

“It’s Always 1855 Here”:  
Inhabiting the Past at Fort Nisqually Living History Museum

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for graduation with Honors in Anthropology.

Whitman College  
2022

*Certificate of Approval*

This is to certify that the accompanying thesis by Colby Lynne Dragon has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation with Honors in Anthropology.

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May 11, 2022

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## **Author Positionality**

I acknowledge that I am a twenty-one-year-old white woman from an upper working-class family. I grew up on the homelands of the Squaxin, Cowlitz, and Nisqually peoples. I conducted my research at a museum that sits on homelands of the Puyallup peoples and celebrates a fort previously located on the homelands of the Nisqually peoples. I drafted this undergraduate thesis at a college that resides on the homelands of the Cayuse, Umatilla, and Walla Walla peoples. I am a newcomer to the field of living history and have used this research and interview conversations to explore my interests in public history, education, museum studies, and heritage management. Because of a previous internship at my research site, I had established relationships with the majority of the interpreters I interviewed which directly affected the conversational nature of our interviews and questions I felt comfortable asking.

“History...is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete,  
of what is no longer.”  
~ Pierre Nora (1989)<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Briggittine M. French, “The Semiotics of Collective Memories,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 41 (2012): 339.

## **With Gratitude**

To Austin, Dave, Jim, Joyce, Sarah, Paul, and John – thank you for welcoming me into your world and for taking time to reflect with me on what it means to be a living history interpreter. You each taught me so much.

To Fort Nisqually Living History Museum staff – thank you for allowing me a site at which to realize my then-disembodied research project and for your behind-the-scenes support.

To Professor George and Professor Lerman – thank you for your mentorship: for your endless questions, reading recommendations, critical and challenging feedback, and the overwhelming encouragement that kept me excited to continue learning, researching, understanding, and writing. I could not ask for better advisors.

To my family – thank you for listening: to the early project ideas, to the verbal processing, and all our FaceTime conversations.

To Leah, Rain, and Hailey – thank you for the laughs, the late-night homework sessions, the bottomless chocolate box, and friendships to last a lifetime.

To Abishai – thank you for your creativity, your curiosity, and your confidence. You are my inspiration.

## Abstract

Fort Nisqually Living History Museum (FNLHM) is a reconstruction of Fort Nisqually, a Hudson's Bay Company trading outpost in operation from 1833 to 1869. Originally located in what is now DuPont, Washington, preservation-minded citizens disassembled the two remaining Fort buildings in the 1930s as part of a Works Progress Administration project. With the manpower of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), these two original buildings were reassembled in the museum's current location at Point Defiance Park in Tacoma, Washington. The CCC also built sixteen additional buildings using historic techniques in order to reconstruct the Fort Nisqually of the 1850s. As a living history museum where "it's always 1855," FNLHM staff and volunteer interpreters portray and interpret the historic everyday lifeways of those associated with Fort Nisqually in the mid-nineteenth century.

The lives of living history interpreters are *pastful*. Ethnographic research conducted during the winter of 2021-2022 and FNLHM-produced TikTok videos reveal how living history interpreters perform and embody Fort Nisqually history for a visiting public. Anthropological theories of cultural performance, historicity, narrative, and historical memory frame living history at FNLHM. I argue that as living history interpreters render a particular place historic, align the past and present so they can step through time to that historical place, and then share stories about the past, their twenty-first century selves come to inhabit a nineteenth century past. Positioning themselves within these places, times, and stories, living history interpreters create collective historical memories for themselves and the visiting public.



## **Prologue: Immersion**

It is the middle of a Pacific Northwest winter. The waters of nearby Puget's Sound are calm, and the gray fog settles low. The wind whispering through the evergreens brings a crisp chill. Inside the palisade walls, smoke puffs from chimneys as the garden lies dormant. And yet, history is alive here at Fort Nisqually Living History Museum.

Fort Nisqually Living History Museum (FNLHM) is a reconstruction of Fort Nisqually, a Hudson's Bay Company trading outpost in operation from the 1830s to the 1860s.<sup>2</sup> Originally located in what is now DuPont, Washington, preservation-minded citizens disassembled the two original Fort buildings still standing and reconstructed them in the 1930s at the museum's current location in Tacoma, Washington. As a living history museum, FNLHM's staff and volunteers portray and interpret the historic lifeways of people living along Puget's Sound in 1855.

