

Finding Roots: The Construction of Heritage at Joseph Schneider Haus



Hillary Walker Gugan

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*Friends of the Joseph Schneider Haus
Kitchener, Ontario*

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Introduction

This Fellowship report is comprised of two related but independent chapters. The first chapter examines how the Schneider family homestead was converted into a house museum. The roots of the Joseph Schneider Haus (JSH) are traced from the earliest days in the village of Berlin, through the First World War, to Canada's Centennial celebrations in 1967. The chapter delves into the history of the community focusing on its Germanic roots and the consequences of the First World War. The house eventually passed down to the fourth generation of the family. Joseph Schneider's great granddaughter, Miriam Sokvitne determinedly worked to ensure that history would not forget her family's contribution to the settlement of modern day Kitchener, Ontario. Changes in the cultural climate of the community as well as museum practices ultimately influenced how heritage was manufactured. I reviewed documents from the JSH archive, the Waterloo Historical Society, the Waterloo Regional Heritage Foundation, and Miriam Sokvitne's Estate.

The second chapter focuses on how the present interpretation of the homestead as a house museum offers different ways to connect with heritage. My research involved multiple site visits where I observed the delivery of programming. Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH), as defined by UNESCO, is used to understand how sensory feedback communicates the heritage presented at the Haus. I have attempted to capture the ICH that permeates the museum through thick descriptions of the smells, sights, sounds, tastes, and textures that are conjured through the programs. Theoretical and museological texts are referenced, as aspects of the living history

found at the Joseph Schneider Haus are unpacked. The visitor experience is examined with respect to physical, contextual, and mental spaces. The chapter concludes with a look at how Intangible Cultural Heritage is kept vital through the activities of the Joseph Schneider Haus.

Chapter 1

Who's Legacy: The Creation of the Joseph Schneider Haus Museum

Opening its doors on a sunny September afternoon in 1981, the Joseph Schneider Haus (JSH) in Kitchener, Canada established multiple legacies. The JSH uses living history to demonstrate the lifestyle of the Mennonite family who left a humble and unintentional legacy. I will examine how the multiple legacies of one house museum strengthened the historical fabric of society on a local level and supported the national reconfiguration of Canadian heritage.

Meeting the Schneiders

The whirling of the spinning wheel is just one of the many sounds that portrays the productive activities of the Schneider family. The Schneiders arrived to the area now known as Waterloo Region, Ontario, Canada in 1806 along with several other Mennonites. The new immigrants walked along side Conestoga wagons on a trip lasting four weeks and four days from Lancaster, Pennsylvania.¹ The Mennonites sought the remote and untamed lands of Upper Canada to lead a life apart from the world. These early pioneers founded a new community centered on their Pennsylvania-German culture. Joseph Schneider established the first homestead in the settlement. The house that now hosts the museum was constructed circa 1816.

¹ Susan MacFarlane Burke, Kenneth McLaughlin, Stephanie Kirkwood Walker. *This Old Haus: A place in time* (Kitchener, Ontario: Friends of the Joseph Schneider Haus, 2008), 13.

Joseph Schneider followed the Mennonite tradition of humility. He would never have imagined that the threads of his life would create the foundation to such a rich legacy.

The interpretation period of the house is the 1850s. At this time the second generation of Schneiders: Joseph Eby Schneider, his wife Sarah and their nine children lived in the house.² The Schneider's homestead was a welcoming place for family, friends, and even passing strangers who were given a hardy meal and a warm bed in the "tramp room."³ Joseph and Sarah's daughter Louisa left a diary that offers insight in the richly textured lives that unfolded within the walls of Schneider Haus. Louisa recalls:

My parents were very social people. Their home was a regular stopping place for everybody. Many people that lived in Waterloo County would visit them, not only relatives, but acquaintances... [and] ... company from Pennsylvania. ... We had so much company that at times we would be afraid to look up the road for fear we would see a "*Doch Waegle*" coming, and if we did see one it would surely head for our place. ... Friday was bake day and we would bake 25 pies, 10 large old-fashioned loaves of bread and a couple dozen of buns. Often on Monday morning we would have to bake again because we had so much company over Sunday that there was nothing left.⁴

An important part of the regional Mennonite culture focuses on fostering a strong community. Friendships and familial ties were reinforced with shared meals after

² Burke, *This Old Haus: A place in time*, 15-6.

³ Louisa Schneider Troxel, "Reminiscences by Mrs. Louisa Schneider Troxel" in *Hannes Schneider and his wife Catherine Haus Schneider Their Descendants and Times 1534-1939*, edited by Joseph Meyer Snyder and Miriam Helen Snyder (Kitchener, Ontario: n.d.), 94A.

⁴ Troxel, "Reminiscences," 94A.

attending services at the Meetinghouse on Sunday mornings. The Schneiders' lives were made richer through meaningful ties to the broader community.

Berlin as a community

The fabric of the community became richer as new threads were incorporated throughout the 1820s. The early Mennonite community attracted European German immigrants for several reasons: the thick bush had been reasonably settled; German was the dominant language; and the region was known to have cheap land. The decade of 1825 to 1835 saw tremendous growth as new immigrants developed the village.⁵ By the 1850s the formidable forests of Upper Canada had been tamed into a respectable settlement known as Berlin. The town's name reflected the German centric population. Many of the European Germans that settled in the area during the 1820s were skilled "tradesmen, artisans and craftsmen, and industrialists" who were pleased to find an established settlement with similar cultural roots.⁶ This core section of the population worked to establish Berlin as a manufacturing centre with goods being sold clear across the Dominion. All goods were proudly shipped with an iconic "Made in Berlin" label that came to represent quality manufacturing across the country. The label was most popular in the 1880s until the First World War.⁷

Insight into the daily patterns of the bustling village is provided by Louisa's diary:

"Everybody had to speak German in Berlin. The business people could not do

⁵ John English and Kenneth McLaughlin, *Kitchener: An illustrated history* (Toronto: Robin Brass, 1996), 21.

⁶ John English and Kenneth McLaughlin, *Kitchener: An Illustrated History* (Toronto: Robin Brass, 1996), 21.

⁷ Kenneth McLaughlin, *Made in Berlin* (Kitchener, Ontario: Joseph Schneider Haus Museum, 1989), 1.

business unless they could speak German as they could not wait on their customers.”⁸

The unique character of Berlin set it apart from the primarily British culture that blanketed the rest of the colony. In 1886 a reporter from the *Toronto Mail* described Berlin as “A Patch of Old Germany Set Down in the Garden of Ontario.”⁹ The village even erected an outdoor bust of Kaiser Wilhelm I in 1896.¹⁰ By the end of the century Berlin welcomed new residents of British descent who embraced the Germanic lifestyle and benefited from the village’s industrious nature. The German character of the village was reinforced through the celebration of their heritage. Starting in 1876, Berlin hosted *Sängerfest* roughly every three years. The event was a community song festival “often with as many as sixteen choirs with more than eight hundred singers, attended by ten to twelve thousand people.”¹¹ The gatherings provided a sense of belonging and welcome in the community regardless of social class or heritage. Cultural clubs, such as the Concordia also played an active role in fostering strong social connections and maintaining cultural heritage within the community.¹²

This sentiment changed as nations and individuals grappled with the unsettling implications of the First World War. By 1914 military activities accelerated across

⁸ Troxel, “Reminiscences,” 94C.

⁹ English, *Kitchener*, 66.

¹⁰ Patricia McKegney, *The Kaiser’s Bust: A study of war-time propaganda in Berlin, Ontario 1914-1918* (Wellesley, Ontario: Bamberg Press, 1991), 1.

¹¹ English and McLaughlin, *Kitchener: An Illustrated History*, 115.

¹² English, *Kitchener*, 115.

Canada as communities began recruitment campaigns. It was widely known that men with German last names were not welcomed into the ranks. There were reports of “strange and unknown [Canadian] men with German, Austrian or Turkish names” being arrested and returned home by the British War Office.¹³ Historian Patricia McKegney argues that this situation was made worse through the cumulative effect of Canadian and British propaganda campaigns throughout 1915. The “violently anti-German” messages alienated the German-Canadian population of Berlin- resulting in markedly low enlistment numbers.¹⁴

By the end of 1915 the Canadian military had established the 118th Battalion in Berlin with the expectation of achieving the recruitment of 1,100 men. By Christmas of that year there were still less than 200 men listed on the roster of the 118th Battalion.¹⁵ To bolster the numbers officers began unorthodox “street recruitment” techniques. McKegney explains that some men met with street recruiters quietly while other encounters resulted in scuffles on the streets. “Some men were carried in by the soldiers, their clothing dirty, their hats broken or lost.”¹⁶ On December 13, 1915 a large fight broke out at “Lyric Club, the Royal Billiard Parlour, and the Lutheran Club” that resulted in twenty men being forcibly presented at the

¹³ McKegney, *The Kaiser's Bust*, 132.

