frail health or harsh conditions, were soon returned to the Poorhouse” (See Image 4.1 in Appendix).28

Advancing from this youthful focus, in the eye-catching mural which is strategically located where the original entrance to the House of Industry and Refuge existed, a woman with her three young children appearing exhausted and destitute enter the double doors of the asylum where the administrators await to greet and counsel the mother and children (See Image 4.2 in Appendix). In this instance, the relationship between the poorhouse and the unstable family without a

leading male figure is sustained. In establishing this connection, the museum has expressed a comparison between the normalcy of the double-headed household and the absence of such as a problem of rural society which required the aid of provincial and federal institutions to ensure that the consequences did not affect traditional rural values and customs.

World Wars are a common focus of exhibits throughout local county museums, as well as larger provincial or national museums. While the grander institutions tend to address these historical events on a broad scale with relation to the battles which defined the nation, the advances of the home front, and the demographic and economic repercussions, local county museums engage in a different approach. The focus in these localized organizations tend to place emphasis within the bounds of the region, relating tales through personal documents of inhabitants of the county who participated in the war whether overseas or on the home front. The World War One exhibit at Wellington County Museum is no exception.

The exhibit which was originally intended to focus on survival in the trenches with a reconstruction of a trench has expanded to incorporate a more comprehensive idea of the consequences of war on Wellington County. Nevertheless, in the presentation of warfare, the component of family is engaged maintaining its significance in the county and further solidifying the economically independent and self-sustaining basic unit of rural life. The family bonds are depicted with infinite strength, and as a means of constancy in the chaos of warfare. In two informative compilations created by the museum, familial relations are clearly presented. The first appears with the title “Dear mother, I’ve Been Thinking of Enlisting…”, a line extracted from a young Elora man’s letter to his mother in 1915 (See Image 5.1 in Appendix). While the placard proceeds to detail common physical attributes of soldiers from Wellington County, the appeal to the mother-son relationship places the ideal family in the mind of the audiences. In the
next compilation with the heading “What the Letters Don’t Tell Us”, letters of young soldiers to their mothers or sisters are displayed to demonstrate how the soldiers connected with their families in spite of the strict regulations of the military which limited what information could pass beyond the lines of battle (See Image 5.2 in Appendix). Furthermore, in exhibit created in 2001, a number of mannequins and paintings were placed on display, depicting soldiers in the war. Taking more than a year to construct, the great-grandsons and great-grandnephews of local World War I soldiers were used as models (Appendix 5.3; 5.4). Their participation was the brainchild of the museum curator Susan Dunlop, who wanted to breathe life into the names and stories of the men who lived through the horror of trench warfare. Conservator Patty Whan cast the hands and faces in plaster which were painted by local Rockwood artist, Susan Strachan Johnson. The exhibit was presented with the Award of Merit from the Ontario Museum Association in 2002. It appeared imperative to include family members as it contributed significantly to understanding the local community.

As the permanent exhibit establishes the family, it presents varying perspectives of the composition and significance of kin relations in economic independency and self-sufficiency. In the rural context, the successful family is perceived as a double-headed household with a husband and wife operating as an independent singular unit. This image is further solidified through comparison with alternatives characteristic of native populations, as well as the negative connotation of the poorhouse which is largely depicted as full of women, men, and children who did not have relatives on whom they could depend or who originated from broken homes. Expanding from this focus of family to represent the success of agricultural households, the

employment of the family also serves to represent the strength of the domestic sphere in rural society.

The domestic component of the rural ideal maintains a distinction between urban and rural women, casting the rural as strong and independent, continuously providing for their families as well as participating as key figures in rural communities. Two permanent exhibits display this feature particularly well. The Log Cabin exhibit contains various strong females participating in seasonal activities necessary to provide for the larger population to ensure a thriving settlement. Murals along the walls include images of women and girls producing food, teaching children, making candles, and travelling on horse and buggy (See Images 6.1 and 6.2 in Appendix). The images reinforce the integration of females in the larger community as opposed to reserved solely to the domestic sphere, making necessary contributions to ensure the development of the area. Additionally, in the recreated structure of the log cabin, depictions of women demonstrate that not only did their work entail the physical labour outside of the home, but also domestic duties. While the men had responsibility to sustain the land agriculturally, this section of the exhibit hosts a variety of items which were relevant to female duties including the cast iron cookware, the spinning wheel, the butter churn, and finally dolls, which symbolizes the raising of youth in the community (See Images 6.3, 6.4, and 6.5 in Appendix).

Echoing this familiar theme, the 1920s Kitchen exhibit details the labour of the female population close to a century later. Depicting an adaptation to technological advances without deserting the rural roots demonstrates that rural women were able to be as efficient and maintain a primarily domestic purpose. The setting remains transfixed on the duty of rural women to raise the youth and prepare the basic needs of the family as evident by the high chair, mixing bowls, and cooking ingredients sprawled across the table as though to indicate a mother mid-way
through preparing a meal (See Image 7.1 in Appendix). With the early telephone placed on the
ewall, however, the artifact eludes to the social role of females in the larger community (See Image 7.2 in Appendix). The strength of the domestic sphere and the relation between females and the larger surrounding society alludes to another element of the rural ideal.

