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# Correct clothing for historical interpreters in living history museums

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Correct clothing for historical interpreters in living history museums

by

Laura Marie Poresky

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
MASTER OF SCIENCE

Major: Textiles and Clothing

Major Professor: Dr. Jane Farrell-Beck

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Graduate College  
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This is to certify that the Master's thesis of  
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has met the thesis requirements of Iowa State University

Signatures have been redacted for privacy

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## ABSTRACT

The use of representational clothing at living history museums was investigated in 33 telephone interviews. Time periods from the 17th to 20th centuries were portrayed by the sample of sites, which were located across most of the continental United States.

It was found that most of the sites used third person historical interpretation. Historical clothing was seen as quite important to telling the story of the site; proper clothing helped both visitors and interpreters to understand the site better. The clothing was procured from a number of sources. Maintenance of garments was shared by interpreters and staff. Clothing was found to last approximately two years, depending on the garment and the wearer.

Research sources varied according to time period and region represented. Site clothing was held to be reasonably accurate for the period and region represented. Respondents were divided on the importance of absolute authenticity in clothing to living history sites.

## INTRODUCTION

Living history has become popular in the United States in many forms, from the permanent settings of established sites like Plimoth Plantation to ephemeral weekend Civil War reenactments on county fairgrounds. It can be used for recreation or education, and often combines the two, becoming an entertaining tool for outreach programs and special events. In any form, living history requires efforts in two directions: research to discover the social and material culture of the period of interest, and procurement of objects that represent that material culture. One of the most vital elements of material culture for living history is clothing. Even a vague attempt at period clothing--a slouch hat, a plaid shirt, a long skirt--informs onlookers that they are seeing into the past, although through a distorted lens. It reminds the wearers that they are representatives for the past to the people of the present. Accurately researched and reproduced representational clothing can identify the age, gender, class, and even nationality of the wearer's character, as well as establishing the era being represented.

### Justification

Many North American museums today use costumed guides, either for special events or as regular interpreters of historic sites (Coats, 1990; Dupree-Begos, 1994; Kneubuhl and Strazar, 1994; Russell, 1992). Historic sites often use costumed guides or interpreters as an extension of the museum environment, particularly in farm or village settings, to create living history museums. Whereas the buildings, artifacts, plants and livestock of a site are

often thoroughly researched, historically accurate clothing for the interpreters is sometimes neglected.

Several influences contribute to this neglect. Although a great deal of research has been done on historic clothing, very little has been done to apply this information in a scholarly fashion to the costuming needs of living history. Some aspects of fabric, cut, and construction of clothing have been published (Arnold, 1972a, 1972b, 1985; Farrell-Beck, 1987; Farrell-Beck, Haviland, & Harding 1985-86; Haack & Farrell, 1980; Leisch 1995; Marendy, 1993; Mellor, et al., 1991; Waugh 1964, 1968). With the exceptions of Arnold (1985), Haack and Farrell (1980), and Waugh (1964), the emphasis has been on women's clothing, rather than that of both sexes. In addition, many time periods have been unevenly represented in costume histories, leaving holes in the record. The clothing examined in most histories belonged to the European upper class (Fox & Cottrell, 1988), but living history museums on this continent usually concentrate on the American agrarian classes. Commercial historical patterns tend to conform to living history needs more closely, but are not always reliable tools for creating period-correct representational clothing for men and women: patterns may not fit properly, and sometimes do not reproduce period clothing accurately. The mediocrity of interpreter costume at living history museums may be due to this dearth of information on appropriate period clothing.

Economic factors are another influence on the accuracy of clothing used in living history. Research, materials, and construction all require investments of time and money. Conscientious research must be done by each site to determine available and proper dress

for its own needs. Fabrics with historically suitable characteristics of fiber content, weight, weave and color are often expensive and hard to find. The yardage required for representational garments is frequently very large, especially compared to modern clothing. Finally, period-correct construction often requires unusual, time consuming sewing skills, with extensive hand work used on most garments.

In addition, there is the question of requiring interpreters to wear representational clothing with its attendant discomforts and inconveniences (Campbell, 1995; Graf, 1993; Hall, 1993). From the modern point of view, clothing typical of the nineteenth century and earlier is excessively hot, heavy, and confining for both sexes, especially during the peak summer visitation season. To complicate the issue, little work has been done to discover which kinds of compromises were made from the fashionable styles for work clothing in the past. Obviously, the fine clothing depicted in fashion plates for paying calls was not worn to work the soil, but alternative possibilities have only rarely been considered (Helvenston, 1991).

Few studies have been done on U.S. living history museums as a whole, and none has been done on the attitudes toward clothing as a part of historical interpretation. Information on how living history sites manage their clothing programs would be useful to two different groups: established living history museums looking for ways to improve their clothing programs, and museums or historical sites that are interested in using living history and starting a clothing program. An overview of the methods used by a number of sites shows the many different options utilized to procure clothing for interpreters, and

how they interact with the site's interpretation program as a whole. Based on this information, sites can make educated decisions about their own interpretation programs, and what place representational clothing will have in those programs.

I will explore the reasons why museums use different levels of historical interpretation and standards of dress by interviewing administrators of living history museums and their clothing programs.

### Research Questions

1. Which kinds and combinations of historical interpretation are used at living history museums? Is there a favored kind of historical interpretation in the United States?
2. How do living history museums research representational clothing for costumed interpreters?
3. How do living history museums provide representational clothing for costumed interpreters?
4. How do living history museums maintain representational clothing for costumed interpreters?
5. How do living history museums establish and enforce a designated degree of period correctness in dress for costumed interpreters?
6. Is there any gender bias present in attitudes towards the use of representational clothing in living history?

7. What suggestions do museum administrators have for establishing a clothing program for living history interpretation?

### Operational Definition of Terms

**Clothing/Costume:** the entire set of garments worn by interpreters to represent dress of the past, which may include undergarments such as corsets and petticoats and may extend into hairstyles and cosmetics; dress.

**Clothing Program:** the administrative and practical apparatus for producing and maintaining representational clothing. This includes researching dress of the period and sources for materials, garments, and accessories; procuring the clothing; maintaining clothing stock; and regulating how the clothing is worn by interpreters.

**First Person Interpretation:** interpreting history by speaking and acting as a person of the time period and region represented by the site. To be credible, this form of interpretation requires rigorous research and attention to detail in all aspects of the site. Since the interpreter must know everything the character he or she represents would know, and nothing more, visitors sometimes have difficulty interacting with first-person interpreters.

**Historical Interpreter:** any employee, docent, or volunteer whose job is to give visitors historical information about the site and activities within or around the actual exhibits.

In living history, the interpreter is often part of the museum exhibit, and there is no express barrier between the visitor and the exhibit.

Living History Museum: any museum listed in Jay Anderson's The Living History Sourcebook (1985), denoted as such in the 1996 Official Museum Directory, or described as doing first- or third-person interpretation, living history, or living history events in the "Activities" portion of the citation in said directory.

Open-air Museum: A living history museum that may or may not have first- or third-person interpreters. Open-air museums usually concentrate on an outdoor site, such as a farm or a fort; living history museums can be run within a single building.

Representational Clothing: clothing designed to represent garments of the past, of any degree of accuracy to a particular time and place (Dowd, 1993).

Third Person Interpretation: interpreting history from a modern perspective while engaged in activities appropriate to the site, usually in representational dress. This form of interpretation allows for easier communication between interpreters and visitors, but weakens the impression of being transported in time that results from good first person interpretation.

### Objectives

1. To describe the types and combinations of historical interpretation currently used at living history sites.
2. To discover how living history museums research clothing appropriate for their sites.
3. To discover how historical interpreters obtain the clothing they work in at living history sites.
4. To explore how living history museums establish and enforce a designated degree of historical accuracy for costumed interpreters to complement the site as a whole.
5. To offer guidelines for improving or establishing costume programs at living history sites.

### Assumptions

1. Informants will answer the questions honestly and according to their knowledge when interviewed.
2. Questions will elicit useful information.

### Limitations

1. The results from this study may not be generalizable to the opinions of other living history museum staff or to other living history museums in the U.S.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Many books have been published on costume history, but the larger number of them are unsuitable as sources for American living history clothing programs, since they concentrate on European aristocracy and upper-class fashions. Where relatively little research has been conducted on a time period in this country, English sources such as Arnold (1972a, 1972b, 1985) and Waugh (1964, 1968) are used with reservations. To fill in the gaps, some living history sites have collaborated with scholars to research clothing (Gehert 1976; Haack & Farrell, 1980). These studies have been very specific to the time and place represented by the site, and may not be useful to sites representing the same period, in different regions. Some works on general aspects of fabric, cut, and construction of clothing in the United States have been published (Farrell-Beck, 1987; Farrell-Beck, Haviland & Harding 1985-86; Leisch 1995; Marendy, 1993; Mellor, et al., 1991).