During the summer of 2021, I worked as a curatorial intern at FNLHM. While I learned a lot about Fort Nisqually and Pacific Northwest history, and encountered many new objects, I left at the end of the summer with unanswered questions about the practice of living history. In January 2022, I returned to FNLHM with a research question in hand. Sitting at the nexus of history-telling and embodiment, this question asks: through living

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<sup>2</sup> A note on terms: FNLHM or 'the museum' refers to the modern entity, while Fort Nisqually or 'the Fort' refers to the historic entity.

history, how do twenty-first century bodies inhabit a nineteenth century past, both real and imagined? To begin to answer this question, I conducted interviews with seven living history interpreters (both volunteers and staff at FNLHM) over five days of ethnographic fieldwork in January 2022.<sup>3</sup> These interviews complement my own informal observations and reflections from my previous internship during the summer, my attendance at two signature events – Brigade Encampment in August 2021 and Candlelight Tours in October 2021 – and formal observations from my fieldwork in January.<sup>4</sup>

To frame my ethnographic fieldwork, I look toward a variety of anthropological theories. Cultural performance, narrative, and embodiment theories help make sense of what living history is, what it does, and the roles interpreters (those who engage in living history) play. The concepts of historicity, which refers to the cultural perceptions we have about the past, and collective memory, which refers to how we choose to remember the past, both illuminate the role that living history has in history-making projects. On the whole, I argue that living history is a cultural performance of embodied historical narratives. In other words, as interpreters portray historic lifeways (by dressing in historic clothes, demonstrating historic skills, and talking about historic events) their actions create particular stories about the past, and perform those stories in and through their bodies. Their twenty-first century selves come to inhabit a nineteenth century past as interpreters render a particular place historical, align the past and present so they can step through time to that place, and share historical narratives.

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<sup>3</sup> All interpreters declined the use of pseudonyms, and our interview conversations lasted about an hour on average. For an in-depth discussion of ethnographic methods and my prior relationship to FNLHM and its interpreters, see chapter one.

<sup>4</sup> I worked as a staff member during Brigade at the end of my internship and returned as a volunteer for Candlelight in the fall. Brigade and Candlelight, as FNLHM signature events, are described and discussed further in chapters one and four.

Living history is the practice of embodying and interpreting moments of everyday historic life. It grants individuals an opportunity to experience what life would have been like in historic times and places based on experiential learning through dressing and acting as historic others. Educational in nature, living history hinges on the incredibly unique act of interpreting the past. Heritage interpreter Freeman Tilden wrote that “the chief aim of Interpretation is not instruction, but provocation” (1967:9). Tilden conceptually defined interpretation as “the revelation of a larger truth that lies behind any statement of fact,” an act that “capitalize[s] mere curiosity” (1967:8). In his aims of “provocation,” “revelation,” and “curiosity,” Tilden invites interpreters to investigate the perceived stagnant quality of facts – historical facts in the case of living history.

Living history interpreters are those who engage in living history, called ‘interpreters’ in short. They aim to make history relevant for a modern audience through interpretation. Their “mission” is to “bring tangible elements of the past to life and to help visitors understand the past through a human lens” (Bain 2019). It is not enough to simply dress as a historic person. Interpreters must portray, contextualize, and explain the things of the past through immersive storytelling in order to enhance our understandings of historic persons, lifeways, skills, and events.

Generally, living history involves two roles: the interpreter and an audience, and the immersivity and “provocations” of living history extend to both. Interpreters develop an “impression” or, more colloquially, a persona or character. First-person and third-person impressions refer to the two main impression styles in living history

interpretation. First-person impressions adopt the persona of a historical figure (in dress, speech, actions, attitude, etc.), while third-person impressions outwardly portray a historical figure (mostly in dress and action), but individuals speak as one's own self. Both first- and third-person impressions can be realistic (persons who actually lived) or fictional. Interpreters develop such fictional impressions usually from "composites of known figures" or are "general characters relying on more disparate evidence" (Bain 2019). For example, in a first-person realistic impression an individual would become Fort Nisqually Chief Factor Dr. William F. Tolmie, dressing and speaking as Tolmie.<sup>5</sup> Alternatively, an individual could develop a first-person fictional impression of Andrew Thomas, a fictional blacksmith who might have worked at Fort Nisqually. Third-person impressions could be of the same two persons as above, real or fictional, yet the interpreter continues to speak to others as themselves. More commonly, third-person interpreters do not necessarily become a specific persona, but portray the dress, lifeways, and skills of a generic group of historic persons. First-person interpreters are often described to be "stuck" in the time they are portraying – constrained to the knowledge and experiences of their persona. On the other hand, third-person interpreters can "step through time," retaining their modern knowledge, their modern ways of speaking, and, importantly, their knowledge of history's trajectories (how eras ended, the outcomes of major battles, the accomplishments of historic persons, etc.).

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<sup>5</sup> Appointed by the Hudson's Bay Company, the role of Chief Factor is often described by interpreters at FNLHM as a "general manager." The Chief Factor was the man responsible for overseeing the daily operations of a place like Fort Nisqually, keeping track of employees, and communicating with superiors such as Dr. John McLoughlin, Chief Factor and Superintendent of the Columbia District at Fort Vancouver (the district in which Fort Nisqually was located). Fort Nisqually and Hudson's Bay Company history are featured in chapters one and three, respectively.