The component of community in relation to the rural ideal similarly draws along the boundaries of family. Nevertheless, in rural culture, community represents the next stage of the basic organism of society. Rural history documents the successful integration of people located within a specific geographic region as a singular entity, surviving primarily through co-operation and dependence on communal labour and production. The murals surrounding the walls of the Log Cabin exhibit present this image quite explicitly. While the paintings were not an original feature of the exhibit, the addition of these images has provided an understanding of the behaviour of pioneer life as perceived by the museum curators. In contrast with the domestic space represented by the cabin and the barn, these murals depict scenes of communal activity, which relate the idea that the mid-nineteenth century was not characterized by a secluded household, but success was dependent upon an entire community. In one scene, older men are presented as cutting down large trees, while the young men use horses to transport the lumber. In the front, women and young children are collecting sap from the same trees (See Image 6.1 in Appendix). In the mural along the largest wall, the season of fall is complete with images of harvesting, gardening, butchering, and candle-making. The harvest scene solely emphasizes the multitude of farmers who had to come together to ensure a successful season (See Image 6.2 in Appendix).

The theme of community also penetrates the historical retelling of the Wellington County House of Industry and Refuge. “If These Walls Could Speak” possesses images of the inmates of
the institution posed together as if a community, an illustration which is embedded even in the windows of the exhibit (See Images 8.1 and 8.2 in Appendix). The exhibit appeals to the social responsibility of the larger community as well, which may have been controversial considering the negative social stigma attached with the asylum. Nevertheless, the presentation of the “Deserted” or impoverished is completed in a manner to portray how the community supported even the most destitute as this was an obligation of rural society. It also discusses how inmates were contracted out to local farmers to ensure they could once again contribute as members of a community. Since the museum opened its doors in May 1975, the building was always considered as part of the exhibition.\(^{30}\) On the exterior, the structure was engraved with the words “County Poor House” and “County House of Industry Erected A.D. 1877”. In the 1920s, the word “Poor” was removed from the original entrance in an effort to erase the stigma of failure from the House’s residents. This process was similarly completed twenty years later when “of Industry” was removed from the latter engraving. However, in 2005 and 2006 the words were restored in an effort to restore the historical integrity of the building. This served to deliver an impression of community responsibility rather than a representation of the rejection of the principles which were the foundation of the institution.\(^{31}\) This demonstration of social acceptance amongst the community of aiding in the reintegration of the ill and poor might appear as controversial. Nevertheless, the museum has maintained this perspective since it was established as a permanent part of the museum in 2006, and even earlier as the structure was embraced by museum curators and administrators.


\(^{31}\) “What’s In a Name,” *If These Walls Could Speak: The House of Industry and Refuge, 1877-1947, Exhibit*, Wellington County Museum and Archives, 2012.
The rural ideal is composed of the themes of community, women, and family because they demonstrate a divide between how rural culture is idealized and how urban culture is perceived as strikingly different. The component which provides the most distinct division, however, is that of nature. In literature and popular culture, rurality is associated with a direct link to the land. At the Wellington County Museum this is achieved with an emphasis on agriculture as an inescapable feature of the local county’s development.

“First Story: The Neutral of Wellington County” was a major gallery installation in June 2003. The exhibit is a retelling of two Neutral sites dating back to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in the area where Puslinch Township is currently located. It was opened with a semi-permanent addition which provided the background for the story titled “Fragments of History: The First 10,000 years” which traces evidence of hunters, gathers, and farmers from the earliest Paleolithic beginnings in Wellington County. The exhibit’s main features consist of native hunting tools and artifacts, as well as a model of the 16th century Neutral site based on the 1983-1984 excavation of long houses by archaeologist Raymond Reid (Appendix 9.1). The exhibit is cloaked with animal furs, antlers, bone implements and the sustenance of the people, primarily corn (See Images 9.2, 9.3, and 9.4 in Appendix).32 The relationship drawn from this display relays an immediate tie between the rural community and the Aboriginal community as they inhabited the same area. Aboriginal populations are considered as possessing the most natural relationship with nature. They were not only the first immigrants to acquire the land and to utilize it for basic survival, but also did not dominate the land, but rather worked with it for

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32 The native artifacts displayed in cases also arrived prior to the complete excavation of the site including projective tools such as the arrowhead with some donations arriving as early as 1979. The artifacts, however, were exhibited only until a piece was stolen from the museum. Following this instance, all originals were replaced with silicone replicas. (http://wcm.pastperfect-online.com/39564cgi/mweb.exe?request=keyword;dtype=d;keyword=exhibited)
continuous resources. By drawing a parallel of interdependence with the natural world between the community and Aboriginals, this reinforces the relationship as characteristic of the land located within the region.