¹⁴ McKegney, *The Kaiser's Bust*, 143.

¹⁵ William Campbell, “We Germans... Are British Subjects’ The First World War and the Curious Case of Berlin, Ontario, Canada,” *Canadian Military History* 21, no. 2 (2012): 52.

¹⁶ Patricia McKegney, *The Kaiser's Bust: A Study of War-Time Propaganda in Berlin, Ontario, 1914-1918*, 1st ed, Bamberg Heritage Series, no. 2 (Bamberg, Ont., Canada: Bamberg Press, 1991), 156.

recruiting office; nine of the twenty men were enlisted.¹⁷ Soldiers were a general menace in Berlin with reports of foul language and insults directed towards women. Military officials did not end the practice because it was the only way that recruitment numbers rose.

By the middle of February tensions reached a fever pitch. Reports claimed that nearly fifty soldiers vandalized the Concordia Club Hall. A bonfire was set in the street burning furnishings and cultural symbols. Previously, city officials had agreed to store Kaiser Wilhelm I's bronze bust in the Hall for safekeeping. The soldiers looted the statue a final time- after that night it was never seen again. The mayhem was allowed to continue until 11:00 p.m. when Battalion officers arrived to return the men to the barracks.¹⁸ Bad behavior of the 118th Battalion continued: "the soldiers raided a shoe shop, a tailor shop, and a book-store" seeking German paraphernalia. After several attempts to exercise discipline upon the Battalion the regiment was moved to London, Ontario on May 22, 1916.¹⁹

Not only did the anti-German sentiment fracture the social structure of the community, it also threatened the manufacturing centre's viability. Products stamped with the "Made in Berlin" label were no longer selling. Citizens of Berlin, Ontario grappled with the choice of changing the town's name. February 11, 1916 a

¹⁷ Ibid., 155–156.

¹⁸ Ibid., 158.

¹⁹ McKegney, *The Kaiser's Bust*, 160-161.

formal resolution was put forward to change the name.²⁰ Leading citizens, of both British and German descent, organized the “British League” to rally support for the name change. On May 19, 1916 a record number of voters participated in a referendum to settle the debate on the name change. The results were in favour of change by a narrow margin of 81 votes.²¹ At length, another vote was held to decide the new name. Only 892 people (a mere 18%) of the eligible population participated. Of these votes there were 163 ballots with all options crossed out and Berlin or Waterloo (the neighboring city) penciled in.²² Given the six choices on the ballot, just 346 voters selected Kitchener—in honour of Lord Kitchener, England’s Secretary of State for War. Following the vote, a group of 2,000 residents signed a petition that was submitted to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario in an effort to halt the name change.²³

In the aftermath of the civic trauma that unfolded during the First World War, historians John English and Kenneth McLaughlin observed that the civic pride that once defined Berlin had disappeared from the streets of Kitchener:

The belief that Kitchener could live apart, could have a double loyalty, could purchase respectability through productivity, had abruptly ended. The city was now a part of that national community whose contours the Great War had done so much to shape... [F]ew would talk about ... the Kaiser’s bust now

²⁰ McKegney, *The Kaiser’s Bust*, 172.

²¹ McKegney, *The Kaiser’s Bust*, 175-177.

²² McKegney, *The Kaiser’s Bust*, 177-178

²³ Campbell, “We Germans... Are British Subjects’ The First World War and the Curious Case of Berlin, Ontario, Canada,” 54.

melted down into souvenir napkin-holders... Berlin thus died; its signs and icons vanished. Those who sought its monuments could not find them....²⁴

There was a marked silence surrounding the violence that stole the community's cultural heritage. The trauma of this period resulted in suppressed traditions and a deeply entrenched cultural amnesia. As evidence, there are very few publications addressing the history of Berlin and Kitchener published between the First World War and the mid-twentieth century. W. V. Uttley published the principle text, *A History of Kitchener, Ontario*, in 1937. Even at that point the traumatic period was lightly addressed. In his chapter entitled, "Before and After the Great War" Uttley offers this explanation of Berlin's name change:

For the majority of citizens, war-time was a period of trial, yet stamped with exemplary conduct. Per capita, the citizens gave as much or more than other Canadians to patriotic drives. In 1916, reports of the criticisms levelled at Sir Adam Beck on account of his German parentage reached the city. Fearing that Berlin might be next, two hundred business men petitioned the council to change the name of the city. That was finally done. They chose "Kitchener," in remembrance of Lord Kitchener. Of the break, native-born citizens said in effect, we deplore the change but must accept it.²⁵

Uttley frames the change as an economic strategy. He makes no mention of the civic strife that fractured the community, or the extent of the dissatisfaction most residents felt about renaming the German centre of Canada after the British war hero. It took many years before inhabitants felt comfortable reviving their roots.

²⁴ English, *Kitchener*, 133.

²⁵ W. V. Uttley, *A History of Kitchener, Ontario* (Waterloo, Ontario: Chronicle Press, 1937), 409.

The construction of a legacy

By the 1960s Miriam Sokvitne, a fourth generation descendent of Joseph Schneider, worked intensely to ensure her family legacy was acknowledged. Sokvitne petitioned the Archaeological and Historic Sites Board of Ontario (AHS) to have a plaque placed in front of her family's homestead. Sokvitne saw her work as an extension of her father, Joseph M. Snyder's²⁶ ambition to ensure that history would not overlook the Schneider family's role in settling the area. In a speech given at the unveiling of the Historic Sites' plaque Sokvitne explains:

This day has also given me the opportunity of seeing the hopes of my father move one step closer to fulfillment. This was to have the home preserved as a memorial to those early pioneers, and I believe that the recognition of the old house by the Ontario Archeological and Historical Sites Board is a step in the right direction.²⁷

In addition to ensuring the significant building was added to the Historic Sites registry, Sokvitne collected family heirlooms and early nineteenth century period furnishings.²⁸ Sokvitne clearly states her intention to establish the house as a living history museum in a letter to James Auld, the director of AHS, after the historic plaque was erected. Sokvitne writes:

²⁶ Joseph M. Snyder changed the spelling of the last name to avoid confusion with another prominent Joseph M. Schneider in the community. The family homestead was sold out of the family in the 1910s. Joseph M. Snyder purchased the house back in the 1920s. Burke, *This Old Haus: A place in time*, 17.

²⁷ Miriam Sokvitne, *Unveiling of Historical Plaque at the Joseph Schneider Homestead*, July 28, 1966, Kitchener, Ontario, courtesy of the Miriam Sokvitne Estate.

²⁸ Sokvitne, *Unveiling of Historical Plaque*, courtesy of the Miriam Sokvitne Estate.

This introduces the problems associated with the next phase of a project, which to me is an obligation I would like to fulfill during my lifetime, that is, the creating of a living memorial to these early settlers, in the restoration of the old home as a public museum.²⁹

Sokvitne's ambition to transform the Schneider homestead into a "living museum" aligned with a growing national interest in heritage inspired by the 1967 Centennial celebration of Canadian Confederation.

Centennial celebrations sparked a flood of enthusiasm for heritage. The Archaeological and Historic Sites Board of Ontario was expanded and renamed the Ontario Heritage Foundation in 1967. This organization (now known as Ontario Heritage Trust) was intended to "identify, preserve, protect and promote" heritage properties across the province.³⁰ The 15 years following 1967 saw a sharp increase in small community museums within Ontario.³¹ Locally, the Waterloo Regional Heritage Foundation (WRHF) was formed in 1973. As an umbrella organization, the WRHF was the first to distribute funds collected from taxpayers for use on regional heritage projects.³² The government of Canada crafted a National Museum Policy in 1972 stressing that every Canadian should have access to the country's heritage. The Canadian Conservation Institute was created the same year.³³ The growth in the

²⁹ Sokvitne to James Auld, October 10, 1966, courtesy of the Miriam Sokvitne Estate.

³⁰ Ontario Heritage Trust, "FAQ," <http://www.heritagetrust.on.ca/About-us/FAQ.aspx#;FAQLink2> (accessed October 1, 2015).