Aside from Leisch (1995), few authors have written for an audience interested in reproducing clothing, although some efforts to redress this lack are evident in recent papers and posters presented at Costume Society of America (CSA) symposia (Wascom, 1994, 1995). Presenters at past symposia have described clothing from specific areas, from Canada to New Zealand (Gousse, 1995; Malthus, 1994) and for specific uses, including festivals, rebellions, and pregnancy (Danischewski, 1995; Romaniw, 1994; Zucco, 1995). Representational clothing for museum use has been the topic of several CSA presentations, ranging from Sorge's adaptation of eighteenth century stays for the modern figure (1995)

to Kondo's reproduction of modern Tibetan garments (1995). Not all of the topics covered at the Costume Society's symposia or in Dress, its annual publication, have been pertinent to the field of living history, certainly; the Society's interests overlap with those of living history specialists, but also go beyond them.

The Association for Living Historical Farms and Agricultural Museums (ALHFAM) was established to serve living history sites and staff; its publications have dealt with many aspects of recreating the past, including museum management. Its Historic Clothing Committee puts out a quarterly newsletter which has treated collections care and clothing programs at various museums. ALHFAM's annual conferences have usually included papers or workshops on period clothing.

Midwest Open Air Museums Magazine, published by the Midwest Open-Air Museums Coordinating Council (an affiliate of ALHFAM), has frequently featured articles on historic clothing and specific garments from museum collections. Many of these articles have been calculated to be useful to all segments of the living history audience. S. LeCount's (1995) examination of early American great coats included discussions on terminology for garments and textiles, and described the construction and materials used in four extant coats. A more limited study, of 1840s tail coats, gave only physical descriptions of a selection of garments (Torgerson, 1993). Shaw's articles in the Magazine include overviews on the construction and use of common garments (1995a, 1995b), along with pieces that set a single extant garment in its historical and functional contexts (1994, 1996).

Despite the efforts of ALHFAM and MOMCC, research concerning how museums might

establish and run the clothing program of a historic site using first or third person historical interpretation has been rare. Joan Severa's (1979) leaflet on authentic costuming has been the only thorough publication on the subject in seventeen years, although briefer articles on authenticity have appeared (Ferguson, 1981; Loba, 1996; Shaw, 1993). In a pair of papers titled "It's Too Hot!," Graf (1993) and Hall (1993) discussed some of the problems of enforcing a clothing policy: the interpreters did not understand what authentic costuming required, or disliked the way period clothing looked on them, or found that it was uncomfortable. Evidence from other fields has suggested that people doing physical labor (at least in the last few decades) preferred comfort over correct or even safe clothing (DeJonge, Vredevoogd, Henry, 1983-84). Most of the recent literature on historical interpretation concerning clothing has been addressed to reenactors, who are usually independent of museums and individually responsible for finding their clothing (Hadden, 1996; Johnson, 1995).

The problem of creating and maintaining clothing for interpreters has been addressed on an individual basis by the ALHFAM committee for that topic (S. LeCount, personal communication, October 8, 1996). The series "Reproduction Clothing at Historic Sites: Costume Programs" described a selection of "well-established costume programs" (C. LeCount & Shaw, 1996). The articles have shown that sites have many different ways of managing clothing programs. Historic Fort Snelling emphasized adherence to a clearly stated list of guidelines for correct period appearance (LeCount & Shaw, 1996). Old Salem developed an enforcement policy to ensure compliance to its costume policy (LeCount &

Hall, 1996). Interpreters at Connor Prairie purchased their representational clothing, instead of borrowing it from the site as at the first two sites. Lincoln Log Cabin provided clothing for hired staff, but required volunteers to obtain their own; suitable clothing could be purchased from the site itself, and outgrown adolescent clothing traded in without cost (Nordmeyer, 1996). A study examining the interpretation and clothing programs of a number of sites would not replace these case studies, but would offer an overview of current practices in living history museums.

## PROCEDURES

Selection of Subjects

Subjects were selected from two sources: Jay Anderson's Living History Sourcebook (1985) which lists 62 living history sites in the continental United States, and The 1996 Official Museum Directory (American Association of Museums). I cross-referenced sites from the Sourcebook with the Directory to find living history sites that were still in business. Additional sites were chosen from the Directory to broaden the focus of the study, since many of Anderson's sites were in the eastern United States. Efforts were also made to make the sample representative of the historic periods interpreted in this country, from seventeenth century colonists to twentieth century tractor farmers. Western and southwestern museums were chosen based on whether the "Activities" section of the Directory mentioned first- or third-person interpretation, or living history. Attempts were made to include large- and small-scale sites in the sample. I established a purposive sample of 43 sites, representing all regions of the continental United States as well as all of the time periods represented by North American museums. Given the pattern of European immigration on this continent (Enscore, 1996), this resulted in an unavoidable geographical bias toward the East Coast. The sample was also dominated by sites representing the nineteenth century, although the full range of periods was present.

Potential contact persons for each site were selected from the Directory. Letters soliciting interviews were sent to each site in October 1996 (see Appendix A), and follow-up calls made after a one-month interval. Several sites did not reply, and were struck from

the sample, leaving thirty-one sites. These sites were sent a second letter, explaining the main content of the interview questions, and requesting an interview time during January or February 1997 (see Appendix B). The winter months are the off-season for many open-air museums; it was anticipated that contactees would have more free time to be interviewed during that time. A total of thirty-three people were interviewed: one site asked me to interview two people, and one respondent suggested that I interview one of the National Park Service's experts in representational clothing (see Table 1).

Table 1: Interview Subjects

Subject name	Site and state	period
J. Roderick Moore	Blue Ridge Institute VA	1800
Maryanne Andrus	The Homeplace 1850 KY	1845–1859
John Johnson	Georgia Agrirama GA	1870–1910
Stephen E. Saunders	Jarrell Plantation Georgia State Historic Site GA	1850–1900s
Mike Capps	Lincoln Boyhood National Memorial IN	1820s
Susan Nordmeyer	Lincoln Log State Historic Site IL	1845, 1870s
James McKenna	Old Bethpage Village Restoration NY	1765, 1815–1884
Maiken Nielsen	Sunnyside Manor, Historic Hudson Valley NY	1845–1859
Jennifer Anderson–Lawrence	Philipsburg Manor, Historic Hudson Valley NY	1690–1750
Bill Schroh	Van Cortlandt Manor, Historic Hudson Valley NY	1790–1820
Douglas DeCroix	Old Fort Niagra NY	circa 1779
Elaine A. Wisowaty	Sainte Marie Among the Iroquois NY	1657
Katie Boardman	The Farmers' Museum, Inc. NY	1845
Keith Bott	Fosterfields Living Historical Farm NJ	1880–1910
Robert Richter	Mystic Seaport CT	1820–1920
Sue Oiler	Quiet Valley Living Historical Farm PA	1760–1913
Elizabeth Lodge	Plimoth Plantation, Inc. MA	circa 1627
Leona Messinger	Historic St Mary's City MD	1634–1695
Jeanne Allen	National Colonial Farm of the Accokeek Foundation, Inc. MD	circa 1775
Joe Anderson	Living History Farms IA	1700–1900

Subject name	Site and state	period
Raymond Scott	Fort Washita	OK 1840-1865
John Hirsch	Jourdan-Bachman Pioneer Farm	TX 1880-1890
Tom Woods	Old World Wisconsin	WI 1840-1915
Stephen E. Osman	Historic Fort Snelling	MN 1827
James Mattson	Oliver Kelley Farm	MN 1850-1876
Scott Eckberg	Grant-Kohrs Ranch National Historic Site	MT 1860s- present
William Gwaltney	Fort Laramie National Historic Site	WY 1834-1890
Rex Norman	Fort Laramie National Historic Site	WY 1834-1890
Brock Cheney	This is the Place State Park/Home of Old Deseret Village	UT 1847-1869
Lorraine Bowen	Ronald V. Jensen Living Historical Farm	UT 1910-1917
John Martinson	Fort Walla Walla Museum Complex	WA 1830-1930
Walt Tegge	National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center	OR 1843-1870s
Bill Brown	Harper's Ferry Interpretive Design Center, National Park Service	

### Development of Interview Schedule

An interview schedule covering the research questions (above) and basic demographic information was developed for telephone use. The cost of long-distance telephone calls was outweighed by the advantages of better return rates over mail surveys (Dillman, 1978) and the ability to clarify questions and answers during the interview. Since many of the questions could not be reduced to Likert scales or other easily quantifiable

forms, telephone interviews allowed me to clarify questions during the interview; full answers could also be drawn out more easily over the telephone than in a mail survey, where complex or disagreeable questions could simply be passed over.