The relationship with nature is strategically carried over into the neighbouring exhibit which features the recreated barn and farming implements demonstrating that settlement of the area did not dictate an annihilation of the land, but rather another method of inter-dependence between the people and the land as the people worked closely with agriculture (See Image 10.1 in Appendix). Unlike the connotations of conquering the land, however, the farming tools are those used by hand, and reveal that rural life still maintained an unbreakable link of man working with nature. These implements, and those similar to them, have been showcased by the museum in similar contexts, consistently maintaining this natural relationship with the land as demonstrated by artifacts in the exhibits of the late 1980s (See Image 11.1 in Appendix).

These permanent exhibits at the Wellington County Museum are recent contributions which will remain as ongoing inspiration for visitors, as well as for museum staff who may connect them with upcoming temporary exhibits or make alterations to the displays based on incoming feedback or new artifact additions. Nevertheless, more than others, these exhibits embody the museum’s principles and interests and speak to its relationship with the surrounding community, as well as serve as a contrast to the continuously changing nature of the temporary exhibit.

**Temporary Exhibits**

Temporary exhibits appear in local county museums for a variety of reasons and for a range of weeks or months dependent upon their purpose. If an exhibit is constructed to mark an
anniversary or commemoration of a historical event, such as the War of 1812 or the sinking of the Titanic, they may remain a part of the collection for over a year. On the other hand, travelling exhibits which are erected quite frequently at the museum may stay for only a few weeks before they continue to the next institution scheduled to host the artifacts. Some temporary exhibits are created as part of annual celebrations, such as the 2000 “Mother Earth” textile exhibit, which was a tribute to the International Plowing Match, while others are tributes to local individuals such as “Remembering Jane” in 2003 which honoured the work of Nichol Township artist Jane Baldwin who was tragically killed three years earlier. Temporary exhibits installed from the museum’s permanent collection are often reflective of either the curator’s personal preferences or to display new and complete artifact collections which would contribute to a comprehensive exhibit as opposed to an inconsistent display of objects.

Nevertheless, temporary exhibits require an independent analysis in the context of the rural ideal from those ongoing exhibitions which are constructed to reflect very specific images of the local community. These exhibits are unique as the motives behind their integration into the museum are primarily to attract new and larger audiences. As such, some of the larger exhibits may possess no correlation with the community at all and others might attempt to appeal to a broader audience with a focus on a broad theme without making reference to the county. With the exception of the travelling exhibitions, however, the artifacts which remain in the archives at Wellington County are exclusively historical to the region. As such, the arrangement of artifacts and the articulation of the accompanying texts demonstrate an emphasis on several of the components of the rural ideal. The majority of temporary exhibits created by the Museum since

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its arrival at its current location in 1975 can be categorized into one of the four components of the rural ideal.

Prior to engaging in a discussion of the parallels between exhibition and ideology, however, it is important to consider the role of travelling exhibits. These exhibits demonstrate a relationship which exists amongst Ontario museums. Travelling exhibits also offer smaller county museums, such as this, artifacts to display that would previously have been unavailable to them. For example, in the Winter of 2000, a travelling exhibit from the Bruce County Museum came to Elora which brought together a history of the Middle Ages through the use of heraldic banners, building models, hands-on Medieval games, astrolabes, construction and metal working tools, as well as a 200-foot embroidered replica of the Bayeaux Tapestry.\textsuperscript{34} The history of the exhibit had no relevance to the community or to Canadian history, nor would it host historical items from the area; however, it offered the museum the opportunity to exhibit these artifacts. Ultimately, exhibits such as these add variety and encourage repeat visits from local residents. In addition, travelling exhibits may also inspire similar exhibits. For example, in 1979 Wellington County Museum was the home of a travelling display from the Royal Ontario Museum entitled “Indian Rock Paintings” which was comprised of reproductions of very early Native art painted on rock faces.\textsuperscript{35} Within the same year, donations of local native artifacts such as projective tools were collected and displayed in the museum.\textsuperscript{36} This can be seen as the forefront of the permanent “First Story” exhibit which currently appears in the museum.

\textsuperscript{34}“Upcoming Exhibits,” \textit{Circa} 14, no. 1 (Winter 2000).
Furthermore, travelling exhibits allow the museum to demonstrate the hard-work of curators across southern Ontario, and to display their own. The museum has hosted exhibits since the late 1980s when it had its first outside exhibit, the Ontario Science Centre’s Moth exhibit created through the Academy of Medicine in Toronto. Additionally the Markham Museum contributed “The Mennonite View: The Carvings of Jacob Roth” in 2001. A variety of exhibits from Bruce County Museum including “The County Bicycle Shop” in the Spring of 2003 have appeared in Wellington County as well as Guelph Civic Museum exhibits such as “Sitting Pretty: the History of the Toilet” in 2006 and “Remembering John McCrae, 1872-1918” in 2008. “Arresting Images: Mug Shots from the OPP Museum” celebrated the 100th anniversary of the Ontario Provincial Police in 2010 and was circulated by the OPP Museum in Orillia. Additionally, travelling exhibits shown in larger national museums such as “Over Here: Women, Work and World War II” which drew international attention with its display at the Canadian War Museum have made their way to the countryside. The Wellington County Museum also engages in this reciprocal process, creating outreach exhibits intended for display at other institutions such as “Minto Township Heritage” in 2004 which featured textiles from the Museum’s collection that celebrated the heritage of Minto Township, Clifford, Harriston and Palmerston.

The Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) has produced numerous travelling exhibits which have been influential at the county museum and generated popular interest. Following the 1987 renovation of the Museum, which included an environmentally controlled loading dock off of a new 2,000-square-foot gallery, the museum was able to meet the stringent requirements demanded by the ROM for its travelling exhibits. One of the first of these exhibits appeared in

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the winter of 1989 entitled “Korea: Land of the Morning Calm” inspired by the 1988 summer Olympics in Seoul, Korea.\textsuperscript{40} Finally, Wellington County has hosted a regular travelling exhibit from the ROM: “Egypt, Gift of the Nile”. This recurrent exhibit has entertained audiences at Wellington County in late 1998, spring of 2003 and 2006, winter of 2008, and returned most recently in the winter of 2011. The Dino-Mobile which travels from Toronto has also engaged in frequent stops in the county. These large-scale exhibits produce larger audiences and attract media attention and public interest to the institution. In spite of this, however, they are excluded from the study of the rural ideal as the purposes of these exhibits predominately possess no historical co-relation to rural living or the region. Furthermore, the museum curators and administrators are not the chief facilitators of the artifacts leaving little room to analyze how the displayed arrangement characterizes any relevant ideology.

Temporary exhibits created by the museum, however, offer valuable contributions to the discussion and are analyzed under the similar components of the rural ideal as expressed by permanent exhibits. This analysis is undertaken separately to reflect on the evolution of the temporary exhibits as they link historical objects. Furthermore, the multitude of temporary exhibits relates to their continuous development and revivals, possessing a linear history of creation and construction relevant to the periods in which they are displayed which possess distinct perspectives and processes. Nevertheless, the rural ideal remains a prevalent feature throughout these transformations.

As with the current permanent exhibits, the portrayal of family as a self-sustaining and economically independent singular unit has penetrated the temporary exhibits since the emergence of the museum in the 1970s. This component can primarily be traced through exhibits

which emphasize the raising of young children. In 1979 a new exhibit was installed in the lobby entitled “School Days in Wellington County” from the 1820s and 1840s, into the end of the nineteenth century. Included were photographs of schools and school children from around the County as well as report cards and graduation certificates to complete the exhibit.\(^1\) Similarly, as one of the first exhibits installed at the new museum in 1975, a gallery full of children’s toys and clothes was included. These artifacts can be seen in various forms throughout the following decades. In December of 1982, the Curator, Ellen Landlands, placed some of these artifacts in a display which focused solely on dolls. This was spurred by the visiting exhibit from the Ukrainian Museum in Toronto which contributed one set of dolls, the “Dolls of Ukraine”, to the exhibit.\(^2\) This theme has been echoed in more recent exhibits as well which focus on the family through the responsibility of raising children. For example, in 1990 a similar theme was developed in a newly created exhibit “A Child’s World”. Located in the Costume Gallery, this exhibit was explicitly intended to store and display beautiful samples of late-nineteenth century children’s costumes.\(^3\)

In 2000, “Cradle Talk”, a collection of gadgets and household items were put on display which aided in the fashioning of babies into responsible, well-adjusted adults.\(^4\) A similar exhibit was presented in November and October of 2005 entitled “Just Like Mom & Dad”, which reflected the nineteenth century’s idea of children as little adults. Toys which replicated the work of adults such as housekeeping and baby care for girls and tools and trucks for boys were placed

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\(^3\) *Circa* 5, no. 1 (Winter 1990).

in comparison with the adult objects on which they were modeled.\textsuperscript{45} Placing an emphasis on the recreational enjoyment of children, the 2003 exhibit “Indoors & Outdoors: Children’s Games and Toys” featured sleds, toboggans, board games, dolls, and pull toys. Drawing on the previous collections of toys, in 2004, the theme was continued with “Toys Are Us: Historical Dolls and Toys” which displayed seventy toys, dolls, puzzles, and game boards ranging from the 1880s to the 1950s. Some of the highlights of the exhibit included a hand-made Noah’s Ark circa 1930; dinky toys from the 1950s; a 1920s doll dressed in the black habit of a nun; two 1950s marionettes; and a 1908 Eaton’s Beauty Doll (Appendix 12.1). Along the same lines of featuring toys, dolls and games, a later exhibit which opened in the Museum in January 2009, “Child’s Play” highlighted the vast array of playthings in the Wellington County collection and extended with new additions into the 1980s.\textsuperscript{46} The theme has been maintained into the present with the 2012 exhibit entitled “Summer Pleasures” featuring many children’s toys and clothing. However, similar to the previous exhibit “Just Like Mom & Dad”, this current display provides a more wholesome image of the entire family with bathing suits for the adults, as well as recreational activities which include the whole family such as biking or crocket (See Appendix 12.2; 12.3).