³¹ Kenneth McLaughlin. "Heritage House: The museum worth waiting for," in *This Old Haus: A place in time*, ed. Susan MacFarlane Burke, Kenneth McLaughlin, Stephanie Kirkwood Walker (Kitchener, Ontario: Friends of the Joseph Schneider Haus, 2008), 20.

³² McLaughlin, "Heritage House," 22.

³³ McLaughlin, "Heritage House," 20.

Canadian heritage sector, which Sokvitne tapped into, reflected similar transformations occurring in other countries.

Some key developments in the United States prefigured and influenced the Canadian approach to heritage. Patrick Butler's article "Past, Present, and Future: The Place of the House Museum in the Museum Community" examines elements that have shaped the heritage landscape. The decades following America's first centennial celebration (the 1880s and 1890s) saw a general increase in the appreciation of American cultural heritage. People began to nostalgically collect "early American decorative arts and material culture." In fact, this movement matured into the colonial revival style that permeated society to the extent that simplified versions of colonial revival were found in the Sears, Roebuck and Co. catalogue by the end of the century.³⁴ Similarly, after the Canadian centennial there was a marked increase in collecting folk art furniture. In particular, the Waterloo region boasted an active community of antique collectors focused on early Mennonite designs.³⁵

Moving beyond a general interest in heritage, the United States formalized several aspects of museology during the twentieth century. The advanced nature of research that occurred at Virginia's Colonial Williamsburg in the first half of the twentieth century was a crucial step in establishing scientific based approaches and

³⁴ Butler, "Past, Present, and Future," 24.

³⁵ Roberta Grosland, Stephanie Kirkwood Walker, and Susan MacFarlane Burke, Personal Interview, interview by Hillary Walker Gugan, April 9, 2015.

applied research towards heritage buildings.³⁶ This scholarly research combined “archaeological, architectural, and artifactual research with exciting new documentary work.”³⁷ This approach marked a deeper engagement with regional domestic history. Several training programs were developed throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Winterthur, the house museum and research centre created by Henry Francis du Pont, created a training program in 1952 in partnership with the University of Delaware. It was the first Masters degree program designed to train professional curators to work within heritage settings.³⁸ A decade later the Deerfield Summer Program provided instruction for undergraduates. By 1964 the Cooperstown Graduate Program was formed to study folk art, pop culture, and administrative techniques. Working professionals could refine skills through seminars offered by the National Trust. The last three decades of the century saw the number of academic programs continue to increase.³⁹ Butler also notes the rise of heritage tourism because of increased leisure time, and the use of automobiles along with the construction of the national highway system.

³⁶ Patrick Butler, “Past, Present, and Future: The Place of the House Museum in the Museum Community,” in *Interpreting Historic House Museums*, ed. Jessica Foy Donnelly (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2002), 27.

³⁷ Butler, “Past, Present, and Future,” 27-28.

³⁸ “Graduate Programs,” *Winterthur Museum, Garden and Library*, January 5, 2016, <http://www.winterthur.org/?p=634>.

³⁹ Patrick Butler III, “Past, Present, and Future: The Place of the House Museum in the Museum Community,” in *Interpreting Historic House Museums*, ed. Jessica Foy Donnelly (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2002), 31–32.

Multiple histories: Folklore vs. Evidence

Canadian house museums established in the first half of the twentieth century were often run by concerned local citizens. A romanticized, nostalgic view of local history was usually employed in these interpretive narratives. A similar *milieu* had been established in Kitchener as residents reconnected with their past. Key elements that created a sentimentalized view of early Mennonite pioneers were: Mabel Dunham's novel *Trail of the Conestoga* published in 1924; the Pioneer Memorial Tower built in 1926 extolling the Mennonites as the "builders of Canada;" and Edna Staebler's series of books published in the 1960s highlighting the wholesome Mennonite "foodways" and lifestyle.⁴⁰ These materials formalized the community's folk traditions.

It was in this context that Miriam Sokvitne determinedly carried forward her family's legacy. Sokvitne's speech for the unveiling of the AHS plaque in 1966 weaves a romantic view of the heroic settlers. The stoic Schneiders carved out a self-sufficient homestead with outbuildings, a sawmill, and an access road that became the main artery of the modern day city. She describes the interior of the house centered on an open hearth used for "baking, cooking, and heating."⁴¹ The hearth was replaced with a stepped cook stove in 1850. However, she expressed hope to reconstruct the hearth with vintage bricks on the original footing. To conclude her

⁴⁰ McLaughlin, "Heritage House," 22.

⁴¹ Sokvitne, *Unveiling of Historical Plaque*, courtesy of the Miriam Sokvitne Estate.

remarks, Sokvitne extended an invitation to congregate at her home in the spirit of *freundschaft* that her family cultivated over one hundred years before.⁴²

While Sokvitne was heavily invested in the folklore surrounding the early settlement of the area she was also aware of the developing museum culture in Canada. She attended an Ontario Museum Association (OMA) workshop entitled, *The Historic House* on October 21-23, 1977. Her attendance at the workshop falls in line with her intention to convert the family homestead into a museum. The OMA workshop provided several relevant resources, including a reading list that highlighted texts produced by the US National Parks Service and the American Association for State and Local History (AASLH). During the 1960s the AASLH began producing *Technical Leaflets* that offered guidelines on the “care, research, and management of historic structures.”⁴³ Several AASLH leaflets were found in Sokvitne’s personal estate.⁴⁴ After securing the historic plaque for the property, Sokvitne continued her conversation with the Archaeological and Historic Sites Board to seek guidance on transforming the site into a museum. Letters from the Sokvitne Estate show that she received a site visit and advice in January 1967 from the Senior Museum Advisor, Mr. V. N. Styrmo, of the museums programme in the

⁴² Sokvitne, *Unveiling of Historical Plaque*, courtesy of the Miriam Sokvitne Estate.

⁴³ Butler III, “Past, Present, and Future: The Place of the House Museum in the Museum Community,” 32.

⁴⁴ “The Historic House Workshop” (Ontario Museum Association, October 21, 1977), Miriam Sokvitne Estate. The following titles were in Sokvitne’s possession: *Using Consultants Effectively* (#82 1975), *Historic Landscapes & Gardens* (#80 1974), *Historic Houses: an approach to furnishing* (#17 1970), *Historic Site Interpretation: the human approach* (#32 1965), *Paint Color Research and Restoration* (#15 1968), *Before Restoration Begins: keeping your historic house intact* (#67 1973).

Tourism and Information Ministry's Historical Branch. Mr. Styrmo seemed to advise that a "small business venture" be operated on the homestead site with the intention of supporting a "museum type of restoration" within the former residence.⁴⁵

Miriam Sokvitne arranged the transfer of the family homestead to public holdings in 1974 with the understanding that the WRHF would oversee the restoration of the historic site. In light of the shifts in the Canadian cultural climate, board members of WRHF purposely broke with established practice and approached the development of the site with scientific rigor. Kenneth McLaughlin, then chairman of WRHF, characterized the foundation's approach towards the project:

[The historical restoration was] more complex than recreating memories, it called upon precise and accurate restoration details from which one could reach out and 'touch the past' in a way that novels and historical fiction cannot. In reading fiction, one suspends one's sense of disbelief; with an historical restoration one can learn from history only by painstaking accuracy.⁴⁶

McLaughlin's statement reflects the spirit of the times in which he worked. During the 1970s emphasis rested on facts in the face of romantic nostalgia. Curator Susan Burke was hired to manage the restoration of the 1816 Pennsylvania German farmhouse. The process started with extensive feasibility studies and restoration plans. As the work proceeded the plans were revised based on the archeological

⁴⁵ James Auld, "Letter to Miriam Sokvitne," October 21, 1966, courtesy of the Miriam Sokvitne Estate; Miriam Sokvitne, "Letter to V. N. Styrmo," February 2, 1967, courtesy of the Miriam Sokvitne Estate.

⁴⁶ McLaughlin, "Heritage House," 22.

evidence. The most contentious change was the decision against recreating the open hearth in favour of re-installing a stepped cook stove to stay true to the interpretation period.