Sarah, a staff interpreter at FNLHM, sees the inability to connect with visitors as one of the limitations of first-person interpretation: “if you’re strictly first-person, you can’t connect with people on their level” (Sarah 2022). First-person interpreters have to let go of their modernity. They are limited to the knowledge and experiences of their persona. They might “know” five unique ways to start a fire without a match, but they will not “know” what a Bic lighter is or what it does. This exchange of historic knowledge in the place of modern knowledge often manifests itself as a dismissal of the knowledge and experiences of the public audience during interactions. Consider, for example, this hypothetical dialogue between a first-person interpreter (FI) and a visitor (V):

FI: Welcome to Fort Nisqually! How far did you travel to get here today?  
V: Oh, it took us about an hour by car.  
FI: What are you talking about? What is a car? Horses are the only way to get here!

On the other hand, the same exchange between a third-person interpreter (TI) and a visitor (V) might go something like this:

TI: Welcome to Fort Nisqually! How far did you travel to get here today?  
V: Oh, it took us about an hour by car.  
TI: So not too far. Well, you travelled by car today but when people travelled in the 1850s, they did so by horse and wagon when travelling overland or by steamship if they came down Puget’s Sound...<sup>6</sup>

In the first example the first-person interpreter, with knowledge limited to their persona, was unable to make history relevant and relatable for their modern audience. Instead of dismissing the visitor’s experience like the first-person interpreter did, the third-person interpreter was able to acknowledge a differing experience and make a modern connection. If we kept listening to the third-person interpreter, they might continue to

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<sup>6</sup> Sarah 2022. These imagined scenarios are drawn from comments made by Sarah during our interview.

interpret Fort Nisqually history by segueing into sharing how long that meant it took for trade goods to arrive at Fort Nisqually from places like London, England.

Some scholars have already written about the experiences of living history and reenactment (a broader term which refers to general, more theatrical endeavors in re-living history – typically of historic events such as Civil War battles in the U.S.). Stephen Eddy Snow (1993) conducted an “ethnohistorical” investigation of the living history program at Plimoth Plantation in which he focused on understanding the theatricality, ritual, and liminality of living history. Richard Handler and Eric Gable (1997) took as their focus the ways that public history is managed at Colonial Williamsburg to create a narrative of nationhood; considering Colonial Williamsburg as a corporation entangled with tourism, education, and museum and heritage pedagogy. Tony Horwitz (1998) explored the ties between reenactors, American ideals, and the ‘Deep South,’ while Vanessa Agnew (2004, 2007) shed light on first-person interpretation, stereotypes of time travel, and the globality of living history with her research in Germany. Patricia G. Davis (2012) discovered that African American women participate in Civil War reenactments to recover lesser-known memories of the Civil War and frames their participation as acts of resistance through performances of idealized femininity.

For two reasons, my research focuses on third-person interpretation. First, as outlined above, scholarly research on living history has historically emphasized first-person interpretation. Secondly, most living history interpreters at FNLHM interpret in third person and their dress demonstrates which generic group of persons associated with

Fort Nisqually they portray. In the following chapters, this study of living history offers new perspectives into how interpreters inhabit history while attending to past, present, and future concerns. We learn that interpreters' lives are *pastful*, full of the traces of history. Living *pastful* lives, interpreters create new memories about the past allowing historical narratives to be rewritten, reperformed, and re-remembered for generations to come.

This paper is organized like a story. We have begun in the prologue, will journey through five chapters, and then close with the epilogue.

The first two chapters provide crucial ethnographic and theoretical background. Chapter one, "The Fort Nisqually Bubble," introduces the site at which I conducted fieldwork and outlines my research methods. It is in this chapter that I include the typical narrative story that interpreters share about Fort Nisqually and introduce my interlocutors. This first chapter also features a frank discussion about the critical reflexivity I needed to make sense of my own portrayals of a Metis woman and a European woman during my time at FNLHM. The second chapter, "A Living Artifact," will briefly outline the theoretical framings for this paper. It is in this chapter that I explore the anthropological concepts of cultural performance, historicity, collective memory, narrative, and embodiment that situate my understanding of living history as a cultural performance of embodied historical narrative.

Chapters three, four, and five address the question of how twenty-first century persons inhabit a nineteenth century past. In chapter three, "On Almost the Exact Same

Land,” I focus on place – outlining how Fort Nisqually and FNLHM have been variously imagined as a contested colonial place, as a nostalgic place, and as a historic place. I then describe the *immersive trifecta* (consisting of the built environment, movements of interpretation, and sensorial experiences) at play in rendering FNLHM’s Fort Nisqually into a historic place.

The fourth chapter, “Wearing Modern Boots,” considers the common assumption that living history is an exercise in time travelling and asks, *is it really?* I explore two different temporal ideologies (linear temporality and aligned temporalities) and how they relate to the ways interpreters see themselves inhabiting the past, present, and future during interpretation.

In chapter five, “Here, We’re British,” I highlight the stories interpreters share with visitors. I pay particular attention to the interpretive techniques they use to make past ways of life relevant and thus understandable to their modern audience. In specific, I look at the use of “we” which reveals how interpreters’ posit themselves as part of the historic group they portray; the use of modern comparisons such as “Fort Nisqually was the Costco of its day” that makes history relevant; and visual narratives in the form of two videos posted by FNLHM on TikTok to understand how interpreters invite their audience to (re)imagine what past life might have been like.