As men and women are historically represented as distinctive in terms of labour and recreation, it is difficult to provide a singular representation of a household. Through an appeal to children as the primary representation of families, the theme of childhood activities including school, games, and clothing can be seen as a consistent focus of the exhibits presented by the Museum since the establishment of its initial galleries. Children serve to represent the basic social and economic organism of rural life – the family – and as such speak to the self-

\textsuperscript{45} “Exhibit Highlights,” Circa 18, no. 4 (Autumn 2004).
\textsuperscript{46} “Upcoming Exhibits,” Circa 23, no. 1 (Winter 2009).
sufficiency and independence which characterizes the capacity for work and recreation throughout the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth century.

The concept of community similarly serves as a method of categorization of the large quantity of exhibits which have passed through the doors of this local county institution. These exhibits consist of a variety of topics, including local businesses and influential members of the community in addition to shared communal interests or celebrations of the numerous villages and townships which comprise the larger county. Several artifacts pertaining to a turn-of-the-century general store were arranged along a period countertop in one of the original exhibits in 1975. Amongst these items were also featured artifacts such as an original prisoner’s box, a Union Jack and pigeon holes from the old county court building, in addition to tools used by coopers, agrarians, woodworkers, and shoemakers from the region. A more comprehensive and organized reconstruction of the general store was organized a few years later complete with shelves lined with goods in packages familiar to the nineteenth century inhabitants. Through displaying history as represented by local historic stores and trades of businesses, the concept of community is stressed as a defining feature of rural society.

Prominent individuals also served as a theme which developed in the creation of exhibits in the Museum, speaking to the essence of community. In 1979, the main lobby featured an exhibit on Dr. Abraham Groves, a humanitarian who contributed greatly to the health and welfare of the community, as well as to the advancement of medical knowledge. The exhibit outlined his career while also adding a personal perspective including the display of his study lamp, watch, and pipe. “A Century of Service: 100 Years at Groves Memorial Hospital”

continued the story of the exhibit over twenty years later in March 2002, which focused on the progressive contribution of Dr. Grove’s hospital, the Royal Alexandra, and the School for Nurses.50 A similar presentation was created on behalf of David Boyle, who served as Principal at Elora Public School in 1871.

Exhibits which extend beyond the bounds of the physical community evoke images of the local regions as representations for national and international commemorative events through referencing individuals with whom the residents of the county have a direct relation through shared geographical space. In 2012, two exhibits of this nature were erected at Wellington County Museum including for the War of 1812 and to mark the anniversary of the sinking of the Titanic in April 1912. The latter exhibit features information solely mediated along the walls of the gallery. While the sinking of the Titanic is a renowned tale, this exhibit re-evaluates the key features of the story, not focusing on the grandeur and unfortunate events of the ship itself, but instead upon one individual aboard who heralded from Fergus of Wellington County, Ontario. His name was Thomson Beattie (See Appendix 12.6). The focal point of this exhibit centralized around the life of the individual and the small portion of his life which he experienced aboard and the tragic manner through which he met his end. Having sunk with the ship and while escaping into Collapsible Boat A, he died of exposure at dawn. His body, however, was left along with two others, not retrieved with the remainder of the survivors. A month later his body was found onboard a lifeboat, saved from the icy water by two sailors.51 Thus amongst tales of Thomson’s mother and friends, including a young woman named Maud MacArthur, and a copy of his last postcard (See Appendix 12.7, 12.8 and 12.9), there is only one display which

51 “Titanic” Exhibit, Wellington County Museum and Archives, 2012.
references the Titanic as independent from Thomson. This speaks specifically to the wireless operators who tried to contact rescue vessels as the ship sank (See Appendix 12.10 and 12.11).

The War of 1812 exhibit uses the same method of drawing on the individual in its display entitled “Richard Pierpoint: Slave, Soldier, Settler”. Also an inhabitant of Fergus, Pierpoint is used to provide a semblance of insight into “the suffering and achievements – through slavery, war and peace – of early African Americans in Upper Canada.”\(^{52}\) This exhibit develops the narrative of Pierpoint, who led a league of Coloured Corps during the War of 1812 and was subsequently rewarded by the Upper Canadian Government with a land grant for his service. Featuring tools, weapons and uniforms relevant to the era of the war (See Appendix 12.12 and 12.13), the exhibit is mostly dedicated to Pierpoint’s journey following his struggle to find, clear, and maintain his grant of land in Fergus unsettled by the racial prejudice which remained prevalent yet countered by the opportunities that loyalty attributed to former slaves (See Appendix 12.14, 12.15 and 12.16).

The use of Thomas Beattie and Richard Pierpoint to represent the anniversary of two events which possess an affect felt far beyond the borders of Wellington County speaks directly to the idealized nature of community. Beyond a method of intriguing local residents, by employing a direct relationship which inhabitants can relate to, it emphasizes a feeling of sameness and continuity which has existed in the region since the early nineteenth century.

Populations and towns have also served to invoke ideas of community through similar methods. This is particularly exemplified in two exhibits from 1987. One consisted of a display about the towns and villages of Wellington County, showing items specific to each town or village including the Palmerstone hearse, a hand-carved horse-drawn wagon built around 1905.