The questions were arranged in a funnel to lead from demographic information to site practices, ending with opinion topics (see Appendix C). This concentrated most of the short answer questions at the top of the schedule, although some occur in later sections to vary the pace of the interview. Additional questions on the use of corsetry at sites and staff gender bias were added at the request of other researchers, and fitted into the schedule where appropriate to the context (see Appendix C, #11-12 and #32-33). After consultation with the Iowa State University Human Subjects Review Committee, I added a series of permission questions to the beginning of the schedule. Interviewees were notified in the contact letter that the interviews would be recorded on audiotape unless they objected, per Committee instructions.

### Conducting Interviews

The telephone interviews were recorded on audiotape using a Marantz cassette recorder directly linked to the telephone line. Notes were taken simultaneously on the computer, using an onscreen version of the schedule as a prompter and a form to fill in short answers and paraphrase longer replies. The cassette recorder was borrowed by the week from ISU's Media Resources Center (MRC), which also supplied the cassette tapes. The combination of audio and computer recording eliminated the need for transcribing tapes.

and also insured a backup if one of the recording devices broke down. This proved to be invaluable when one of the cassette recorders malfunctioned and failed to record a week of interviews.

The interviews were conducted between January 14th and February 22, 1997. Most of the interviews lasted around half an hour, with only a few exceeding 45 minutes.

### Analysis

The nature of this study did not call for elaborate analysis. Data from the multiple-choice questions (numbers 1, 6, 8, 25, 26, 27, and 29) and short answer questions (numbers 4, 7, 11, 30, 32, and 33) were compiled. Data from the questions that elicited longer answers were summarized from the notes taken during the interview. The data were analyzed to find common threads, and summed up in percentages when the information allowed.

The following hypotheses were formulated in relation to the research questions:

1. First person sites will be more likely to place greater importance on accurate clothing than sites using third person interpretation as their primary interpretation tool. Data will be compared from questions 6, 26, and 27.
2. Sites representing time periods when corsets or other heavily boned garments were worn will be more likely to use such garments if first person interpretation is one of the primary interpretation tools. Data will be compared from questions 6, 11 and 12.
3. Older sites will be more likely to use first-person interpretation as the primary

interpretation tool than younger sites. Data from question 6 and the 1996 Official Museum Directory, which lists the founding date of most sites, will be used.

4. Older sites will place greater importance on historical accuracy than younger sites.
5. Large sites (by visitation) will be more likely than smaller sites to use first- or third-person interpretation instead of tour guides or self-guided tours.

Statistical analysis was performed with SPSS for Windows 6.1. Hypotheses 3, 4, and 5 proved to be impractical to run correlations on, due to the statistically small quantity of data and the difficulty in consolidating the data into useful forms. Data from questions 6, 11, 26, and 27 were successfully consolidated and analyzed using Spearman's rho for correlation. The results were applied to research question 5.

Significant correlation was found between questions 26 and 27, with a correlation coefficient of  $-0.369$  at the  $.05$  level. The coefficient was expressed negatively because responses to the two questions were scaled in opposite directions: A=1 for high accuracy in question 26, and 5 for high importance in question 27. This result showed that the combined questions measured related phenomena.

Correlation tests between the "authenticity questions" (26 & 27) and site interpretation showed no significant results, although a nearly significant ( $-0.342$ ) negative correlation was found between self-guided tours and importance of clothing to site.

A positive correlation was found between the use of corsets and first person interpretation ( $.476$ ).

## FINDINGS

Living History in the United States

The living history sites in my sample represented most of the geographical area of the continental United States, excluding the Southwest, where contacted sites did not respond. County, state, or national historic sites made up over half of the sample's sites. Site size, measured by the annual number of visitors, ranged from 10,000 at the Ronald V. Jensen Living Historical Farm in Utah to 450,000 at Mystic Seaport in Connecticut; median visitation was 55,000. Season length ranged from summer-only to year round, with some sites doing interpretation only during the warmer months of the tourist season. All but two of the sites charged admission. Six sites offered family rates, and most sites had lower rates for children; five had senior price tickets. The overall mean ticket price was \$3.50 within a range of \$1-\$18.50.

Twenty-nine of the 31 sites used interpreters in representational dress as part of their daily interpretation program; the other two only used costumed interpreters for special events. All the staff I spoke with emphasized how representational clothing improved the presentation of history at the site as a whole, even when it was not used in some areas of the site. First- or third-person interpreters in representational clothing created the illusion that visitors were entering the past, which is one of the central goals of living history.

### Interpretation at Living History Sites

The sites in the sample interpreted time periods between 1600 and the present using a variety of interpretational tools. First- and third-person interpretation, tour guides, and self-guided tours were used along with static exhibits; nearly three-quarters of the sites used a combination of two or more of these tools. Fourteen of the sites (45%) had very broad ranges, interpreting a century or more; at some sites, this involved separate areas representing a specific year or decade; at others, living history events representing different eras had been hosted by the site. Twenty-four of the thirty-one sites interpreted the nineteenth century (77%); four of those sites also interpreted earlier periods, and nine interpreted later periods, so only 35% represented the period 1800–1900 exclusively (see Table 2). Ninety percent of the sites surveyed used third person interpretation at least part of the time. Since third person interpretation allows freer communication between visitors and interpreters than first person interpretation, this result was not surprising.

### Representational Clothing at Living History Sites

Most of the sites in the sample used representational clothing as part of their regular interpretive programs. At several sites, staff in period dress only occupied part of the site, and the other areas were run by staff in modern clothing or uniforms. Other sites hosted living history events where volunteers and reenactors formed most of the interpretive staff. Sites that did not use representational dress cited concerns about

Table 2: Interpretation at Sample Sites

Type of Interpretation	Total Sites <sup>a</sup>	1600-1700	1700-1800	1800-1900	1900-2000
Total Sites <sup>a</sup>	31	4	7	24	10
First person	13	3	4	15	5
Third person	17	4	5	19	8
Tour guide	9	0	2	8	3
Self-guide	9	0	2	7	2

<sup>a</sup>Many sites interpret more than one time period and use more than one type of interpretation, therefore the total rows do not equal 31.

creating and maintaining a clothing program properly.

The initial descriptions of the clothing worn at living history sites ran from "period costume" to long lists of the garments used, from broadfall trousers to wire-rimmed glasses. All of the sites specified the time period of clothing used for living history activities; some sites also took region and socioeconomic class into account. The accuracy of representational clothing ranged from high-quality reproduction garments and accessories based on extant artifacts to clothing found at thrift shops that approximated the look of the period.

Outer clothing was emphasized at every site; underclothes such as corsets and petticoats were not as commonly mentioned. While these garments are not (or certainly should not be!) seen by visitors, they create the distinctive appearance of women's clothing during almost all of the periods represented by the sample. Corsets were worn at most of the first-person sites by some of the female interpreters, but only three of eleven sites reporting use of corsets also reported that all of their women wore the proper

undergarments, including corsets. Stays and boned bodices were considered to be comparable to corsets in this study, as they carry out similar functions of providing bust support and controlling the outline of the torso. It should be noted that a small number of first person sites represented eras and regions where corsets and/or women were not present. Sainte Marie Among the Iroquois, which interpreted a seventeenth century Jesuit mission, is one example of the latter case. Even so, a positive correlation of .476 was found between the use of first person interpretation and the use of corsets.

Sites that relied primarily on third person interpretation rarely included corsets in their lists of representational clothing. When they were present, they were usually worn only by one or two staff members for special events, or by reenactors participating in events at the site. In these cases, too, there were sites that simply had no use for corsets, such as the Grant-Kohrs Ranch. The only woman on the Ranch's interpretive staff was the blacksmith, who, in accordance with research on female blacksmiths in the 1930s, worked in men's clothing.

Sites that specialized in third person interpretation were generally more lenient in their definitions of period clothing than first person sites. Some sites chose inconspicuous modern clothing, rather than historical clothing, to keep visitors' attention on the site and the activities, and away from the staff. Two of these sites, Fosterfields Living Historical Farm and The Farmers' Museum, also had a smaller number of staff in representational clothing who did special programs. Anything that approximated the look of the century and avoided obvious anachronisms, like visible zippers, was acceptable for interpreters at

the Georgia Agrirama.

Georgia Agrirama, like the rest of the sites in the sample, had a set of clothing standards that interpreters were introduced to as part of job training. The standards and the amount of training interpreters received on their clothing varied widely across the sample. In some cases, interpreters were informed of dress standards before they were hired, or during orientation sessions. The most thorough training included how to wear and move in representational clothing, along with site policy on clothing, during the site's general training sessions. Clothing information was also passed on to new interpreters from more experienced staff, or as part of a printed training packet. Other sites were less formal, and less thorough, in transmitting site standards for appearance. One interviewee estimated that volunteers received two hours of information on clothing as part of site training, with as little as fifteen minutes on how to interpret clothing to the public. Many sites did have written guidelines or documentation on the clothing used at the site; others, recognizing the need for improving their interpreters' clothing knowledge, have been developing site guides and orientation programs.