The epilogue is a reflective conclusion. It sums up the main revelations of this project within the context of historical memory considering living history’s creative potential for memory-(re)making and offers one final story about an interpreter caught fabricating history.



## **Chapter One**

### **“The Fort Nisqually Bubble”: Ethnographic Methods<sup>7</sup>**

According to their website and brochure, Fort Nisqually Living History Museum is a reconstruction of “Fort Nisqually, the first globally connected settlement on the Puget Sound” (FNLHM, accessed April 3, 2022).<sup>8</sup> The narrative that follows describes the historical context, facts, and lifecycle of Fort Nisqually reconstructed at FNLHM. In compiling this narrative, I drew on interviews with and observations of many interpreters (including those not interviewed). No one interpreter said exactly this. This narrative is most often recounted in the present tense in order to foster an immersive atmosphere. This interpretive technique is retained in the following narrative.

Of course each individual interpreter may add their own emphases and additional facts when (re)telling Fort Nisqually and FNLHM history, but this is the narrative framework within which living history operates at FNLHM. The act of including and excluding historical facts, though often unintentional, is an authorial act in silencing. In the following narrative, note the absence of Indigenous communities as agentive historical actors. The narrative’s general focus is on sharing a white, British perspective of Fort Nisqually history.

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<sup>7</sup> Field notes (2022).

<sup>8</sup> A PDF copy of their brochure, “Walking in the Footsteps: A Self-Guided Tour,” can be accessed online at FNLHM’s website: <https://www.metroparkstacoma.org/place/fort-nisqually-living-history-museum/#about>. This brochure includes a brief history, map of the museum, and descriptions of each building and additional landscape features. It is also reprinted as an image on the pages immediately prior to chapter three.

*The Oregon Territory, the U.S. and European name for this tract of land encompassing the Pacific Northwest region, has been jointly occupied by Britain and the U.S. since 1818. In early summer 1833, Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) Chief Trader Archibald McDonald establishes Fort Nisqually as a fur trading outpost on the banks of Sequelitchew Creek. Just a few buildings along the creek, Fort Nisqually sits on the lands of the Nisqually peoples in the area of what is today DuPont, Washington. A few months later in June 1833, Chief Trader Francis Heron arrives and selects a site on nearby Sequelitchew Prairie for an official 'fort' and builds a house. During the summer and fall the same year, HBC men erect a few more buildings, plant a garden, and build a high fence between the people's house and the storehouse to enclose the space. In 1834, William Kittson, arriving with Heron's departure and dissatisfied with the current state of the Fort, orders the majority of the existing buildings rebuilt and new structures erected, completely changing the layout of Fort Nisqually for the third time.*

*In 1840-1841, HBC transfers the management Fort Nisqually to its subsidiary Puget Sound Agricultural Company (PSAC) which oversees 161,000 acres of Fort Nisqually's surrounding farmland as a commercial enterprise to offset the economic loss of the declining fur trade. Dr. William Fraser Tolmie arrives at Fort Nisqually as Chief Trader in 1843. As headquarters for PSAC operations, the Fort moves about a mile east of the first site closer to a fresh water supply and expands with more*

*structures. A stockade wall encloses and fortifies this site in 1847-1848. In 1853, the U.S. Congress creates the Washington Territory. Operating as a British holding in American-claimed territory, Fort Nisqually sees Dr. Tolmie advance to Chief Factor in 1855 (the year FNLHM portrays). Four years later, the Tolmie family moves to Fort Victoria, leaving the Fort's management in the hands of PSAC clerk Edward Huggins who declared his intention to become a U.S. citizen ten days earlier.*

*In 1869, the U.S. government awards the British government \$450,000 as payment for PSAC "possessory rights and claims" to the Puget Sound area. Huggins files a preemption claim to retain ownership of the Fort's buildings and some surrounding land shortly thereafter. The Huggins family homesteads this property for the next thirty-five years. Daniel Caufield buys the Huggins' farm in 1906 and then, in a larger land sale, sells the land to DuPont Power Works in October of the same year. One hundred years after original establishment, the Civilian Conservation Corps moves and rebuilds the two remaining structures (the Granary originally built in 1850 and the Factor's House completed in 1855) from the historic Fort Nisqually site to Tacoma's Point Defiance Park as a Works Progress Administration project in 1933. This WPA project also reconstructs the rest of the buildings here at Point Defiance, on the traditional lands of the Puyallup peoples, according to the Tolmie-era layout using historic techniques.*

These are the stories within FNLHM's walls. It is a historical narrative continuously grounded in time and place – *something happened here on this date*. In and amongst these simple sentences of dates, names, and places are the everyday stories of Fort Nisqually. It is the task of the living history interpreter to breathe life into the spaces between each line of this narrative. Through their actions, their words, and their presence, interpreters portray the historic lifeways of the community associated with Fort Nisqually in the 1850s.