Weaving a Community

The evidence-based restoration did cause controversy in the community. As the project neared completion Sokvitne withdrew her support. She planned to withhold her collection of family heirlooms from the museum because her version of the past was not being told. Kitchener's local newspaper, *The Record*, constantly critiqued the expanding budget, questioned restoration decisions, and doubted the necessity of the entire project. This conflict highlights growing pains as the sector strove towards professionalization. The leading forces behind the restoration were able to forge meaningful relationships with the community. Susan Burke networked with multiple sectors of the community. Burke cultivated relationships with regional Old Order Mennonite communities to contextualize the findings of the restoration process. Members of the public were also invited to become involved with the museum from very early stages. The house needed extensive restoration because it was converted to a duplex in the early twentieth century. After investigative work was concluded, restoration work parties were hosted on weekends. Volunteers provided cost effective labour while removing recent modifications to the house. Afterwards participants would usually gather at Burke's house for a meal and

socializing.⁴⁷ This volunteer model reflects the working bees the early Mennonites used to build the community. A strong social network of support for the museum was created while volunteers learned about historic building techniques and regional heritage.⁴⁸

Since the museum opened in 1981, Schneider Haus has based many public programs on the working bee model. For example, the month of May is devoted to quilting bees. During one weekend a group of Old Order Mennonite women complete an entire quilt on site. The local Embroiders' Guild provides demonstrations throughout the month. School groups get hands-on practice "stitching in the ditch" on a full size quilt, learn the meaning behind traditional quilting patterns, and examine historic and contemporary quilts on display within the museum's galleries. Schneider Haus capitalized on growing support for the regional Germanic heritage. In 1984 the museum expanded its mission beyond interpreting the lifestyle of Joseph Eby Schneider and his family in the historic homestead to "*encourage the study and appreciation of the German culture in Ontario by collecting, conserving, researching and exhibiting folk and decorative art and documents from the areas of Germanic settlement in Canada, primarily the Region of Waterloo.*"⁴⁹ The amended mission acknowledges the broader legacy left by many generations of German immigrants to the area.

⁴⁷ Susan Burke, Stephanie Walker, Roberta Grosland, interview by author, Kitchener, Ontario, April 9, 2015.

⁴⁸ Many participants were actively restoring their own heritage properties.

⁴⁹ Burke, *This Old Haus*, 136-137.

Multiple community organizations slowly re-connected with the German roots of the region after the Second World War. The Concordia Club reopened in 1948 with a focus on reviving social events. The early 1950s saw the creation of the Schwaben and Transylvania clubs. These institutions offered community resources, health insurance, and social gatherings to new German immigrants seeking a fresh start after leaving their war ravaged homelands. A group of Kitchener residents formed the German-Canadian Alliance in 1951 with the intention of fostering connections between German and Canadian cultures.⁵⁰ In direct response to the 1967 Centennial celebrations the Concordia Club hosted an Oktoberfest. This transplanted Bavarian festival proved highly successful. Today, Kitchener's Oktoberfest has grown into the largest such festival in North America.⁵¹ The celebration now includes an annual Thanksgiving Day parade that emphasizes German heritage while celebrating the cultural diversity of the region.

Weaving the bigger picture

The history portrayed in Schneider Haus does contribute to the national story of steadfast settlers who braved the formidable wilds to carve out civilization. However, it is the spirit in which WRHF undertook the creation of the museum that has embodied a more relevant legacy. The restoration and subsequent programs were only accomplished through substantial community involvement. By returning to the sense of fellowship that united the original citizens, Kitchener

⁵⁰ English, *Kitchener*, 206-207.

⁵¹ Oktoberfest, "Our Story," http://www.oktoberfest.ca/About_Oktoberfest (accessed February 1, 2015).

residents reclaimed their neglected heritage. Miriam Sokvitne did donate key pieces of her family's furniture to the museum although she remained uninvolved with the institution for several years. Sokvitne ultimately recognized the spirit in which the Haus was administered and began participating in programs.

The period examined in this paper saw the ideological pendulum swing between nostalgic folklore to interpretive narratives firmly rooted in historical research. On one hand, Sokvitne aimed to create a monument celebrating the very early stages of settlement with a direct focus on early Ontario Mennonite lifestyle. Sokvitne was motivated by sentimental connections to the Mennonite community and personal family heritage. On the other hand, the museum staff strove for authenticity by setting the interpretation date to the 1850s. Several factors informed this decision. First-person archival documents from the family during that period are available in the Mennonite Archives of Ontario. The restoration process revealed numerous modifications to the house over the previous 150 years. The fabric of the house revealed major changes to the exterior, the kitchen cook stove, and the staircase during the early 1850s. Additionally, there were multiple resources broadly addressing the settlement of Berlin that provided the necessary contextualization of the house and family within the greater community. Schneider Haus played an important part in establishing the model of evidence-based restorations in Canada. In 1982 Heritage Canada awarded Schneider Haus with the Category I Regional Award for its "outstanding contribution to the conservation of Canada's built

heritage.” As the pendulum continues to swing, its arch narrows and museum interpretation becomes more nuanced.

It is now time to look more carefully at the conflict between Miriam Sokvitne’s romanticized stories and the WRHF’s strict reliance on fact. I strongly advocate for continued research carried out to the highest standards. However, in light of revisionist histories and the growing emphasis on visitor meaning-making, we now need a more subtle thread to stitch the larger tapestry together. Careful attention needs to be paid to whose history is told. Over the decades the cultural composition of Waterloo Region has evolved to mirror the rich diversity found across Canada. Framing the interpretation in this way allows more visitors to find a meaningful connection to the immaterial cultural that is animated through material artifacts. In her article, “The Meaning of Places through Stories” Birgitta Gustafsson asks:

How can ‘the dominant [narratives]’ be exchanged for stories that contribute to new perspectives, generating opportunities for visitors to understand themselves, their contemporaries and their position in the world? It is a continuous process of creation in which people use different aspects of historic sites to construe themselves as human beings in a historical period of their lives.⁵²

Current house museums are weaving the future’s history. The legacies that they care for must be intentional, for we are all bound by the history in which our society is based. The delicate threads of community lore, historical and scientific evidence,

⁵² Birgitta Gustafsson, “The Meaning of Places through Stories: A pedagogical perspective,” *Museum International* UNECSO No. 249-250, Vol. 63, No. 1-2 (2011): 68.

and personal meaning-making must all be maintained in the face of new technologies and public entertainment venues of the twenty-first century. The complexities inherent to multi-faceted narrative construction require a critical awareness throughout the process.

Chapter 2

Stimulating History

Building and thinking are, each in its own way, inescapable for dwelling. The two, however, are also insufficient for dwelling so long as each busies itself with its own affairs in separation instead of listening to one another. They are able to listen if both—building and thinking—belong to dwelling, if they remain within their limits and realize that the one as much as the other comes from the workshop of long experience and incessant practice.

Martin Heidegger, *Building, Dwelling, Thinking* (1971)

Heidegger highlights the symbiotic nature of life unfolding within a house. The “building” represents the physical components of life. This could clearly be a reference to the architectural structure that dictates daily patterns of life. The layout of a home determines the paths traversed through space. However, the building can be abstracted to refer to the material culture that could ultimately end up on display within a house museum. When applied to a domestic setting, Heidegger’s “thinking” can represent the immaterial aspects of life. As life unfolds moments are punctuated by emotions, social dynamics and sensory experience that lends subtleties and richness to life.

Understanding “thinking” to mean intangibility within the home leads to the consideration of intangible heritage within the historic house museum. Intangible cultural heritage (ICH) has become a principle concern of UNESCO over the past thirty years. As theories surrounding cultural heritage developed, importance has been placed on caring for the intangible aspects of cultural practice. Intangible aspects of culture were previously defined as folklore, with priority being placed on

the finished products that were valued and collected. A shift occurred in 2001 that positioned intangible cultural heritage as a whole “living” system. Instead of just documenting the finished product, emphasis was placed on creating conditions necessary for the continued production and transmission of traditional crafts, stories, and methods.⁵³ UNESCO currently defines ICH by the four following tenets: traditional, contemporary and living at the same time; inclusive; representative; and community-based.⁵⁴ UNESCO’s current guidelines stress that ICH is an integral part of living culture. While honoring “inherited traditions from the past” it also reflects how traditions are embodied within contemporary urban or rural spaces, not sectioned off as a static relic from the past. The spirit in which intangible heritage is pursued is inclusive and representative. Sharing intangible aspects of culture allows intergenerational and cross-cultural connections to be established. The final tenet of ICH states that only the community itself can determine what comprises heritage. Only practitioners can determine “that a given expression or practice is their heritage.”⁵⁵

As part of the research that I undertook for the Edna Staebler Fellowship, I observed multiple instances of programming throughout the museum. I sought examples ranging from school programs, weekend workshops and visits by the general public. While watching the programs unfold I was keenly interested in how cultural heritage was presented with the intent of sharing knowledge. The living history

⁵³ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, “Intangible Heritage as Metacultural Production,” 53.