One item on the interview schedule asked respondents to estimate the clothing knowledge of interpreters at their site on a four-level scale (see Appendix C, #25). Replies centered on the two middle points, with eighteen stating that their interpreters knew as much as they wanted to about the site's clothing, and sixteen stating that the interpreters knew as much as the site needed them to know (see Table 3). Five respondents gave mixed answers, indicating that some interpreters were more knowledgeable than others at that

site. Only one site reported that all of the interpreters knew all of the site's clothing research; one other site said all its interpreters knew very little about their clothing. Bill Brown estimated that interpreters for the National Park Service as a whole knew very little about the representational clothing they wore. To correct for the uneven levels of knowledge among interpreters, most sites (77%) had staff designated to maintain proper appearance in first- and third-person interpreters. Site "authenticity police" were often site supervisors, curators, managers, costumers, or upper level interpreters who enforced site guidelines.

Table 3. Question #25: What do interpreters know about the site's clothing research?

Levels of knowledge	Responses
Everything	4
As much as they need to	16
As much as they want to	18
Very little	4

### The Importance of Accurate Representational Clothing

Staff at sites that used first person interpretation said that their level of accuracy in clothing should be as close as humanly possible to what was worn historically; third person site respondents were less likely to make this claim, and two of the three sites which used first person exclusively had lower ratings of accuracy. Twenty-four respondents

felt that representational clothing was very important for interpreting the site, regardless of the historic accuracy of clothing actually used at that site.

In answering question #26, 73% of the responses indicated that the respondents felt that clothing at their sites should be nearly correct for the site's region and year or as correct as humanly possible, although four respondents added qualifications to the term "humanly possible." Twenty-seven percent judged that the site's clothing should be close to the decade represented. Question #29 asked the respondents to rate the accuracy of the site's clothing as it actually was; again, 73% of the responses were in the same range, although two respondents (7%) set the site's clothing at the bottom of the scale, "close for that century." With nearly three quarters of the sites aspiring to, and reaching (at least in the respondents' opinions), high standards of authenticity, it is apparent that correct representational clothing was important to most of the sites.

Respondents disagreed on how strictly accuracy had to be maintained. Given the leading question, "How do you feel about the maxim 'if you can't do it right, don't do it at all' in relation to costumed interpreters?" 14 agreed with the statement and 19 disagreed; most of the respondents qualified their answers. Mike Capps sensibly pointed out that even if all aspects of the site could be recreated in period, there would still be streams of visitors wandering in and out of the house, which is hardly a common experience for an Indiana farm in the 1820s. Most of the respondents who supported the statement did not interpret it literally; J. Roderick Moore estimated that it was hard to be much more than 80% accurate in a site's clothing, but suggested that if a site could not

attain that level it might rethink its clothing program, or discontinue it. Five respondents strongly supported doing clothing correctly, but granted that compromises had to be made at times; concessions were made for interpreters who could not work all day in period shoes, or for living history sites that were still in the learning stages.

Six respondents were not as expansive in their support. Raymond Scott pronounced that it was "about as easy to do it right as to do it wrong." Another respondent stated that poor clothing was a disservice to the public, and was likely to cost as much as more authentic garments. William Gwaltney's first response to the question was "DO IT RIGHT." Both Mr. Gwaltney and his chief of interpretation at Fort Laramie, Rex Norman, quoted John Langellier: "No interpretation at all is better than bad living history." Bill Schroh felt that the maxim would be very good for some sites, adding "no frock dresses with sneakers!" Katie Boardman cited similar sentiments as the reason why The Farmers' Museum did not use interpreters in representational clothing except for carefully controlled presentations.

In general, the respondents who disagreed with the maxim objected to its harshness. Limited budgets and scanty research time might not allow a site to hit the peak of authenticity, but it should still make the attempt and work to improve itself as time passes. If a clothing program was out of control, it should be reworked, not scrapped, according to one respondent. Elizabeth Lodge, at Plimoth Plantation, felt that not doing period clothing at all was a forfeit; "there's something to be said for doing your best." This was a common theme among those who opposed the maxim. Walt Tegge directly

contradicted the staff at Fort Laramie, and John Langellier, with the opinion that it was better to do some sort of period clothing than to do none at all; if necessary, the shortcomings of the interpreters' dress could be pointed out to the public. A good interpreter could make up for indifferent clothing, especially at sites where a general depiction of an era was the focus of interpretation. Stephen E. Saunders felt the maxim might be appropriate for first person interpretation, but he wouldn't use it at Jarrell Plantation. Two respondents felt that "doing it right" would unnecessarily exclude capable female staff from interpreting male roles, or (presumably, although no one mentioned it specifically) vice versa.

While slightly more than half of the respondents disagreed with the statement "if you can't do it right, don't do it at all," respondents on both sides of the argument felt that it was important for interpreters to be as accurately clothed for the site's place and time as possible. Budgets, experience, site interpretation focus, and the interpreters at the site were the most common mitigating circumstances.

#### Procuring and Maintaining Representational Clothing

Clothing for historical interpreters came from a variety of sources. A few sites had costume or wardrobe departments in charge of acquiring, making, and maintaining clothing, but most of the museums in the sample did not have this luxury. The manager, site supervisor, or other administrator was generally in charge of managing the clothing program in addition to other duties. In a few cases, site administrators did actual garment

construction, but it was more usual for them to purchase clothing or supervise sewing by interpreters or volunteers. Many sites purchased patterns for their interpreters to use, either with site-supplied fabric or the interpreters' own cloth. Readymade and commissioned garments were purchased by sites, or by interpreters following site guidelines. Some vendors were local seamstresses or companies; others were mail order houses that might offer custom- or ready-made clothing and materials. Stephen E. Saunders, at Jarrell Plantation, mentioned the local hardware store as one of his clothing suppliers; it still carried the type of overalls used in the early 1900s by area workmen.

Plimoth Plantation, This is the Place State Park, Historic St Mary's City, Living History Farms and Mystic Seaport had wardrobe departments to support clothing programs at those sites. Department staff ranged from two tailors, a cordwainer, and a part time seamstress at Plimoth to a single costumer at Mystic Seaport. Volunteer work was also used at these sites. An extreme example of this was the Stitching Committee, created in honor of Utah's state centennial, which supplied This is the Place State Park with five hundred miscellaneous garments. The risk with volunteer work was that sites did not always have much control over what was produced. This is the Place received large numbers of inappropriate clothing in the wrong sizes, which were simply not useful. Sites purchasing from local contractors and seamstresses had to give clear specifications and work closely with the producer to ensure that the finished product was suitable for use.

Most sites kept a stock of representational clothing for the use of staff and volunteers. Many sites allowed or encouraged interpreters to wear their own clothing, if

it was suitable. Three sites required interpreters to procure their own representational clothing. Stock clothing policies differed from site to site. Jourdan-Bachman Pioneer Farm checked garments out to staff by recording the identification number of the garment and noting a return date, rather like a library book. This is the Place State Park required deposits for clothing from stock. Philipsburg Manor's volunteers and short-term staff borrowed clothing by the day; the site did not allow long term loans. Lorraine Bowen, at the Ronald V. Jensen Living Historical Farm, said her site simply "signs out" clothing to interpreters, although volunteers had to turn garments back in at the end of each day, while regular staff could keep it for the season.

In general, the person who had physical possession of period clothing was responsible for its care. At Ronald V. Jensen, a volunteer coordinator was in charge of washing, mending, and storing the clothing used by volunteers. Long-term staff were responsible for maintaining the clothing they had checked out, including washing, unless the garments were not machine-washable. This was typical of sites that supplied representational clothing to their interpreters. In addition, several sites had washing facilities available to interpreters on site; in some cases, interpreter clothing was used to demonstrate period washing methods to visitors. Some sites also used worn interpreter clothing to demonstrate mending techniques. Woolen clothing was usually the responsibility of the site, along with garments that required dry cleaning.

The same person who was in charge of the clothing program usually checked over clothing at the end of the season for discards and pieces that needed mending. Clothing

in poor condition that was still wearable was downgraded for dirty work or fatigue clothing, or worn by interpreters portraying less affluent characters. Discards from the Ronald V. Jensen Living Historical Farm were reused as field clothing or became part of the site's washday demonstrations.

At some sites, clothing in good condition had been discarded because it was inappropriate to the site. Fort Laramie National Historic Site recently "weeded out" poor reproductions and other useless garments from its stock, and sold them at auction. Some of the more usable clothing was retained to lend to other sites and museums. Other sites gave discarded garments to charity.

Clothing damaged to the point where it could no longer be mended was usually converted into rags or patches for other clothing. Nine sites recycled worn out clothing for use in quilts, rag rugs, or used the fabric to make smaller garments. Old Fort Niagra used old cotton clothing for musket patches: a small patch of fabric was wrapped around each bullet before it was loaded into the musket, to ensure a snug fit in the barrel of the gun. Some sites used old representational clothing for dress-up programs or fundraising programs. Sunnyside Manor's discards were used for children's dress-up and scarecrow-making programs.