I had the opportunity to work at FNLHM as a curatorial intern during the summer of 2021. I worked on many object-based projects: inventorying collections, maintaining outbuilding exhibits, and caring for FNLHM's artifacts. I was often inventorying during the few weekdays FNLHM was open to the public that summer.<sup>9</sup> Dressed in modern clothes with blue nitrile gloves and a laptop, my appearance was a bit at odds with an otherwise Victorian atmosphere as I stood in parlor of the Factor's House. Unlike the living history interpreters, I did not fit in!

Often visitors would comment – “I didn't know they had laptops back then!” or “Is that *really* what they would've worn?” These were not serious questions, but like the interpreters I, my body, and my work were very much on display. Usually I gave a laugh and used their comments to segue into talking about my role as curatorial intern and about important behind-the-scenes (now visible) projects that help museums run

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<sup>9</sup> During my internship, FNLHM was open to the general public Thursday through Sunday due to COVID-19 restrictions. During January while I was conducting fieldwork, FNLHM was open to visitors only Friday through Sunday due to limited winter hours, lasting COVID-19 restrictions, and limited staff. At the time of writing, FNLHM has returned to its pre-COVID-19 schedule: open Wednesday through Sunday during the winter season, and shifting to seven days a week for the summer season from May 1 to October 1.

smoothly. I answered questions about specific objects – “are those really *original* objects?” Some are, some are not – and more broad questions about Fort Nisqually history. I was able to use my curatorial role to interpret specific pieces of Fort Nisqually history through its artifact collections.

As part of my internship, I was asked to work as a living history interpreter during Brigade Encampment in the middle of August 2021.<sup>10</sup> I had spent the summer watching staff and volunteers interpret Fort Nisqually history dressing up to portray the sorts of people who lived, worked, and interacted with Fort Nisqually in the 1850s, so I was excited to give living history a whirl! I wondered how the experience of interpreting would feel different “dressed” than in jeans typing on a laptop. Those two days of Brigade were not enough. I designed this project to learn more about the experience of living history and knew I wanted to return to FNLHM for participant-observation fieldwork.

This thesis relies on two main data sources: my personal reflections and interviews with interpreters. I draw on observations I made and personal experiences from Brigade in August as well as a when I returned as a docent to volunteer at the Candlelight Tours in October 2021.<sup>11</sup> Because these events occurred early on in the development of this project and I participated in each event as staff and volunteer respectively, I draw on my own memories and observations sparingly in the coming

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<sup>10</sup> Brigade is a two-day hands-on learning event for visitors and reenactment of the 1855 arrival of the annual fur brigade to Fort Nisqually. It has a combination of first- and third-person interpretation.

<sup>11</sup> Candlelight is another two-evening event where visiting groups are led by docents through FNLHM witnessing first-person scenes of events that happened in the 1850s.

chapters. In January 2022, I returned to the museum to interview interpreters about a list of topics and to be intentional about recording my own observations.

Ethnography is the central research method in the discipline of anthropology. An anthropologist does ethnography and also writes an ethnography; it is a little confusing. It requires the researcher to go out into the community one is studying in order to understand and then write about a particular cultural phenomenon. Researchers rely on a variety of data-collecting strategies. I employed two traditional and common methods: participant-observation fieldwork and interviews. Participant-observation fieldwork is just what it sounds like – the researcher becomes a participant in the community of study while observing the interactions of themselves and community members. Anthropologists rely on interviews to hear community members talk about the cultural phenomenon under study in their own words. Instead of structuring my interviews as a series of questions, I thought about the topics I wanted interpreters to talk about and guided our conversations around those, leaving space for interpreters to speak more generally about living history and FNLHM as well.

Based on experiences during my internship, returning to FNLHM in January for fieldwork meant I wanted to appear as an interpreter. During the summer, I noticed that visitors were less likely to interrupt a conversation between myself and an interpreter when I was in my modern clothing, than when I dressed in Victorian clothing. Dressing as an interpreter in January helped me blend into the landscape of FNLHM, allowing visitors to interact with the interpreters with whom I spoke without feeling as though they were interrupting another visitor's experience. It also gave me the chance to interpret Fort Nisqually history when asked by a visitor or another interpreter.

I arrived at the museum each winter morning about a half-hour before opening to push open the heavy palisade gates. Entering the front gates meant entering the “Fort Nisqually bubble.” I could block out my twenty-first century world leaving modern cares behind in the parking lot and become an interpreter for the day experiencing in some small way an idea of what life was like in the 1850s for those associated with Fort Nisqually. Making my way into the Clerk’s House (volunteer headquarters), I dressed in my borrowed underpinnings (chemise, three petticoats, and kerchief), then my self-made teal dress and borrowed shawl. Parting my hair down the center and twisting it into a low bun, wriggling into my boots, tying on my apron, and placing my recorder in an apron pocket, I was ready.