\(^{52}\) “Richard Pierpoint: Slave, Soldier, Settler” Exhibit, Wellington County Museum and Archives, 2012.
(See Appendix 12.2; 12.3). The second exhibit was a display of the ghost towns of Wellington County including Aboyne, Hollen and Maryborough Township.53 Furthermore, in an exhibit which seems to emphasize differences in the culture of the community, “From the Old County” opened in May 2011 to depict the many immigrant populations from across the globe that uprooted their lives to settle in Wellington County, a classic Canadian multiculturalism tale. The exhibit features items which people brought with them (See Appendix 12.4; 12.5), however, these tokens are used as reminders that bear witness to the strength of community and the integration and inter-dependence necessary for successful settlement, in spite of cultural barriers.54

Finally, the component of community echoes through the exhibits which feature interests considered characteristic of the community. In 2000, “Music in Wellington County” depicted music as an integral part of the cultural experience in the County, whether at weddings, funerals, quilting bees or card parties. The exhibit stresses how, through song and instruments, elders taught music as a means of passing traditions onto younger generations.55 This is further substantiated with two exhibits which pay tribute to the music and commitment of the Fergus Brass Band which appeared in 2000 and 2004-2005.56 On the other hand, a recent exhibit from November 2008 entitled “Plugged In!” highlighted electrically powered objects, and constructed these artifacts to depict the manner in which community is maintained through connections established through audio, visual, and telecommunications tools and equipments.57

54 “Upcoming Exhibits,” Circa 25, no. 2 (Spring/Summer 2011).
55 “Upcoming Exhibits,” Circa 14, no. 3 (Summer 2000).
57 “Upcoming Exhibits,” Circa 22, no. 3 (Autumn 2008).
Several exhibits over the decades have appealed to the history of domesticity and family, focusing their exhibits of feminine objects and female life. Numerous exhibits have displayed fashion or clothing which was popular, while others showcased textiles and decorative glass or beads made by women over the nineteenth and twentieth century. For example, in 1979, one of the most extensive displays offered by the museum was of wedding dresses which showed how the style evolved from the early-nineteenth century through to the end of World War I. At the same time, a large display of handcrafted nightgowns was located in the recreated Victorian bedrooms.58

The prominent outlet through which the history of women has been portrayed, however, is around the theme of household objects which are representative of the labour undertaken by females in the rural setting. Starting in 1975, artifacts such as tools for sewing, cooking, and cleaning were on display,59 some of which were later incorporated into a gallery which hosted displays of early hand-operated mangles and primitive washing machines in 1979.60 These items have been placed for interpretation by public audiences throughout the decades, whether in specific galleries or in small display cases, however, the theme continues to play a key role in the museums rotating temporary exhibits as demonstrated by two of the more current exhibits. The exhibit, “Keeping Clean” created in late 2011 describes the long and laborious tasks of soap making, laundering, and housecleaning, exploring the methods and improvements over the years.61 Display cases are filled with laundry detergent and soaps, and numerous washing basins are showcased throughout the room to demonstrate the changes which occurred with new innovations (See Appendix 12.6; 12.7). Transferring the depiction of female labour into the

61“Upcoming Exhibits,” Circa 24, no. 3 (Autumn 2010).
kitchen, February 2009 saw the establishment of “A Century of Kitchenware” which celebrates the activities and evolution of culinary history. Kitchen appliances and cookware are displayed in an evolutionary sequence to illustrate the changes in the inventive devices which have been utilized by women for decades, and even centuries. The arrangement of these artifacts to show their development and adaptation to technological advancements specifically relates to the efficiency by which women could complete their domestic labour. This also demonstrates the value women possessed in their contributions to family and community life.

The final component of the rural ideal which is paralleled throughout the temporary exhibits of the Wellington County Museum is the maintenance of ties to nature, or the land, as inherent to rural society. The exhibits which relate to this concept possess two distinctive approaches. On one hand, they appeal to specific attributes of nature and relate it to the region. In 2002, an exhibit entitled “A Love of Nature” was created which drew from the museum’s collection to include birds, animals, and foliage which appeared in works from the nineteenth and early-twentieth century. An additional exhibit was placed on display in the same year which featured a textile collection portraying birds. Drawing from a more symbolic approach, “Shades of Brown” appeared in the spring of 2007, utilizing brown artifacts to evoke a meaningful message, drawing on its rich tones and their relation to the natural world.

The second manner through which nature is reflected in these exhibits is through an emphasis on the agricultural roots of the County. These artifacts have been collected by the museum since its inception. At its original location in the town of Elora, the majority of articles

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64 “Upcoming Exhibits,” Circa, Volume 21, no. 2 (Spring/Summer 2007).
consisted of hundreds of tools from the 1800s used by pioneer craftsmen of the area.\textsuperscript{65} Since the permanent relocation of the Museum, extensive displays relating to the early settlement of Wellington County have included pioneer agricultural elements such as the walking plough.\textsuperscript{66} An agricultural display has been present in one of the main galleries, changing and growing with new donations and ideas. In 1979, the exhibit which outlined the surveying and clearing of the county was enhanced with a charcoal sketch on the wall depicting the role of oxen power in clearing of the land and in the tilling and cultivating of the soil.\textsuperscript{67} Currently, these types of artifacts are located in the permanent exhibit depicting a recreated Log Cabin and Barn, nevertheless, they serve as integral pieces in various temporary and expanding displays, constantly reinforcing the tie between rural labour and nature.