Most sites replaced discarded clothing as it was worn out, although three or four attempted to supply new clothing annually. The reported lifespans of garments ranged from "forever" for cloaks at the Oliver Kelley Farm to one year for shirts at many sites. Interpreters portraying farmers generally wore out a suit of clothing in less than two years.

Most outer garments lasted about three years. Suits at Historic St Mary's City were worn for two seasons and then reassigned to a lower social class. James Mattson, at Oliver Kelley Farm, estimated that gardening dresses lasted two years, while other women's gowns could be worn for 4 or more years. Women's chemises were good for one to four years; petticoats were estimated to last ten years at one site. No site reported the lifespans of corsets or stays.

#### Clothing Research at Living History Museums

Almost all of the people I interviewed said that their sites were continually engaged in research, either officially or informally. At many sites, details like fabric designs and jewelry, or specific garments were the main topics of ongoing research. Research also involved evaluation of new historical clothing patterns and vendors. The administrator in charge of the clothing program was frequently the chief researcher, although many sites had a historian or curator who did research for the entire site. Interpreters, interns, and volunteers also contributed to clothing research, especially during the off-season months. National Park Service sites reported research support from historians working for the Service as a whole. Staff at Fort Niagra and Sainte Marie Among the Iroquois mentioned working with Parks Canada sites to find documentation for their clothing. Three sites relied heavily on vendors for research as well as products.

Over half of the sites in the sample used primary sources for their clothing research; slightly over a third of the sample (37%) used them exclusively. Archival

material related to the site was generally supplemented with artifacts from the site or the surrounding area and visual sources: paintings, fashion plates, illustrations and photographs. Historic St Mary's City took advantage of the clarity and detail of Dutch genre paintings of the seventeenth century while researching their clothing. When possible, original clothing was studied. Although four sites had pieces of clothing in the museum's collection, other sites had to rely on pictures of garments or travel some distance to examine clothing of the appropriate period. Plimoth Plantation's wardrobe manager travelled to England to examine extant seventeenth century garments for the site's European population. Researchers for Van Cortlandt Manor, one of three Historic Hudson Valley sites, did some clothing studies closer to home, in the costume collection at the Metropolitan Museum in New York City.

Three of the five military site respondents (at Fort Laramie, Fort Snelling, and Fort Niagra) mentioned making use of regulation manuals, specifications, and other primary documents describing uniforms in their research. Archaeological finds of buttons and other metal accoutrements on Fort Niagra's site aided in reproducing those items correctly for representational dress. Fort Walla Walla Museum Complex relied on primary text sources for its research. Fort Washita made use of information collected by reenactors that had been compiled by the Oklahoma state agency, along with secondary sources on military clothing.

Depending on the time period involved, documenting civilian clothing at these and other sites was a matter of sifting through many sources to find applicable information,

or a process of making conjectures from the small pool of information available. Sites interpreting 1800–25 in the United States had to resort to English references for specific information on the cut of garments in the absence of American sources. Sites depicting the late nineteenth century, on the other hand, had a wealth of primary print sources to choose from—if they could be sure that those sources were available in that particular region. Researchers and interpreters also had to contend with popular stereotypes of what was common “way back then,” especially at the frontier sites where what Stephen Osman called the “John Wayne Syndrome” was especially pernicious.

When I asked respondents if there were sources they preferred to avoid (Appendix C, #22), over half of those who answered positively referred to popular culture (television shows and movies) or theatrical costuming books. A couple of sites noted that secondary clothing histories tended to focus on fashions, rather than on the clothing worn by the masses. Raymond Scott, at Fort Washita, and William Gwaltney at Fort Laramie were critical of popular reenacting literature. Six of the people interviewed felt that all sources might have some useful information, but discrimination was needed to find it. Jennifer Anderson–Lawrence summed up the opinions of the remaining respondents in her answer: “I don’t waste my time on useless sources.”

#### Representational Clothing and Site Interpretation

Representational clothing was seen as a powerful influence on site interpretation by many respondents. Correct clothing could introduce visitors to the site and reinforce

the period in their minds. Poor clothing could discredit the authority of the entire site. Leona Messinger noted that the clothing of interpreters at Historic St Mary's City gave visitors a point of reference for social class and allowed them to understand the viewpoint of the interpreter better. According to many respondents, clothing created a common ground between visitors and interpreters. The visitor may have been in sunglasses and khaki shorts, and the interpreter in a shell jacket and smallclothes, but the fact that both were wearing normal clothing for their circumstances offered openings for conversation, and made the interpreter less intimidating than if a standard uniform had been worn.

William Gwaltney referred to living history interpreters as museum exhibits that talk; even if visitors only watched interpreters going about their duties, they could learn a lot about the world depicted by a site. At the National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center, the dilapidated clothing worn by interpreters helped to convey the hardships and emotional trials of overland emigrants. The clothing of interpreters at Sainte Marie Among the Iroquois expressed the social strata of priests, brothers, and soldiers in the seventeenth century settlement. Combined with a carefully researched and reproduced environment, high-quality representational dress helped visitors to concentrate on the time period being interpreted, and assisted in the illusion that they had stepped into the past.

A minority of respondents had their doubts regarding the acuity of the public when it came to representational clothing. James McKenna thought that the average visitor noticed the interpreters' long dresses and suspenders, and stopped there. John Johnson, at the Georgia Agrirama, felt that representational dress was very important for setting the

mood of his site, even though visitors did not tend to look closely at it. Other people acknowledged that visitors might not absorb all the information conveyed by period clothing, but they would still benefit from the atmosphere created by interpreters who matched their surroundings. Susan Nordmeyer, at Lincoln Log State Historic Site, noted that visitors saw clothing even if they did not examine it. Clothing that contradicted visitors' expectations of quaint historical garb by expressing personal style and class distinctions could spark questions about the people the interpreters represented.

Representational clothing was also important to the people who wore it. Joe Anderson reported that period clothing gave novice interpreters confidence, and made them "feel like the experts they are." Several respondents likened costumed interpreters to actors on stage; the clothing gave them better insight into the people they represented, made them more aware of the importance of accuracy in all areas of interpretation, and allowed them to get into character.

Working in the proper clothing helped interpreters to give visitors a more realistic impression of the past. Hats, tightly fitted coats and long skirts helped to give interpreters the posture and carriage typical of the period. Elizabeth Lodge, at Plimoth Plantation, mentioned that many interpreters at her site found seventeenth century clothing more practical for their work than modern dress would have been. In addition, the high level of authenticity maintained at that site ensured that the first person interpreters could be sure that their clothing was at least as accurate as their interpretations were.

William Gwaltney described good representational clothing as a talisman for interpreters; with it, they did not have to worry about hiding inaccurate details or explaining anachronisms. This was especially valuable in first person interpretation. The first person interpreter with a zipper up her back could not, as a woman of 1845, say what that odd device on her gown actually was. Third person interpreters could admit that, yes, there is a zipper up the back of that woman's dress, and then go on to explain how dresses were usually fastened in that period, but the visitor's sense of being in the past would be blunted in the process.

One concern that three respondents expressed was that interpreters occasionally became so fascinated with their clothing that it was an end in itself, rather than an aid to interpretation. Putting on period clothing did not make a person a good interpreter; certain postures, gestures, and manners belonged to specific periods as much as the garments did, and had to be "put on" as well to achieve an accurate portrayal. Training sessions at several sites took this problem into account, treating how to wear clothing in their guidelines for site behavior.

Even with this caveat, all the respondents stated that representational clothing benefitted interpreters. It made them more accessible to visitors, and more confident in their characters. Wearing clothing of the period gave the interpreters a deeper understanding of, and greater respect for, the era and people they interpreted. By encouraging them to take interpretation more seriously and broadening their knowledge through experience, the use of representational dress made interpreters more valuable to

their sites.

### Influences on Attitudes Toward Representational Dress

At the request of another scholar, respondents were asked if they saw any gender differences in the attitudes of interpreters and administrators towards representational clothing. Overall, most of the respondents (79%) did not. Among interpreters, a difference was seen between experienced and novice interpreters by five respondents. Experience was also seen as an influence on administrators' attitudes towards period dress.

However, in the minority of respondents who did perceive gender-based attitudes towards representational dress, there were some interesting results. Five of the seven respondents who saw gender differences among interpreters were men; they felt that female interpreters were more interested in clothing than their male colleagues. Two men added that women were also more interested in fashionable clothing of the period, whether or not it was appropriate to the site. The two women who saw gender differences among interpretive staff at their sites said that female interpreters were more interested in accurate clothing than male interpreters.