*Figure 1: Author dressed as a living history interpreter portraying a European (British woman). I made my dress the week before Brigade using a historical pattern and mostly historic techniques. This image is from Brigade Encampment 2021 but is what I wore during my January fieldwork exchanging the sunhat for a warm shawl.*

I always went to interpreters for our interviews. I wanted to talk with interpreters while they were doing their normal activities. Only one interpreter responded to an email I sent out in the weeks prior. I simply approached the other interpreters day of and asked if I could spend part of the day chatting with them in between visiting groups. I interviewed seven interpreters during my five days at FNLHM.<sup>12</sup> When we were not chatting, I watched how interpreters interacted with visitors – how they used the space of the museum to tell stories about the past – and listened to the words and stories they shared with visitors. The interpreters always took the lead in talking with visiting groups. I only interpreted if asked a direct question by a visitor or jumped in when a steady stream of visitors came through the buildings. I spoke with Sarah and Austin separately in the Sale Shop, Jim and Dave on the porch of the Factor’s House individually, Joyce in the Laborer’s Dwelling, and Paul and John together in the Blacksmith’s Shop (for a map of the site, see the brochure reprinted between chapters two and three).<sup>13</sup>

Most of the interpreters I interviewed were people I had met during the previous summer. Others I met for the first time during our interview. I talked with two staff interpreters and five volunteer interpreters. Sarah and Austin, the two staff interpreters, were the two I knew best from the prior summer. We had worked together around the museum setting up for various events, interacting during the summer camps I also spent time helping with, and spending a few lunches together chatting about Fort Nisqually history. Sarah and Austin have each been working at FNLHM for the last few years and both bring an educational background in history, museum education, and other related

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<sup>12</sup> Each interview lasted about an hour on average. Interview audio recordings and written transcripts have been donated to Fort Nisqually Living History Museum.

<sup>13</sup> All interviewed interpreters declined the use of pseudonyms.



fields. Dave, a talkative interpreter, taught me how to fire a flintlock musket over the summer and many different ways to start a fire during the winter. At Brigade, I spent two days keeping visitors busy tin-punching in the hot summer sun while Jim worked nearby on his own projects answering visitor questions. I met Joyce at Brigade too where she taught me about transferware ceramics. I met John and Paul for the first time in January when I asked if they would be willing to give an interview.

A staff interpreter at FNLHM for the last few years, Sarah dresses as a European woman. She was my first interviewee; we chatted a second time the following week diving deeper into more specific topics surrounding gender and representation at FNLHM. During both interviews, Sarah was knitting a *sontag* (a Victorian shawl that crosses over the front of the chest, wraps around back, and then ties in front). In the summertime, Sarah enjoys working in the garden, but her all-time favorite heritage skill to experience at FNLHM was getting to plow. She described this experience as “life goals” – it was something she wanted to try “just once” to “know what it’s like” so she did, and it was “amazing.”

Austin, another staff interpreter at FNLHM, started right around the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. He had been in the marketing and advertising world and had returned to school to earn his degree in public history just before the onset of the pandemic. Austin began Civil War reenacting at nine years old and has “been doing it ever since.” In addition to portraying a Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC) laborer at FNLHM, he also is part of a local military history group that has shifted its focus from Civil War events to reenacting more local U.S. military movements and events. Austin has a keen interest in sharing moments of daily life with visitors and also in talking about

the interactions between the Hudson’s Bay Company, American settlers, and Indigenous communities.

Jim, a volunteer interpreter, caught the living history bug when he joined a muzzle loading gun club in Minnesota many years ago. He wanted to learn how to shoot a muzzle loader but kept getting dissuaded because “all the literature basically talked about how dangerous this was.” He thought to himself, “excuse me, but this has been going on for centuries, and there are people that do this routinely. I just need to find the right people.” So he joined a club that just so happened to be a rendezvous club.<sup>14</sup> It was “a very casual introduction” to living history interpretation. At FNLHM, Jim sets up his workbench on the porch of the Factor’s House. He has been a practicing tinsmith since about 2012 but his interest stemmed from watching tinsmiths at the Henry Ford Museum as a youngster. Now a tinsmith at FNLHM, Jim portrays a skilled craftsman, dressing much the same as a general laborer. He makes all sorts of things – teapots, coffeepots (spout placement is the difference!), cake pans, strainers, mugs of various sizes, lanterns, and more – some of which are sold through FNLHM’s Gift Shop. When I first met him at Brigade, I thought Jim was a quiet man. But like anyone, with the right question Jim’s face would light up like a sunbeam. Talking about the history of tinsmithing is his favorite part of volunteering at FNLHM.

Dave is a well-loved old-timer. If you want to know about historic trade guns, shoot a flintlock musket, learn how to start a fire five different ways without a match, or talk about modern car engines, Dave is your man. At FNLHM, he portrays a HBC

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<sup>14</sup> Per Jim, a rendezvous is “the historic reenactment of the annual party that is the exchange of furs for next year’s trade items” (2022).

laborer. When he is not walking visitors around the museum, Dave is in the Sale Shop talking about trade relations or outside chopping firewood with a historic crosscut saw or a hatchet. Dave also volunteers at the Meeker Mansion (in Puyallup, Washington) where he bears a striking resemblance to Ezra Meeker himself.