⁵⁴ UNESCO, “What Is Intangible Cultural Heritage,” 4–5.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

model in place at the Joseph Schneider Haus allows for learning by doing. I sought to understand how the programming activities at the Joseph Schneider Haus embody the intangible cultural heritage of the regional culture and the site.

Elements of Experience

Four elements of engagement shape the visitor's experience of heritage: physicality, context, mental space, and neuroscience. The physicality of the space allows for a multitude of sensory stimulation. The contextual implications of learning within a museum setting are compounded by the former domestic use of Schneider Haus. The space that the museum as an institution occupies within the collective consciousness of our society shapes how visitors conceptualize the material they encounter. Finally, a cursory understanding of neuroscience sheds light on how the aforementioned elements determine experience.

Physicality

The costumed interpreters at Joseph Schneider Haus follow a living history model while enacting traditional Mennonite activities. Interpreters take on the tasks of different family members and invite visitors to engage in day-to-day activities. This approach creates an immersive environment ripe with smells, tastes, textures and sounds. Visitors can sample traditional baked goods, like Sand Heart Cookies and Maple Squares, prepared in the wood-burning cook stove. They can warm themselves near the stove on a chilly autumn afternoon, or sample tea made from

herbs grown in the four square garden. They can feel the texture of wool and flax in different stages of processing.

The elements of daily life that unfold within the house and grounds of JSH allow for sensory feedback that moves beyond conventional museum learning. In his book *Birth of the Museum*, Tony Bennett states that nineteenth century museum displays were linearly arranged so that visitors could visually “read” the objects and text in order to construct a narrative meant to educate the populous.⁵⁶ These types of exhibitions were designed to convey a cognitive interpretation with a sense of authority. The priority of visual engagement within such exhibitions produced a restricted understanding.⁵⁷ This method limits both the possible interpretations of exhibition material and the ways in which visitors can engage. Marshal McLuhan lays the foundation for understanding this emphasis on visual engagement in *Inside the Five Sense Sensorium* (1961). Visual priority is the result of the predominance of textual material within Western society. Such exhibitions are a response to visual living habits that lead to linear thinking and cause and effect models.⁵⁸

In Western society traditional visual learning models have expanded in acknowledgement of the importance of multisensory, experience-based learning. Writing in 1998, George Hein explains how pedagogical models started viewing the “active participation of the learner with the environment” as key to creating lasting

⁵⁶ Bennett quoted in Hall, “The Reappearance of the Authentic,” 74.

⁵⁷ Wood and Latham, *The Objects of Experience*, Introduction.

⁵⁸ McLuhan, “Inside the Five Sense Sensorium,” 45–46.

learning outcomes within museums. Hein stresses the importance of museums creating experiences that allow visitors to interact with objects in a clear and organized manner.⁵⁹ Hands-on engagement results in a better understanding of the natural and cultural realm. The gallery spaces in the modern part of the JSH building allow for traditional museum displays that communicate principally through visual means. However, the transfer of knowledge that happens during interactive engagements throughout the historic house and grounds mark a more dynamic mode of exchange.

Context

The sensory feedback within the Joseph Schneider Haus can be used to ground the visitor's experience to the greater heritage context. The rich atmosphere of historic domestic interiors has always played a dynamic role in shaping the visitors' understanding within historic house museums. In *Identity and the Museum Visitor Experience* (2009), John Falk explores how visitors internalize and grow from museum experiences. Falk explains:

Museums are very contextually relevant and rich places; they are full of real things, situated within relevant context. Because of this museums are places that make it easy to form memories. This contextualization of the world enables visitors to make 'real' that which was previously only 'sort of real.'⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Hein, *Learning in the Museum*, 6.

⁶⁰ Falk, *Identity and the Museum Visitor Experience*, 150.

The context inherent to house museums and living history sites is especially rich and evocative. Visitors to JSH gain a greater understanding of how life was lived in the 1850s by examining the context in which daily tasks were completed.

The personal understanding that comes from encounters with the ‘real’ allows visitors to create meaningful connections to the past. While the neighborhood surrounding Schneider Haus has changed dramatically since the home was built in 1816, the site itself still provides a context in which to understand the origin of the settlement. The reality that the city of Kitchener originally started on the Schneider’s farmstead enables visitors to contextualize the growth and development of the area and better understand their present environment. Their previous experience and knowledge of the area provides a personal connection to the regional heritage while configuring their position within the broader context of the world.

Mental space

The space that museums hold within the collective consciousness of Western society dictates how they function for many people. Carol Duncan discusses how museums serve as sites of cultural cultivation in her book *Civilizing Rituals*. Museums traditionally require visitors to follow certain prescriptive behaviours that carry ritualistic overtones. “Like most ritual space, museum space is carefully marked off and culturally designated as reserved for a special quality of attention—in this case,

for contemplation and learning.”⁶¹ The knowledge that one is about to enter a special space prepares the mind to participate in the ritual and gain a better understanding of the culture being presented. While this purposeful state does not occur for every visitor, many people do enter an altered state of mind upon entering a house museum. A common trope within the genre of house museums is to “step back in time.” This approach is problematic in that the past is unattainable and history is always viewed through the lens of the present. However, the regular repetition of the phrase, by both staff and visitors, indicates that the habitual connection with the everyday world is set aside while visitors explore the domestic setting of the Schneider family.

The embodiment of intangible cultural heritage within the Joseph Schneider Haus engages many dimensions of the visitors’ mental space. Sheldon Annis explains that the visitor moves through three distinct mental spaces during the course of a visit: dream space, pragmatic space, and cognitive space. Each space functions as an area of ICH transfer. Within the dream space visitors absorb information on a subconscious level. Annis describes museum dream space as a place where “there is a flow of images and meanings—highly personal, sometimes lulling, sometimes surprising, more or less conscious...”⁶² Free associations and impressions are formed in dream space. It is here that personal connections are established to the intangible aspects of the experience. The smell of dust and drying herbs in the attic, the striking visual juxtapositions of vibrantly coloured skeins of woolen yarn, or the

⁶¹ Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals*, 10–11.

⁶² Annis, “The Museum as a Staging Ground for Symbolic Action,” 169.

sound of 100 year old floorboards bearing the weight of another generation all allow for an internalized understanding of culture that ensures a continued rejuvenation of heritage.

Annis' pragmatic space positions the museum and its content as a stage and backdrop, with social interactions between people taking center stage. "In pragmatic space, museum-going is usually a happy and social event. Being there in some particular social union is both purpose and product."⁶³ At JSH, the relationships that are made or maintained are integral to the continuance of intangible heritage. The UNESCO guidelines for safeguarding ICH call for a vital embodiment of cultural traditions in contemporary culture. Protecting the social context necessary for maintaining living intangible heritage became a priority for UNESCO after the 2001 revisions.⁶⁴ Visitors interact with the others in their social group, but might also talk to and learn from other visitors. Interpreters welcome everyone warmly while carrying out tasks that activate the site. There is also an important social dynamic between the interpreters.

The cognitive space that Annis describes follows the typical mental engagement that one thinks of while considering museums. Here visitors seek understanding and follow interpretive narratives.⁶⁵ This space is heavily informed by Duncan's ritualized museum space. Visitors come to the Schneider Haus prepared to learn

⁶³ Ibid., 170.

⁶⁴ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Intangible Heritage as Metacultural Production," 54.

⁶⁵ Annis, "The Museum as a Staging Ground for Symbolic Action," 170.

about pioneer lifestyles and Mennonite culture. The hands-on learning that occurs through the living history interpretation is a demonstration of traditional skills that result in the creation of tangible and intangible cultural heritage. It is important to note that although visitors learn from the demonstrations at the Schneider Haus, the meaning that they make is ultimately personal. Despite the interpretive narrative that is followed, visitors construct meaning based on their previous experiences and established knowledge.

Neuroscience

Recent advances in neuroscience allow for a greater understanding of how the brain processes the sensory information that is transferred through intangible heritage. Knowledge of brain function allows for a refined articulation of how culture shapes our understanding. The immersive environment of the Schneider Haus allows visitors to gain an intimate perspective on early Canadian history. However, visitors arrive at this understanding of history through their present day cultural lens. Jonathon Marotta runs the University of Manitoba's Perception and Action Lab. Marotta explains that the brain processes sensory stimuli through a chain reaction along neuron pathways. There is a fraction of a second in this process when the brain converts sensory impulses to meaningful content.⁶⁶ This step is governed by previous experiences and cultural attitudes. Despite entering a historic site and witnessing traditional practices, visitors do not "step back in time" upon entering the kitchen of JSH. Contemporary visitors can never attain a truly historical moment

⁶⁶ Matthews, "Sense and Social Anthropology."

because they cannot account for all cultural factors that informed the former inhabitants' brain patterns. What is portrayed is a modern day expression of cultural heritage. This is in line with the UNESCO definition that ICH is living and connected with contemporary cultural expression.