The four components of the rural ideal can be seen as embedded in the permanent and temporary exhibits at the Wellington County Museum. While this analysis does not argue that the re-enforcement of this ideology is intentional completed on behalf of the curator and museum staff, a co-relation exists between the ideal and the representation of history at the institution. The displays at this museum are used to demonstrate a pattern which may be seen at similar local county museums across Ontario which possess similar features, histories, and characteristics as the museum located in Elora. Nevertheless, this analysis is not intended to generalize these institutions but merely draw attention to the potential for an ideology to influence and engage with audiences, utilizing the arrangement of artifacts in exhibit displays to engage with the general population.

\textsuperscript{65}“You Won’t Find Mummified Egyptians – But Dr. Grove’s Operating Table is in Basement,” \textit{Fergus News Record}, Wednesday June 10, 1970.
\textsuperscript{66}Harry McDougall, “Museum Once Home to County’s Poor,” \textit{Kitchener-Waterloo Record}, Saturday, December 26, 1987.
\textsuperscript{67}“New Displays at the County Museum,” \textit{Wellington Advertiser}, October 15, 1979.
CONCLUSION

The rural ideal is an intellectual construct which emphasizes a romanticized and idealistic representation of rural life, claiming a moral superiority over the contrasting modern urban society. This analysis demonstrates the ability of an ideology to manifest itself in the local county museums across the region of Southern Ontario as symbolized by the Wellington County Museum and Archives through the exhibit which acts in the same manner as text or images to deliver this concept to the public.

Permanent and temporary exhibits at Wellington County demonstrate the potential for artifacts and information to be presented in a manner which abides by a particularly positive interpretation of a rural past. The exhibition of the rural ideal remains balanced around the four components of the rural ideal, which serve as an organizing feature of this thesis. These historical displays portray the rural ideal by focusing on themes of domesticity, economic independence, community, and nature to perpetuate this mythical ideology.

The museum as an object of study emerged with the onset of public history. While different from academic institutions which possess a scholarly claim to the discipline of history, museum exhibits broaden the potential reach of rural history, and as a result, the rural ideal. In the same manner as authors or academics who have sought to further the understanding of rural history and culture, these exhibits in local county museums have the potential to reach an audience untouched by the publications prevalent at universities. Appealing to the local inhabitants of the region, as well as the grandeur community who enter into an institution similar to the Wellington County Museum, visitors become immediately engaged with a history which has been constructed for them. Engrained with an authenticity which becomes associated with
research and study of the past, these exhibits do not exist as “facts” but instead as an interpretation which is suited to a particular social and political context based upon key facets of the institution such as the necessity for the continuation of funding.

There exists no shortage of rural county museums across southern Ontario, all equipped with attributes and characteristics similar to Wellington County Museum. In the process of research which has defined this thesis, various local county and rural museums were considered for comparative and contextual purposes. A few examples of these establishments across Southern Ontario include the Brant County Museum and Archives, the Huron County Museum, the Paris Historical Museum, the Jordan Historical Museum, the Dufferin County Museum and Archives, the Guelph Civic Museum, Haldimand County Museum, and the Princeton Museum. Many elements exist as common features of these institutions. Funding, collecting, managing, and constructing histories which undoubtedly share roots based on similar periods of settlement and similar methods of extracting from the land for survival. Communities across southern Ontario appear to be related through similar settlement patterns of immigrant populations adapting to the toil of the soil and the cultivation of the land. As a result, the local county and rural museums which have been established across the region possess many of the same methods of operation and display in their exhibition.

The collection of artifacts marks the beginning of these institutions. Since these regions possess similar agricultural roots, much of their collections are comparable amongst their, literally, thousands of documents and artifacts. The total reliance on donation remains the common element throughout Southern Ontario. The collections consist of documents, ceramics, furniture, recreational equipment, machinery, agricultural implements, clothing, textiles, photographs, books, First Nations artifacts, local religious and social organizations
commemoratives, as well as model scaled and full-sized structures.\(^1\) The museums are willing to accept items which are associated with pre-history, such as artifacts from Aboriginal populations, as well as more recent contemporary items.

Each of these institutions have been established to speak specifically to individual communities, engrained with a distinct rural history, and to serve as key locations of history, heritage, and tourism. This leads to an historical quandary of allegiance and obligation. Exhibits must tread lightly to ensure a positive image of the history of the area and those who inhabit it and avoid anything which may be considered offensive to the population or succeeding generations which may visit the establishment. As these museums all represent rural areas, they serve as the prime potential outlets for the rural ideal – romanticizing and idealizing rural life – to ensure survival and acceptance amongst their chief visitors. The capacity to influence the general population with a distinct expression of rural life as idealized means these communities feed into popular culture and shape the interpretation of local history.