Six respondents also saw gender differences among administrators. Three of the five women who saw differences said that female administrators were more supportive of efforts to make clothing at the site more accurate (two did not explain what the differences they saw were). Leona Messinger remarked that male administrators were more interested in producing "Kodak Moments" than authentic clothing at her site. Keith Bott,

the only man who saw gender differences in the attitudes of administrators towards clothing, felt that male administrators were less enthusiastic about period clothing. It seems odd that male interpreters and female administrators would support authentic clothing more than female interpreters and male administrators. Women may have become more concerned with authenticity as they reached positions with more authority, but the case of the male administrators is more puzzling. Do men forget their interest in historical accuracy as they move to higher positions? A study focused on the matter, with a larger sample, might shed further light on these topics.

#### Advice to Living History Sites

The final item on the interview schedule asked the respondents for their advice to living history museums contemplating using representational clothing at their sites. Most of the answers given showed that respondents in the sample regarded representational clothing as a valuable tool for interpretation. John Hirsch stated that clothing should be one of the three top priorities of a living history site, along with processes and interaction with visitors. Katie Boardman added that visitors are coming to expect interpreters to be in period clothing at historic sites, and commented that representational clothing "makes your PR a heck of a lot easier." Although many respondents were enthusiastic, they also cautioned prospective sites to think carefully before committing themselves to a living history program with representational dress. Living history can be a lot of fun for the visitors and the interpreters, but it can also degenerate into "atmospheric fluff," in Rex

Norman's words. To make sense, costumed interpretation has to be integrated into the site's interpretation plan. To be accomplished, ongoing resources of time and money must be reserved for research and procurement of appropriate clothing.

The first question that must be asked is why the site wants to use representational clothing. If the main reason for putting interpreters into period clothing is to add color to the site, plant flowering shrubs. They require less upkeep. If it would contribute to the site's mission statement, then planning a clothing program is reasonable. Museums that emphasize social and cultural history can put first- or third-person interpretation to good use; a museum devoted to the history of factory machinery probably does not need representational dress in its interpretive program. In addition, just because a site's programming is compatible with representational dress does not mean that the site should use it. Less labor-intensive methods, such as static exhibits, video presentations, and uniformed interpreters may be just as effective, and not as expensive. Clothing programs are never finished; unlike a static exhibit that is built, paid for, and done, requiring only occasional dusting afterward, representational clothing necessitates yearly expenditures and ongoing research.

If a museum has determined that representational clothing suits its goals, the next step is to make sure that it can afford to put a clothing program into action. Ideally, a living history site would incorporate representational clothing into its interpretive and fiscal plan along with buildings, furnishings, and livestock when the museum is still in the planning stages. Many respondents suggested consulting with established sites that have

similar programs to consider costs realistically; one site estimated that \$7,000 were spent each year on clothing. Budget for materials, construction costs, and, above all, for research time: twice as many respondents mentioned building a research base compared to funding.

Research is the key to establishing a respectable clothing program for any living history museum. Clothing for the era and region should be investigated as closely as possible; while well-researched secondary sources are becoming more common, they cannot completely replace primary research, which allows sites to define what secondaries are useful to them. Information from sites that interpret the same period can be borrowed and adapted. Experts on living history clothing can give advice on vendors and sources for materials along with information on clothing and interpreter training.

Maiken Nielsen, at Sunnyside Manor, stressed staff knowledge as one of the vital requirements. She was supported by several other respondents who felt that staff members had to be educated in what proper clothing for the site consisted of and how to wear it for a clothing program to be successful. Staff who already have a working knowledge of historic clothing are very valuable; without them, a consultant should be hired to help with research. A clearly defined manual on interpreter clothing, with relevant information on garments and stated guidelines for daily appearance, was supported by many respondents to make sure that interpreters knew what was expected of them.

Once a site has done its research to determine what was worn in period, it can decide what type of clothing will be used for its interpreters. Jennifer Anderson-Lawrence

advised that the interpretive staff should be taken into account when choosing the period they will be clothed in; "don't put the elderly into Empire dresses!" Some interpreters resisted period clothing, she reported; the site had to decide if it wants to keep the person or the clothing in such cases. The type of interpretation to be used can also affect clothing choices. A site that decides to concentrate on first person interpretation should strive for the most accurate clothing possible; although third person interpretation does not necessitate lower-quality clothing, it is more tolerant of costuming errors than first person presentation. Stephen E. Saunders, who runs a site that represents an extended period spanning over fifty years, noted that a general costume can work at sites where the skills are more important than depicting an exact era. Like many other respondents, Saunders felt that living history sites had an obligation to do clothing properly or risk criticism, although he did not go as far as Robert Richter, who stated that if the correct materials and construction techniques could not be procured for clothing, it was best not to use representational clothing at all.

Many sites, regardless of their primary method of interpretation, emphasized the importance of using clothing that was as accurate as possible, since poor clothing reflected badly on the rest of the site and wasted money and effort in the long run. Most sites were willing to compromise if interpreters needed orthopedic shoes to work comfortably; underpinnings were scant at most sites. Outer clothing, on the other hand, should not be skimped on, since it is the most visible part of the interpreter's appearance. Bill Brown suggested making sample clothing based on extant garments, and keeping them as

examples for interpreter clothing. Several respondents advocated starting slowly, even clothing one person at a time, to ensure that a site did not end up with large amounts of poor-quality garments.

While most respondents encouraged new sites to use representational clothing in their living history programs, four prerequisites were stressed: compatibility with the interpretation program, adequate funding on an ongoing basis, thorough research, and accurate clothing for the period and region.

## CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY

The purpose of this study was to explore the reasons why museums use different levels of historical interpretation and standards of representational dress by interviewing administrators of living history museums and their clothing programs. A search of academic literature revealed very little information on living history in general, and the clothing needs of living history sites in particular. Examination of available literature produced by living historians showed that historic clothing was usually presented in a case-by-case, or even garment-by-garment, fashion, with little description of how sites did, or could, run a representational clothing program. A purposive sample of 31 sites was chosen to represent as much of the continental United States as possible, along with the full range of time periods represented by living history museums in this country.

Living history sites in the sample used a variety of interpretational tools, including first- and third-person interpretation, tour guides in uniform or representational dress, static exhibits, presentations, and lectures. Most of the sites in the sample (71%) used more than one type of interpretation. Third person was the most popular interpretational tool; it was used either by itself or in combination with other methods by 90% of the sample. First- or third-person interpretation usually required representational clothing, which benefitted sites in several ways. Period dress helped interpreters to understand the setting of the site, and gave them more confidence in working with the public. For visitors, the use of representational clothing made interpreters easy to find and less imposing than uniformed staff, as well as establishing the atmosphere of the site and

conveying information about its social culture.

Living history sites usually based their representational clothing on primary and secondary research. Twelve respondents said their sites used primary research exclusively; three sites used only secondary and tertiary sources. Archival information (wills, probate records, receipts), pictorial sources (paintings, illustrations, photographs), and material culture (extant clothing and findings) were all mentioned as sources for documenting clothing, along with primary and secondary publications on dress for the period under study.

Twenty-eight sites procured representational clothing or uniforms for their historical interpreters; three required that interpreters acquire clothing that met site guidelines. Representational clothing was purchased or commissioned from vendors and seamstresses, as well as made by costuming staff, interpreters, and volunteers from patterns that were purchased or drafted on site. Most used a combination of sources to provide clothing that met site standards of historical accuracy and construction quality; local producers who were willing to work closely with the site to reach these objectives were preferred.

Maintenance of representational clothing was the responsibility of the wearer and the staff person in charge of the clothing program at most sites. Garments were supplied to regular interpreters each season at many sites. The interpreters washed and cared for machine-washable clothing; dry cleaning and major repairs were usually undertaken by the site. Volunteer clothing was frequently given out on short term loans, sometimes only on

a daily basis. This clothing was maintained by site staff, who also checked over and reassigned clothing from the regular staff at the end of each season. Dilapidated clothing was recycled into rags, quilts, rugs, or second-hand clothing; cut down for new clothes, used for site programs, or sold off-site.

The authenticity of representational clothing used at sites in the sample depended on how necessary historically accurate clothing was felt to be to the site, and the site's resources for obtaining and maintaining clothing. A high level of accuracy was most important for first person interpretation, although many sites that used third person interpretation held themselves to equally high standards. Some sites did not regard scrupulously authentic clothing as essential to their interpretation programs; two had programs that were general in scope, and the others felt that their interpreters made up for any lacks in the clothing. This sentiment may be responsible for the mediocre accuracy of representational clothing at many living history sites. Clothing standards were maintained by staff education and written guidelines on expectations for appearance and enforcement policy.

Little evidence of gender bias toward representational clothing was found in the sample's responses. A small percentage (18-21%) of respondents saw gender bias in administrators and interpreters at sites in the sample. Male interpreters and female administrators were said to be more interested in correct representational dress than their counterparts. These odd results are probably the product of the study's statistically tiny sample.