An example of the above elements of experience can be detected in the following vignette that I observed:

On one weekend in the early spring a middle age couple visited the Joseph Schneider Haus. After wandering through the rooms they settled in the kitchen where the interpreters were gathered near the stove. Seeking to understand the physicality of the space, the couple came to the museum for learning and contemplation. The couple owned a similarly constructed farmhouse in the nearby countryside. Their first floor staircase was enclosed. The woman was always bothered by the way the wall cut the space, and she felt it must have been a later modification. Discussing the fabric of old houses lead to stories about the restoration of Schneider Haus. After spending time in the kitchen, the woman expressed great delight at the dramatic difference that the open stairs made in the function of the kitchen. She came to appreciate how the space functioned by understanding the interior from a historical context. A prolonged conversation about how the space defined, and was adapted, to the lifestyle of the early inhabitants followed. This example demonstrates an appreciation of cultural differences that shaped the cognitive processes of different generations. Sunlight

filtering through the blown glass windows was admired as everyone imagined how daily tasks and utilitarian possessions were illuminated in the past. The space, as originally designed, allowed the house to breath with the circadian activities of daily life. Experiencing the architecturally defined space allowed an imaginative projection into the intangible experience of bygone eras.

Exploring sensory feedback

The school programs at Joseph Schneider Haus regularly immerse children into historic patterns of daily lives. The Grade 3 Canadian Communities program allows children to partake in the Schneider family's daily activities. After the girls donned pinafores and caps and the boys tied on sturdy aprons, the class prepared to tour the house. Upon crossing the threshold into the historic house the students were told they were "stepping back into history." The atmosphere of the kitchen was laced with smoke from the wood burning stove. The sensory stimulation in this program abounds. Half of the group gathered around the kitchen table to make donuts. One child held the well-worn cookbook, reading out the ingredients from a handwritten recipe. Students saw how ingredients were historically stored in heavy ceramic crocks covered with cloth. The aroma of freshly grated nutmeg filled the air as each student had a turn grating the spice into the rest of the ingredients. Each child had a chance to stir the stiff batter with a thick wooden spoon. When the batter was ready the students eagerly watched as spoonful after spoonful was dropped into a pot of hot oil upon the stove. The anticipation grew as the scent of fried batter filled the air. At the end of the program the students gathered in the programming

room to taste the product of their labour. The enjoyment is palpable as happy children sank their teeth into traditional cinnamon and sugar coated donuts. The physical engagement of the program allowed the students to intimately understand how the demands of meeting the basic needs of life in the 1850s dictated a large part of the Schneider family's lifestyle.

As this program demonstrates, the immersive atmosphere of the JSH encourages the collection of knowledge beyond visual means. Programs that involve the aromas of food preparation are particularly effective in creating lasting memories because of the way the brain processes sensory information. Psychologists Simon Chu and John Downes investigated the neuroscience behind memories associated with particular smells. There is a demonstrated correlation between long-term memories being linked to specific smells and emotion. Neuroscience has determined that the brain processes smell and emotion in the amygdala, hippocampus, and thalamus. All of these parts are located in the primal Limbic system, which also plays a role in the creation of long-term memories.⁶⁷ During the school program smell and memory were explicitly linked. As each took a turn grating nutmeg the interpreter prompted the children to think about the smell. She asked, "What does the smell of the spice remind you about?" The children enthusiastically responded with a chorus of pumpkin pie and apple pie. The smell was used to cue a personal memory within each participant. This act allowed each child to make a personal association with the

⁶⁷ Chu, "Odour-Evoked Autobiographical Memories," 115.

smell of nutmeg, the physical action of grating the hard spice, and a pleasurable mix of memory and anticipation of tasting the spice in freshly baked goods.

Humans read their environment intuitively and accurately. Subtle cues, such as scent, the quality of light, and background noise inform the tone of an experience. Marketing researchers Jean-Charles Chebat and Richard Michon have studied the effect of ambient smells on the public.⁶⁸ Since smell is processed in the limbic system it is decoded differently than other sensory feedback, such as sight and hearing. The limbic system quickly marks incoming scent stimuli with the current emotional state. The emotional context can affect whether the smell is perceived as either pleasant or unpleasant.⁶⁹ While there are issues in conflating marketing research to museum settings, there is a clearly established link between pleasurable ambient smells and visitors forming a positive impression of their environment.

The power of smell has been gaining prominence within the museum world. Jim Drobnick chronicles the increasing attention paid to smell within certain museums in his article *Volatile Effects*. In the 1980s Drobnick states that the use of environmental scents became wide spread at sites where the public gathered:

[A]musement parks, living history sites, heritage centers, science museums and other tourist attractions began to infuse their exhibitions with a wide variety of smells ... to provide intense, immediate sensations, to make

⁶⁸ Chebat and Michon, "Impact of Ambient Odors on Mall Shoppers' Emotions, Cognition, and Spending."

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 531.

cultural experiences accessible to all, and to engage visitors in a personal, interactive manner.⁷⁰

Drobnick contends that the power of smell can be used “as heterogeneous stimulation, for sensory saturation, as an indicator of authenticity, and to engage with visitors on a more subtle perceptual level, one with implicit physiological or psychological effects.”⁷¹ At Schneider Haus the heritage based scents play a key role in the visitor experience. Visitors entering the house while something is baking are welcomed into the historic section of the building by a powerful smell upon opening the gift shop door leading down the walkway towards the kitchen. The aroma of heritage based food cooking on a wood burning stove creates an atmosphere laden with intangible heritage. An aroma is more powerful and favorably processed when it is encountered in an appropriate context that is produced in an authentic method.⁷²

To borrow Drobnick’s term, “dialectical odors” can function in several ways within the house museum.⁷³ As demonstrated above, smell can act as an important access point in allowing visitors to experience heritage in a meaningful way. The Joseph Schneider Haus presents a broader understanding of “dialectical odor” in that it presents smells that are incongruous with the world beyond its walls. The smells within the museum occur as a result of the context in which they exist. The wood

⁷⁰ Drobnick, “Volatile Effects: Olfactory Dimensions of Art and Architecture,” 268–269.

⁷¹ Ibid., 269.

⁷² Chebat and Michon, “Impact of Ambient Odors on Mall Shoppers’ Emotions, Cognition, and Spending,” 537.

⁷³ Drobnick, “Volatile Effects: Olfactory Dimensions of Art and Architecture,” 277.

smoke and spices are not manufactured, and thus work to reinforce the authenticity of visitor experience. However, the absence of certain smells is also telling. The vision of the past presented at JSH is a fabrication, and necessarily so. The past is ultimately unattainable. There are zoning laws prohibiting the keeping of livestock on the property. The donuts are cooked in vegetable oil instead of lard out of consideration of dietary needs and religious beliefs. Organic waste is not disposed of in a rubble pile just beyond the backdoor. History is sanitized. This simple fact should remind us that past eras are always viewed through a present-day lens. This point should also underscore the necessity of maintaining cultural heritage practices that keep intangible heritage vibrant.

Intangible Memories: Cultural and personal interpretations

There are two stages to internalizing intangible cultural heritage. The first stage involves perceiving the sensory cues as discussed above. The second stage occurs when existing culture shapes the understanding of sensory information. The interplay between culture and personal identity shape how intangible aspects of cultural encounters are interpreted. There is a symbiotic relationship between a person's culture and how his or her identity is shaped by the senses. One interprets information based on previous experience. All of this experience shapes one's identity. Within a museum context Elizabeth Wood and Kiersten Latham explain that visitors can "know" an object beyond purely a factual account. Alternative

knowing takes place through memories, sensory feedback, emotional responses, all of which work together to create a sense of identity.⁷⁴

In an effort to understand sensory perception, Chris Salter's work is useful. At Concordia University, Salter runs Hexagram, an experimental performance art space that studies the interpretation of installation art on a neuroscience level. Each brain is different because it is shaped by exposure to unique lived experiences. Cognitive scientists now explain that sensory feedback is processed in a broad network of neurons across the brain, not in isolated areas as previously thought. Each experience will trigger a different pattern of neurons to activate. However, similar experiences will activate areas of the brain with related memories. This explains why a distinctive smell may recall memories from childhood. Salter explains that it seems likely that the neuro-physical response is similar from one person to another. The transmission of stimuli to the brain and through the neuron network is typically the same from person to person. There is a distinct step where the physiological process becomes interpreted into meaning that is still not fully understood. Internalized cultural forces and previous experience inform the final step of the process where meaning is applied.⁷⁵

Insight into how culture shapes the interpretation of sensory information can be gained through historical analysis. Alain Corbin posits that societies throughout

⁷⁴ Wood and Latham, *The Objects of Experience*, Chapter 1.