Similar to commemorative events, fictional literature, tourism brochures, and festivals, the Wellington County Museum and Archives represents similar institutions spread across the region of southern Ontario. Dissecting the individual exhibits in this establishment serves to demonstrate the ability to replicate the rural ideal throughout this context and explore the relevance of this as an interpretation which becomes engrained in public memory. Beyond a

simple ideology, the rural ideal has been manipulated and adapted and is maintained as a prevalent feature of a distinctly Canadian identity.
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APPENDIX

Note: Unless otherwise stated, all photographs taken by author at the Wellington County Museum and Archives, July 16, 2012.

Image 1.1

Image 2.1
This longhouse, measuring about 60 feet (23 metres) in length, represents the fourth longhouse found at the 16th century hamlet. It would house as many as 50 people who were all inter-related to their mothers, sisters and wives.

The longhouse was divided in several sections by furs and mats hung from the bunks; several families would make use of each fire pit to cook their meals of fish and corn stew or deer and wild turkey meat. The smoke from the many firepits caused a great deal of eye damage to the inhabitants.

In the winter, furs were laid out on the ground around the fire for the sleepers. The bunks, also used for sleeping, were layered with sticks, elm bark, cedar branches and furs.
What The Letters Don’t Tell Us

Letters from the soldiers to loved ones at home told families little of the true picture of trench warfare. Every letter was read by officers and censored of complaints or detailed descriptions of battle. The soldiers themselves practised self-censorship and wrote only about the weather, farm practices of the French, and to reassure their families that their wounds were slight.

Private Gordon Jones of Pilkington Township:

A letter to his mother:

"June 16, 1916. I went into the trench and was getting along alright until a shell came along and bursted in front of me. Well, that gave me a shock and kind of disoriented me, also the gas got into my eyes and made them red and watery, but never mind, I'll come around alright." 

A letter from the Chaplain:

"Gordon Jones of Pilkington Township was partially deafened by the explosion. Chlorine gas caused soldiers to turn blue in the face and vomit uncontrollably as it seared their lungs.

Gordon returned to his battalion a few weeks later and was again severely wounded."

Image 5.2

Image 5.3
Image 5.4

Image 6.1
Image 12.3


Image 12.4
Image 12.5


Image 12.6
Dear Helen,

I am sending this card to you to tell you of my change of plans.

I have been fortunate to get passage on a great new transatlantic boat on her maiden voyage across the Atlantic. I will be a week late returning to my family, but this will be a great opportunity for all Thomson.

Miss Helen Phillips
150 Union Street W.
Fergus, Ontario
Canada
Titanic’s wireless operators worked desperately to contact the nearest rescue vessels as the ship sank. For the first time, the new international distress signal ‘SOS’ was used by a ship in distress.

In these telegrams, Titanic’s sister ship, Olympic, passed on the unthinkable news that the ship had hit an iceberg and, by the time Carpathia reached it at dawn, only lifeboats and 700 survivors were visible.
In the early 1820s, before the village of Pergus was settled nearby, Richard Pierpoint arrived to take up his land grant in the wilderness of Garafaxa. At least two other African veterans of the Coloured Corps were granted land nearby – John Van Rotten and Robert Jupiter, who died before he arrived. Several white Niagara-area war veterans were also granted land in the area.

To claim their land from the Crown, each settler had to clear five acres of bush, build a cabin and complete a road allowance along his property. Pierpoint, who had never married and was now in his nineties, would have relied on the assistance of his friends and neighbours to complete the tasks. He was granted ownership in 1826.
THE UNCERTAIN REWARDS OF LOYALTY:
Niagara (1790s -1810)

In pre-1800s, the Niagara region of Upper Canada transformed from a wilderness frontier to an area of settlement. Those who had fought for the British were granted land, including ‘Free Negroes’ like Richard Pierpoint. Racism persisted and isolation, however, discouraged successful settlement by black settlers.

In this revealing ‘Petition of Free Negro’ (1796) to Lieutenant-Governor John Graves Simcoe, nineteen men requested that they be allowed to live and work together to build a strong settlement.

The petition was rejected—perhaps because authorities feared the threat of revolt against Upper Canada’s settlers.

Pierpoint struggled to settle his 200-acre grant in Grantham Township (present-day St. Catharines), eventually selling it in 1806. He was now 63 years old.

REVOLUTION: The Opportunities of War

To augment their numbers in the American Revolutionary War (1776-1783), British authorities offered freedom to American slaves who enlisted with Loyalist troops. After twenty years of slavery, Pierpoint seized the opportunity to escape into the Niagara region and join the battalion known as Butler’s Rangers. His name first enters the historical record in 1780 as ‘Pareport, Richard (negro)’ in the roster of Butler’s Rangers.

Although the British lost the war, it was largely because of the guerrilla-style warfare of militia units like Butler’s Rangers and their Indian allies that Britain held the areas north of the Great Lakes.

In 1784, the peace treaty was signed, Butler’s Rangers disbanded, Richard Pierpoint had earned his freedom.