Nearly all of the respondents encouraged new sites to use representational clothing in their living history programs. Four prerequisites were stressed: compatibility with the interpretation program, adequate funding on an ongoing basis, thorough research, and accurate clothing for the period and region.

### SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The sample size of this study was rather large for a qualitative study based on interviews, but decidedly small for quantitative, statistical analysis; several hypotheses were impossible to test due to insufficient data for running chi-square and correlational tests. A study with a quantitative interview schedule concentrating on a portion of this study's topics with a much larger sample would give better statistical results. The sample might profitably be chosen for sites interpreting a particular period or region, or specific interpretation method.

Questions allowing for comparison of interpreter knowledge of clothing to knowledge of other areas of site expertise, modelled on question #25, would give a more accurate picture of where representational clothing stands in relation to other elements of living history. Using interpreters instead of administrators for respondents would also be valuable; administrators were chosen as respondents for this study due to the broad range of topics under examination, and because administrators have not been surveyed on these topics in the past.

The results of this or a similar study would benefit by triangulating the interview data with interviews from other staff at the sample sites. I interviewed two staff at Fort Laramie for this study; while they were generally in sympathy with each other, there were differences in estimating the overall accuracy of the site's clothing. Another triangulation method would be to compare photographs of interpreters (preferably candid) in representational dress to respondents' estimates of accuracy in dress at each site. I

happened to visit a site included in this sample in 1994; the respondent's description was, to say the least, unfamiliar. It may be that the entire clothing program had been overhauled and improved over the intervening three years, but without a return visit it would be impossible to be sure. Triangulation by this method would require that the researcher be able to judge the authenticity for region and period of each outfit photographed, or rely on the judgement of an impartial expert.

Compilation of a list of frequently asked questions (FAQ) about period clothing, with answers, would be useful to many living history sites for interpreter training sessions. In addition to satisfying the curiosity of new staff as to why vests should be buttoned so, and why corsets should be worn, a FAQ list would prepare interpreters for many questions asked by visitors. Such a list could be developed for general use to supplement, but not to replace, training on the clothing used at particular sites.

An examination of vendors who supply clothing and other goods to living history sites and reenactors is long overdue. Bill Brown reported that one magazine, The Watchdog, functions as a Consumer Reports for Civil War-era products, but there do not seem to be comparable efforts for other time periods. A study based on vendor mail-order (or internet) catalogs would be both practical and valuable to the living history public in general. A related study would compare site-produced and purchased representational clothing at living history museums.

Finally, a note to researchers doing interviews: check over recording equipment, including audio and video tape, before every interview. If an exact transcript is not

necessary, consider using a computer to record data, even for qualitative questions designed to elicit long answers. I found that respondents were more relaxed and informative when they were not being audiotaped, and that the gist of the conversation, along with short quotations, could be typed in fairly easily. With a quantitative instrument, a computer database with fields to be filled in during the telephone interview would be very efficient. In such a case, audiotaping would only be a backup record in case of computer problems.

## APPENDIX A. LETTER TO PROSPECTIVE SITES

Name	2--- Buchanan Hall
Site Director	Ames, IA 50013-0003
Living History Site	October 1, 1996
Address	
City and State	

Dear -----,

I am a graduate student at Iowa State University, planning to do a master's thesis on historical interpreters and their clothing. I am interested in finding out the various problems involved in utilizing costumed interpreters at historic sites: developing the program, collecting resources, supplying historically accurate clothing to interpreters, and making sure that it is worn correctly. As an undergraduate, I held a summer internship at the Homeplace 1850; this experience, along with visits to other historic sites and historical reenactments, has shown me that there are many standards for period correctness, and no one right way to interpret history for the public.

I have seen many articles and books devoted to the clothing of historical reenactors, but only one or two which address the question of using third or first person interpretation at permanent sites. None has addressed all the attendant issues of funding, procuring clothing, adapting site guides, training interpreters, or has carefully considered the desirability of adding yet another complication to a site's program. The finished thesis would describe the solutions found by various sites and give guidelines for sites contemplating a costume program.

To do this, I am planning to contact and hope to interview administrators at historic sites across the United States. This will probably involve telephone interviews of about an hour in duration. I am equally interested in those sites which have decided not to use costumed interpreters as those who do have a costume program of one form or another, to discover the pro and con arguments. A copy of the finished thesis will be furnished to all participants; I am hoping to publish an article in *History News* or a similar journal on the same topic.

Your contribution to this effort would be extremely valuable. I would be happy to schedule an interview at your convenience during February 1997. Any suggestions you have in the meantime, concerning topics or other sites to contact, would be gratefully accepted.

I can be contacted at the above address, or by phone: (515) 296-4--- and email: [lmpsy@iastate.edu](mailto:lmpsy@iastate.edu). I will get in touch with you again at the end of October. Thank you very much for your time.

Sincerely,

Laura M. Poresky  
M.S. Student

Jane Farrell-Beck  
Professor

p.s. If you feel that another staff member at this site should be interviewed, please pass this letter on.

## APPENDIX B. FOLLOW-UP LETTER TO SAMPLE SITES

Name	2--- Buchanan Hall
Living History Site	Ames IA 50013-0003
Address	515-296-4---
City and State	December 11, 1996

Dear -----,

Thank you very much for your interest in participating in my master's thesis. I will be scheduling telephone interviews for late January and February of the coming year. If there is a time of day or date you would prefer for the interview, please let me know; otherwise, I will call a day or so before I'd like to conduct the 1-hour interview.

The interview will consist of several short-answer questions and quite a few open-ended questions. I am interested in collecting some basic site information (open hours, annual visitation, type of site and interpretation used) along with the main topic of interpreter clothing at your site.

I will be interested in the following, where they apply to your site:

- what do your interpreters wear (including undergarments)?
- what research is the clothing based on?
- how would you rate the authenticity of the clothing?
- where do the interpreters get their clothing?
- who owns the clothing?

Whether or not your site uses representational clothing, I will also ask:

- have you heard of the term "representational clothing" before?
- what is your opinion on the use of representational clothing in interpreting history to the public?
- what advice would you give to a museum thinking of using representational clothing in its programs?

The interview will be tape-recorded; if you don't mind, the tape and a transcript will be donated to the ISU Parks Library Special Collections Department for posterity. The ISU Human Subjects Review Committee also requires me to ask permission to use your site's name and/or your own name in my research. I will formally ask your permission for each of these at the beginning of the interview; you have the right to refuse any or all, in which case pseudonyms will be used.

If you wish to contact me between 12/19/96 and 1/11/97, please call 913-539-2--  
- instead of the number above.

Enjoy the holidays!

Sincerely,

Laura M. Poresky

## APPENDIX C. INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Hello, this is Laura Poresky; I'm a graduate student at Iowa State University, and I'm doing research on the use of representational clothing in living history for my master's thesis. Kathleen Dowd defined representational clothing in her 1993 thesis as clothing "intended to represent the past," of any degree of authenticity.

In this survey I'm going to ask you about the interpretation program at your site, and what part representational or period clothing plays in that program. It will take half an hour an hour or so, depending on how much you talk. A lot of the questions are just for finding out what you do, and some are questions about your own attitudes towards representational clothing in living history interpretation. If you don't want to answer a particular question, we'll just skip it and go on to the next one. If you have any questions for me, I'll be happy to answer them. Feel free to interrupt at any time.

Ok, before we go to the questions, I have to know if I can have your permission to use your name and the name of your site in my thesis.

- A. May I use the name of your site in my thesis?
- B. May I use your name and quote you in my thesis, or shall I refer to you simply as a \_\_\_\_\_ staff person?
- C. May I offer a copy of this interview to the Parks Library, Department of Special Collections, for its historical value?
- D. When my thesis is finished, I will send you a 3-page summary of the major findings. A bound copy of the thesis will be available in Iowa State's Parks Library. If you wish, I can arrange for you to have access to the full thesis. Will you be interested in seeing the complete thesis?

All right, on to the real questions.

1. Let's start with a little basic information about your site. Is it an open-air museum, living history museum, state historic site, national historic site, or combination thereof?

- |                        |   |
|------------------------|---|
| OPEN AIR MUSEUM        | A |
| LIVING HISTORY MUSEUM  | B |
| STATE HISTORIC SITE    | C |
| NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE | D |

- 1a. What time period does your site represent?
2. When is the site open?
3. How many visitors come to the site annually?
4. Does the site charge admission?
5. How much?
6. What type of interpretation do you use at your site?
 

1ST PERSON	A
3RD PERSON	B
TOUR GUIDE	C
SELF-GUIDED TOUR	D
7. Has the site always used that type of interpretation?  
(If not, how long has it been in use? What other types have been used?)
8. Who makes up your staff?
 