⁷⁵ Matthews, "Sense and Social Anthropology"; Chu, "Odour-Evoked Autobiographical Memories," 115.

history have had a different understanding of what constitutes sensory feedback in his article “Charting the Cultural History of the Senses.” Corbin suggests that throughout history different eras understood the senses according to culturally specific priorities. If an understanding of environmental factors and social emphasis is established, it should be possible to analyze what was within and without the realm of sensation at a given time and place.⁷⁶ For example, smell at the end of the nineteenth century was downplayed. A highly developed sense of smell was perceived as a symptom of hysterical hyperesthesia.⁷⁷ The living history portrayed within Schneider Haus evokes limited aspects of Berlin’s atmosphere in the 1850s. As visitors move through the exhibition areas they may be struck by smells incongruent to their daily experience, like the smell of drying herbs in the attic or a boiling cauldron of dye for freshly spun wool. Yet such scents would have faded into the background of the sensorium for members of the Schneider family. This difference provides a window of insight into how the previous culture may have processed information.⁷⁸ By experiencing such intangible heritage, I contend that visitors are more able to internalize an understanding of history.

Another example of programming at JSH demonstrates the rich sensory cues of intangible heritage. At the beginning of May a large group of homeschool children visited the Schneider Haus. The program was focused toward Grades 1-3, but older and younger siblings joined as well. After an introduction to the Schneider family

⁷⁶ Corbin, “Charting the Cultural History of the Senses,” 129.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 134.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 136.

and a tour of the site the group settled on the front porch for a hands-on activity. The children were tasked with the chore of cleaning and carding raw wool. While handling the wool the children were able to feel how the texture of wool altered through the process. Their hands were coated with a fine layer of lanolin oil, the pungent smell of wool mixed with the fresh spring breezes in the warm sunshine. In her book, *Dream Spaces*, Gaynor Kavanagh takes Annis' dream space as a starting point to examine how time, space, and memory are conflated within museums. Kavanagh explains how the combined power of rich sensory stimulation and the social aspects of museum visits elicit the recollection of memories and their associated emotions. The highly personal act of remembering is an event that enables a person to connect the past in idiosyncratic ways to current situations. Kavanagh suggests that understanding how visitors move through such a dream state leads to a greater understanding of the impact of museums.⁷⁹ While the children likely did not have prior memories of processing wool, they would have processed the experience in relation to their own internal understanding of the world.

Intangible Cultural Heritage manifests in the physical world through associations with objects. After picking large debris from the fibers the children were each given a pair of carding paddles. The technique of hooking and stretching the wool fibers was demonstrated. The children quickly discovered that this skill requires a

⁷⁹ Kavanagh, *Dream Spaces*, 4.

particular dexterity. The specific coordination needed to master the physicality of carding wool is a prime example of the transfer of intangible culture.

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century UNESCO has made significant revisions to documents governing the conservation of intangible history. Based on the Japanese concept of *Living National Treasure*, UNESCO focused on aspects of cultural creation that offered a vital link to traditional methods for creating heritage based material culture.⁸⁰ Specific support was given to museum work portraying engaging examples of vital ICH.⁸¹ The carding bee hosted for the homeschool children provided an experiential introduction to traditional fiber arts. The group of about thirty children was remarkably focused on mastering the coordination needed to card wool. Ultimately they successfully combed the wool enough to prepared rolags, (to make a rolag, the straightened wool fibers are rolled off of the carding paddle to form a cylinder that is necessary for spinning). The children eagerly handed over their rolags for one of the interpreters to spin.

The aspects of intangible culture within this activity allow participants to form a very personal understanding of life in their community during the 1850s. The opportunity to participate in the production of fabric allows insight into the magnitude of work that previous generations performed. While the children carded, interpreters shared oral histories about the Schneider girls who worked continuously for weeks to process all of the wool and flax that the family produced.

⁸⁰ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Intangible Heritage as Metacultural Production," 53–54.

⁸¹ Ibid., 57.

The students' engagement created an intimate understanding of the process that could not be gained through any other means. Additionally, the work allowed the children to experience the social unity that occurs in a working bee. As mentioned in the previous chapter, many programs are designed on the working bee model to connect to the intangible sense of community that Mennonite settlers nurtured. The program allows movement through all three of Annis' museum spaces. The cognitive space focuses on transferring skills, while the pragmatic space is clearly at play as students work within social relationships to coach and encourage each other. The dream space could be accessed once the mechanics of carding wool was established. There is a therapeutic quality within the repetitive motions that lends itself to daydreaming where specific elements become "disassociated" from their original context. Annis describes dream space as a place where newly formed associations "jolt memory or recognition and provoke internal associations of fantasy, desire and anxiety."⁸² The tactile involvement of this program allows idiosyncratic meaning to be established to heritage on a conscious and subconscious level.

Expanding Sensory Feedback

With the understanding that sensory cues carried different meanings at different points in time, the Western concept of five senses is called into question. The predominate cultures within Western society have created a widely accepted belief that humans interpret the world through the classic five sense of sight, sound, taste,

⁸² Annis, "The Museum as a Staging Ground for Symbolic Action," 169.

touch, and smell. However, non-Western cultures repeatedly demonstrate that life can be informed through other means. The scientific understanding of the body has revealed evidence of at least twenty-four different types of senses including things like balance, and proprioception (the perception of internal sensations, especially those associated with bodily movement). The emphasis on five senses is culturally based. The Western conception of sensory stimuli informs the person about the external world.⁸³ As we have seen historically, the senses can be prioritized differently. Non-Western cultures conceive of the sensorium in a completely different way. Kathryn Geurts points to a markedly different model to understand the senses. In her book *Culture and the Senses*, Geurts points to the Anlo-Ewe-speaking people of southwestern Ghana as a culture that does not characterize the sensorium into five distinct categories. Instead their senses focus on “*feeling* in the body, flesh, or skin.”⁸⁴ The holistic approach of the Anlo-Ewe focuses inwardly, with importance placed on balance, the quality of bodily movement, and hearing. Geurts further explains:

I argue that the sensory order—or multiple, sometimes competing sensory orders—of a cultural group forms the basis of the sensibilities that are exhibited by people who have grown up within that tradition. Such sensibilities have been described by anthropologist Robert Desjarlais as “a lasting mood or disposition patterned within the workings of a body.” Those moods and dispositions in turn become fundamental to an expectation of what it is to be a person in a given time and place.⁸⁵

⁸³ Matthews, “Sense and Social Anthropology.”

⁸⁴ Geurts, *Culture and the Senses*, 10. Original Emphasis.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

Deeper knowledge of a culture can be attained through an understanding of how sensory information is prioritized. While we cannot interview members of the Schneider family who were alive in the 1850s, we can recreate conditions similar to what they experienced to gain a tantalizing glimpse of a lifestyle eclipsed by time. In an effort to learn by doing, visitors are able to participate in gardening tasks within the traditional four square garden. Towards the end of April, as the winter's ice began to recede, the JSH hosted a customized program for a group of homeschooled children. The group made monthly visits to the historic house throughout the school year. This regularity enabled the students to internalize many conditions of life from over 150 years ago.

The home school group set out to complete chores in the yard with the fresh scent of spring in the air tinged with whiffs of smoke from the kitchen fire. The children worked with hand tools appropriate to the interpretation period. As the group approached the white picket fence surrounding the garden they quickly noticed many hand tools laid out. One child exclaimed, "I think we are hoeing!" After some cursory instructions the same child commented, "I've never even hoed before. So, this is a hoe." This activity enabled the children to experience the muscle strength necessary to maneuver the weight of the tools; their young hands experienced the rough texture of the worn wooden handles. Relying on their proprioception, the students had to maintain their balance while leaning over the raised beds of the garden. The physicality of the task illustrated how far one could effectively reach with the hoe while not damaging the perennial plants growing along the outside of

each square. This creates an implicit understanding of the size of the garden. The squares were sized appropriately to be worked by the hand tools.