Joyce, another volunteer interpreter, is lovely and enthusiastic lady. I spent almost an entire day with Joyce in January. Our recorded interview only totaled about an hour (just like the others) but our transcript was the longest! Joyce joined the volunteer program in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic. With low visitation she has had the chance to talk with and learn from many other interpreters at FNLHM. She dresses as a Metis woman, someone with a Euro-American/European parent and an Indigenous parent, and she has made most of the clothes she wears. Like Sarah, Joyce was knitting as we were chatting (as was I when my fingers were warm enough). Whenever visitors entered the building, Joyce always made it a point to set down her knitting and stand up to greet visitors. She finds this encourages visitor-interpreter interactions because it shows that her focus is on the visitors, not her project.

Paul and John are both volunteer blacksmiths. I had seen them both around FNLHM at Candlelight and the during previous summer, but we had not interacted. Paul has been blacksmithing for a little over twenty years and he also does a mix of woodcarving and woodworking. "Making stuff by hand and kind of thinking about how stuff was done way back when" is what got him interested in the historical aspects of blacksmithing. At FNLHM, Paul enjoys sharing Pacific Northwest history and Fort Nisqually's place within it, inviting people to think about a time when the area was not Washington state as we know it. He also has a lot of blacksmith expertise and often

shares the history of the trade with visitors. Like Jim, some of the items Paul makes are available for purchase in the Gift Shop. Other times he makes items for repair projects around the museum.

John has a military history degree and, like Austin, has experience in Civil War reenacting. While doing a bit of family research recently John discovered “several blacksmiths up the chain.” He looked into blacksmithing and found that it was a way he could “still do living history, interact with the public, but not have to lug around the pack and a rifle.” Currently, John is apprenticing under Paul. John also has a good handle on Pacific Northwest history, especially local military history which he shares with visitors curious about the U.S. Army’s presence in the area. Paul and John both portray skilled craftsman dressing as laborers with leather apron to denote their role as blacksmiths.

These seven interpreters are by no means representative of all the interpreters who work and volunteer at FNLHM, nor are they representative of the number of diverse historic individuals known to have interacted with Fort Nisqually. As briefly mentioned in the prologue, FNLHM is a reconstruction of Fort Nisqually, a trading outpost managed by the British economic trading giant the Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC). Reducing Fort Nisqually to a British outpost is a bit of a simplistic rendering. HBC was a British-run company, but it employed many non-British persons. At Fort Nisqually, HBC is known to have employed Englishmen, Irishmen, Frenchmen, those from what is now Canada, Scotsmen, Hawaiians (known at the time as Sandwich Islanders), Indigenous persons, and Metis persons (those with Indigenous and Euro-American/American ancestry). This employment came in two forms: both as indentured, unfree labor and as free laborers. A

Jamaican-born cook worked in the Kitchen for a time and Indigenous persons (especially women) were often unpaid garden tenders or farmhands under the oversight of a (male) HBC employee.<sup>15</sup>

Metis women entered the HBC world through marriages that were *à la façon du paye* (“according to the custom of the country”) and their familial ties directly affected HBC business dealings and trade relationships. White European or European-descended women at Fort Nisqually during its years of operation numbered three (all wives of laborers) and they all “seem to have lost their inhibitions upon arriving in the Pacific Northwest” (Milliken 2005:95). In other words, these three women were not paragons of Victorian virtue. In contrast, about sixty Indigenous or Metis women lived, worked, and were associated with Fort Nisqually. They married HBC laborers, trappers, farmers, and factors. In 1855, the year FNLHM portrays, Jane Work Tolmie (Chief Factor Dr. Tolmie’s wife) was the socially superior Victorian woman at Fort Nisqually, herself the daughter of an Irish father and a Spokane/Nez Perce and French-Canadian mother.<sup>16</sup>

As we have discovered in the typical narrative included at the opening of this chapter, interpreters often limit the stories they tell to the perspective of a white, colonialist, HBC experience at Fort Nisqually. Interpreters rarely step outside the

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<sup>15</sup> For more information on HBC in North America, see Cecelia Svinth Carpenter, *Fort Nisqually: A Documented History of Indian and British Interaction*. Tacoma, Washington: Tahoma Research Service, 1986; and Michael Hughes, “Within the Grasp of Company Law: Land, Legitimacy, and the Racialization of the Métis, 1815-1821,” *Ethnohistory* 63 (3): 519-540; Adele Perry, “Vocabularies of Slavery and Anti-Slavery: The North American Fur-Trade and the Imperial World,” *Australian Historical Studies* 45 (2014): 39; and William R. Swagerty, “‘The Leviathan of the North’: American Perceptions of the Hudson’s Bay Company, 1816-1846,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 104 (4): 478-517.