FULL TIME	A
PART TIME	B
INTERNS	C
or VOLUNTEERS	D
9. How many are seasonal staff?
10. What do your historical interpreters wear?  
(If the interpreters do not wear representational clothing, skip to general attitude questions)
11. How many of your interpreters wear corsets? (women, men?)
12. How often do these interpreters wear corsets? (How tightly do they lace, and how do they go about it?)
13. What training do your interpreters receive regarding their clothes?  
(Historical information, are they taught how to dress properly, how to move?)
14. What difference, if any, is there between the clothing of long-term and temporary (such as intern and volunteer) staff?
15. Ok, let's talk about getting the clothing itself. Who makes the clothing the

interpreters wear? (Is some purchased? Commissioned? Made on site?)

16. How does the site handle clothing for interns and volunteers?
17. Who owns the clothing? (Are some articles, such as jewelry, stockings and other underwear owned by the interpreter while the rest is owned by the site?)
18. Who is responsible for care and maintenance of the clothing?
19. How often is clothing replaced?
20. What happens to discarded clothing?
21. There are a lot of costume history books out there, along with primary and secondary sources that describe clothing. What sources do you base your representational clothing on?
22. Are there any common research sources that you consider to be totally useless for your purposes? (sketchbooks, Norah Waugh, movies, etc.)
23. Who does your research?
24. When did your site last research its clothing?
25. Which of these phrases best describes what the interpreters know about your site's clothing research?
 

EVERYTHING	A
AS MUCH AS THEY NEED TO	B
AS MUCH AS THEY WANT TO	C
VERY LITTLE	D
26. Due to the way some sites are organized and interpreted, absolute authenticity is not always possible, for instance when more than one time period is depicted in one area. Which of the following phrases best describes the proper level of authenticity for this site, in your opinion?
 

AS CORRECT AS HUMANLY POSSIBLE	A
GOOD FOR THAT REGION & YEAR	B
CLOSE FOR THAT DECADE	C
CLOSE FOR THAT CENTURY	D
27. On a scale of 1 to 5, 5 being the most important, how important is clothing to

telling the complete story of your site?

28. How does your level of authenticity in clothing benefit the visitor? The interpreters?

29. At this moment, which phrase best describes the level of authenticity you think this site achieves as far as the interpreters' clothing is concerned?

- |                                |   |
|--------------------------------|---|
| AS CORRECT AS HUMANLY POSSIBLE | A |
| CORRECT BUT BADLY FITTED       | B |
| CLOSE FOR THAT REGION & YEAR   | C |
| CLOSE FOR THAT DECADE          | D |
| CLOSE FOR THAT CENTURY         | E |

30. Does your site have "authenticity police" who maintain period appearance in interpreters, or other ways of maintaining the proper level of authenticity? (Who are they?)

#### GENERAL ATTITUDE QUESTIONS

31. How do you feel about the maxim, "if you can't do it right, don't do it at all" in relation to costumed interpreters?

32. Do you see any attitudinal differences towards representational clothing between male and female interpreters?

33. Do you see any attitudinal differences towards representational clothing between male and female administrators?

34. What would be your advice to a new living history museum interested in using representational clothing for its interpreters?

## APPENDIX D. SITES AND RESPONDENTS IN SAMPLE

James McKenna  
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Tarrytown NY 10591  
914-631-3992 ext11

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Historic Hudson Valley  
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Interpretation Program Supervisor  
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716-745-7611 716-745-9141(fax)

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Living History Site Manager

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 Program Administrative Assistant  
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John Martinson  
 Museum Director  
 Fort Walla Walla Museum Complex  
 755 Myra Rd  
 Walla Walla WA 99362  
 509-525-7703

Walt Tegge  
 Chief of Interpretation  
 National Historic Oregon Trail  
 Interpretive Center  
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 Baker City OR 97814  
 541-523-1843 503-523-1834(fax)

## APPENDIX E: HISTORICAL PATTERN SOURCES

This is a selection of commercial pattern companies that specialize in historic clothing. While this list is taken from the 1996 AlterYears catalog, other vendors also carry these patterns, and with some research I suspect one would be able to buy direct from the company.

### Vendors

Two vendors carry most or all of the patterns in the list below in their catalogs. In 1997, both Amazon Drygoods and AlterYears charged \$5.00 for a current pattern catalog. These are the main mail-order vendors; many of these patterns are sold by independent retailers as well.

#### AlterYears

3749 East Colorado Boulevard, Pasadena, CA 91107  
Telephone: 818-585-2994 Fax: 818-432-4530

Staff are friendly on the phone, but I have not been able to judge service yet.

#### Amazon Vinegar & Pickling Works Drygoods

2218 East 11th Street, Davenport, IA 52803-3760  
Telephone: 319-322-6800 Fax: 319-322-4003

Service ranges from decent (3-4 weeks delivery) to unreliable (9 months delivery).

### Pattern Companies

Companies have been selected on the apparent historical accuracy of their products, based on the illustrations and text given in the AlterYears and Amazon Drygoods catalogs. Companies which appear to appeal to romantic versions of historical clothing have been omitted except when some patterns appear to have some merit. Commentary is based on the companies' statements and personal experience when applicable. The list is approximately chronological in order, and concentrates on clothing from 1500 on.

#### AlterYears Patterns

Elizabethan clothing for women, 1558-1600. Stay away from the Ren-Fair items.

#### Queta's Closet

Accessories, including shoes, from the Bronze Age to 1600.

#### MoiRandall's Miscellaneous

Small selection of clothing ca 1200-1700. Cheap and overly simple.

### Period Patterns

650-1610 C.E., with many styles in each pattern. The graded patterns come with historical notes, and the illustrations are reputable.

### Rocking Horse Farm

1300-1920s, heavily weighted toward the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Seamlines in the 14th C. Kirtle and 1860's Day Dress are definitely wrong if the illustrations depict them accurately.

### Missouri River

Buckskinner clothing, with notes on period construction.

### Eagle's View

Buckskinner clothing, with some historical background. The shoulder seams on the European clothing are too far forward (in modern position) as illustrated.

### Northwest Traders

More buckskinner clothing ("early 1700's frontier") with correct shoulder seams, mostly men's clothing.

### Kannik's Korner

1750-1820; small selection of well-documented patterns, including an 18th C. layette.

### Mill Farm Period Patterns

Late 18th C., no documentation mentioned, but illustrations look fair.

### Pegee of Williamsburg

The 1776 patterns were drafted for Colonial Williamsburg; the Gone With the Wind patterns should be avoided like the plague, unless you want 1940's era Civil War clothing.

### Tailor's Guide

1650-1890, with fabric suggestions and variable documentation. The computer-generated illustrations show no shoulder seams at all for the women's clothing, but the other seamlines are correct.

### Period Impressions

1740-1889, taken from period clothing and adapted for modern figures.

### The Mantua-Maker

1600-1900, concentrates on underwear of the period with a few outer wear patterns. Computer-generated illustrations once again lack shoulder seams, but the other style lines are quite good. One of a very few companies with a variety of bustle and corset patterns.

### Heidi's Pages and Petticoats

1860s patterns for the Civil War reenactor with taste, generally accurate (I have reservations about the lace mitts). Most of the patterns are for women, but men and children are also well represented.

### The Great American Pattern Emporium

1850-1865 patterns, from period garments or sources (noted in each pattern blurb). The patterns are probably better than the illustrations let on; the artist has a poor sense of proportion.

### Harriet's Patterns

1580-1900, mostly Civil War with some very good looking cage crinolines. Once again, the shoulder seams are questionable, and the undated chemises are rather unlikely-looking. Women's and men's patterns.

### Patterns of History

1835-1896, mostly women's outer clothing. The patterns and historical information are very good. Throw away the construction guide; it saves time and vexation. These patterns can be ordered directly from the Wisconsin Historical Society.

### Old World Enterprises

1805-1890s, mostly women's outer clothing from 1860 on, with a few male garments. Includes historical construction and fashion information. AlterYears recommends making a mockup in scrap fabric.

### Making Memories

Late Victorian clothing for petite women and children.

### Buckaroo Bobbins

"Vintage Western Wear" that looks fair for late 19th and early 20th century, aside from the "Retro-Victorian" Hoedown Dress and the modern shoulder seams of the Ladies Outing Jacket. Men's and women's clothing.

### Past Patterns

1820-1930s, mostly women's clothing from the mid and late 19th century. Taken from period garments, with historical notes and clear construction guides, these patterns

are very good. The corset patterns are available in kit form with fabric and hardware included.

#### Past Patterns Attic Copies

1896–1950 patterns, direct copies of surviving patterns for women and children. The only downside is that these eminently correct patterns are only available in the size of the extant pattern, so skill at alteration is a must.

#### Folkwear Patterns

The European–American patterns are 1820s–1950s, and conceived with an eye to the popular rather than historical audience, although historical notes are included. Many patterns in my 1996 catalog are marked “no longer available.”

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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