After working the beds over, the interpreter led a tour around the garden. Children were encouraged to experience the traditional plants. Plants were identified by their distinct characteristics as the students felt fuzzy leaves, stiff woody stems, or distinctive scents. They tasted herbs used for medicinal teas and seasonings used for cooking. Many of the heirloom plants were unknown to the group. Throughout the exploration of the garden the students were told that the Schneider family relied on its produce as a main source of food and medicine. This activity demonstrated how eating in the 1850s was remarkably different. Physical labour was required to ensure the well-being of the entire family. The time spent in the garden allowed each student some degree of personal insight into history through multiple instances of intangible heritage. Although Western culture does not readily recognize an expanded sensorium, the feedback gathered from these sources still informs how we perceive the world.

Intangible Interpreters

The sensory-based experience offered at the Joseph Schneider Haus in conjunction with an awareness of time, historic structure, psychological space, and personal memory could enable the visitor to more fully understand intangible aspects of

heritage. The literary critic, Susan Stewart offers fitting words from her *Prologue*

From the Museum of Touch:

Just as memory enables us to distinguish our waking from our sleeping selves, so does touch cross the threshold between what is unconscious and what is conscious, what is passive and what is active, what is dead and what is living. Memory is the animation of the past necessary to our orientation in the future.⁸⁶

The memory that is animated within JSH looks to the past while it is experienced in the present. Steven Hoelscher's article "Heritage" articulates the act of heritage as the "present-day [use] of the past for a wide array of strategic goals."⁸⁷ I contend that the tangible cultural heritage at JSH is used to evoke intangible aspects of the past to provide visitors with alternative ways of internalizing an implicit understanding of early Canadian heritage.

In her article, "Intangible Heritage as Metacultural Production," Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett explains that placing cultural heritage within a museum setting is beneficial, but at times contentious. People who experience intangible aspects of cultural heritage develop a more astute conception of their place within society. However, preserving heritage in this way results in a tension between arresting its development within an institution and allowing the culture to evolve with contemporary society.⁸⁸ JSH addresses this tension through the artist-in-residence program every year. In the past, folk artists were invited to share their

⁸⁶ Stewart, "Prologue: From the Museum of Touch," 36.

⁸⁷ Hoelscher, "Heritage," 202.

⁸⁸ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Intangible Heritage as Metacultural Production," 58.

craft through exhibitions, workshops, and demonstrations over the course of one year. Such access to ICH enabled visitors to appreciate the rich textures that enlivened the historic cultural landscape. In recent years contemporary artists have been invited, providing a link between current cultural expression and historic topics or materials.

According to the most recent strategic plan, the museum's stated goal is to preserve and interpret ethnic and religious cultural heritage within Waterloo Region, linking contemporary society with its roots.⁸⁹ Yet, in the process of establishing the museum, developing immersive programming, and maintaining a vibrant community base the JSH does not merely present Waterloo Region's cultural heritage. The museum site is a blend of authenticity, comparable period pieces, and recreations.⁹⁰ This historicizing collection of material is the product of the late twentieth century. The content conveyed through the museum acts as a symbol of living cultural expression born out of the needs of contemporary society. Hoelscher explains that "[l]urking just below the surface of the reclamation of a heritage are the needs, the interests, and affairs of a present generation."⁹¹ While the setting of JSH is historic, the "life" within the house responds to modern day concerns. For example, vegetable based shortening instead of lard is used in food preparations to

⁸⁹ Reitz, "Region of Waterloo Museums 2014 Highlights, 2015 Planned Initiatives and Strategic Directions," 25–26.

⁹⁰ The house and Schneider family heirlooms speak directly to the heritage represented. Many pieces of furniture were donated to the museum in the early years. The out buildings are recreations meant to evoke what life was like on the homestead.

⁹¹ Hoelscher, "Heritage," 206. Hoelscher cites Glassberg here.

meet the dietary needs of the multicultural community.

The programming addressed so far is all specifically targeted toward the visiting public. However, the historic interpreters who cultivate and preserve the heritage at JSH actually exemplify the UNESCO guidelines for safeguarding intangible culture heritage. The most prominent instance of the house museum functioning as a metacultural display is found with the historic interpreters. In observing the interpretive team working over the course of the year it became clear that they propagate their own inward facing culture while presenting heritage oriented skills to the public. A newer interpreter was still “learning the ropes” during my observation period. Intangible cultural knowledge was passed to the newer interpreter through the nuanced performance of certain tasks. The stepped cook stove provided ample opportunities for coaching. Core knowledge, such as the proper damper position, is needed to light and operate the stove. However a more haptic knowledge is required to know the proper temperature for frying donuts or how often to stoke the fire.

Each person has a specific, well-honed skill set that he or she nurtures in his or her personal life and then applies to the delivery of programs. Certain interpreters are highly skilled in fiber arts, story telling, or regional history for example. The network of relationships between the historical interpreters facilitates the flowing exchange of ICH within this specific community of museum professionals. Reviewing

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's summary of UNESCO's definition illustrates how completely JSH interpreters qualify as practitioners of ICH:

All forms of traditional and popular or folk culture, i.e. collective works originating in a given community and based on tradition. These creations are transmitted orally or by gesture, and are modified over a period of time through a process of collective recreation. They include oral traditions, customs, languages, music, dance, rituals, festivities, traditional medicine and pharmacopeia, the culinary arts and all kinds of special skills connected with the material aspects of culture, such as tools and the habitat.⁹²

Each member of the interpretive community demonstrated a willingness to share experience based knowledge gained through overseeing the operation of the house as a museum. Another aspect of the community that falls in line with UNESCO's core tenets of intangible cultural heritage is the act of self-definition: "intangible cultural heritage can only be heritage when it is recognized as such by the communities, groups or individuals that create, maintain and transmit it." Applying this tenet to the Joseph Schneider Haus interpreters, it is necessary to recognize that this community is not simply demonstrating historically based skills. They are practicing the intangible skill of historical interpreting at a living history site in the twenty first century.

This community reflects the relationships addressed in Heidegger's *Building, Dwelling, Thinking*. The group would dissipate without the four walls and cedar shingles to contain it. On the other hand the structure would become dilapidated, unrecognizable, or completely give way to the progress of time if not for the

⁹² Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Intangible Heritage," 54.

constant generation of creative momentum within the museum's community. The structure nurtures innovative thought to invigorate the community. Heidegger's words ring true. The symbiotic connection between the early nineteenth century building and the twenty-first century interpretation within the space cultivates an idealized sense of dwelling.

In positioning historical interpreters as practitioners of ICH specific to 21st century living history museums, one is faced with a paradox. The performance they are generally credited for is the heritage of Waterloo Region during the 1850s. While much effort goes towards researching historically based techniques, they are preformed for the consumption of museum visitors and tourists. It is the metacultural activities of 21st century museum professionals truly at work in this instance.

The practiced art of storytelling while demonstrating traditional domestic chores is a key attribute of how contemporary living history museums operate. This skill is honed through an embedded learning situation, much like an apprenticeship. Each program is outlined in resource guides that contain historical facts and program objectives; however, it is through conversations with seasoned staff members that newer interpreters learn the vital elements that bring a program to life. Interpreters adapt programs to suit their personal presentation style and various group dynamics. Additionally, the whole interpretive team must internalize a united sense of timing in order to coordinate several dozen school children through multiple

learning stations while covering required material. The intangible heritage that interpreters propagate enables them to keep thirty Grade 1 students focused and engaged throughout a two-hour school visit.

The historical interpreters practice their craft, bringing a mediated version of history to life through the fine art of storytelling, tantalizing scents, and rich textures. Under such conditions visitors willingly “suspend disbelief” in order to participate in the magical experience of a trip through the Joseph Schneider Haus. Annis beautifully articulates the malleability of museums:

The magic that makes museums so attractive may lie in the flexibility with which people create their own spaces. Museums are more than the sum of their labels and their designed order. Like the objects in them, museums do not *have* a meaning. Rather, they accept and reflect the meanings that are brought to them.⁹³

At JSH this flexibility lies within the wooden floorboards and hangs from the hook rails that line the walls. However, it is often the interpreters that are most flexible. They animate the space and maintain the intangible heritage so that visitors have the opportunity to make their own meaning.

⁹³ Annis, “The Museum as a Staging Ground for Symbolic Action,” 171.

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