<sup>16</sup> For more on the women of Fort Nisqually and Metis women more generally, see Emma Milliken, “Choosing between Corsets and Freedom: Native, Mixed-Blood, and White Wives of Laborers at Fort Nisqually, 1833-1860,” in *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 96 (2): 95-101 and Brenda Macdougall, “‘The Comforts of Married Life’: Metis Family Life, Labour, and the Hudson’s Bay Company,” *Labour / Le Travail* 61 (Spring 2008).

palisade walls of FNLHM's Fort Nisqually to talk about greater geopolitical concerns and cultural interactions. In fact, the only non-white perspective FNLHM represents occurs as interpreters, primarily female interpreters, are asked or assigned to portray Metis women. Jane Work Tolmie and her sister, Letitia Work Huggins (who married Edward Huggins, the last homesteader of the historic Fort Nisqually acreage) are often heralded as notable Metis women among the many other wives of HBC laborers and trappers.

This brings up questions about when authenticity or historical accuracy should be sacrificed in living history interpretation. At FNLHM, perhaps about half of the female volunteers portray Metis women and the other half portray European women, even though historically only three European women were associated with Fort Nisqually. Matters of representation are tricky to navigate because when engaging in living history each interpreter brings with them their own positionality and background. On the one hand, staff and volunteers should be able to portray whomever they wish in a manner comfortable to them, but on the other hand, the absence of particular persons can be construed as an intentional silence or erasure.

Part of my summer internship involved assisting with week-long summer camps. Staff and volunteers dressed as Victorian persons and taught the campers historic skills and trades, all to intensify the immersivity of their week at FNLHM. For the first two months of my internship, I dressed as a Metis woman and for the last month I dressed as a European woman. I did not choose to dress as a Metis woman. It was simply the set of clothes that appeared under my name in the Clerk's House. At first, I was slightly uncomfortable. Metis history is part Indigenous and part White history, but was *I* the right person to be portraying a Metis person? Is it *my* story to share? A couple weeks into

working the summer camps I asked a staff interpreter, “Would you really have seen a blond-haired, blue-eyed Metis girl?” My own positionality, appearance, and personal history seemed at odds with my third-person, generic Metis portrayal and I was trying to make sense of this reflexive discomfort. She assured me, “Yes. You’d probably be second or third generation.” Her answer was not good enough for me, it did not assuage all my discomfort.

So I traded in my moccasins for a corset. During my last month of working at FNLHM, I dressed as a European woman for summer camps and Brigade. Like many female interpreters, I made my own dress in part to try some historical sewing techniques, in part to have something of my own (instead of borrowed FNLHM clothes), but mainly in response to the feelings of discomfort I felt “dressing” Metis. During my fieldwork in January, I returned dressed as a European woman and talked with Sarah and Joyce, separately, about this representation question: how do we *respectfully* (and ethically) tell stories that are not our own? Sarah and Joyce both talked to me about a time not long ago (and maybe not completely phased out) when incoming female interpreters were assigned to portray Metis women and eventually “graduated” to portraying European women if they stayed on (Joyce 2022).<sup>17</sup> In some ways this can be attributed to ease of loaning clothing. Interpreters portraying Metis women tend to wear more loose-fitting or boxy clothing pieces making it easy to fit a larger skirt onto a smaller person, for instance. Interpreters portraying European women wear tailored Victorian dresses, complete with petticoats and a corset, and the fit is more person specific. If an interpreter stopped volunteering, staff and volunteers at FNLHM would not have wasted time and energy

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<sup>17</sup> This was confirmed by Sarah in our second interview (Sarah 2022b).

tailoring a Victorian dress to fit this particular person if they dressed Metis during their time as a volunteer. “Graduating” from portraying a Metis woman to portraying a European woman, inherently presupposes a particular hierarchy: that to become European is to be something more than Metis. As we discussed earlier, this was not necessarily the reality of the Fort Nisqually social hierarchy, and yet is perhaps the social reality at the modern FNLHM.

Researching for this project and talking with Sarah and Joyce, I learned about the three European women around Fort Nisqually during the era FNLHM portrays (1855-1859). Instantly, I felt a similar sense of discomfort this time from within the part of me that is a critical historian-anthropologist: *if there were only three women at FNLHM, and their stories are not even that related to Fort Nisqually operations, why are there so many interpreters dressing as European women; and why am I one of them? Am I complicit in erasing Metis and other Indigenous perspectives from the visual landscape of FNLHM?*

Part of the challenge with living history is that most often visitors question the things they can see – the clothes of the interpreter, the interpreters’ actions, the unfamiliar historic furnishings in each outbuilding, etc. – and the unseen stories are harder to tell. As I dress as a European woman, my very presence indexes to visitors that white, British women lived and worked at historic Fort Nisqually. And while this may be true, to a very limited extent, it is not the entire story. Only through a conversation with visitors am I able to share stories about other historic persons. Joyce remarked that often visitors only see the difference between Metis and European dress when two interpreters portraying each are standing side-by-side. Dressing as a Metis woman is not always enough to share



their lifeways and historic experiences. At the time of writing, I have not yet figured out this interpretive quandary: do I portray someone that looks like me, or do I help people the storied landscape of FNLHM's Fort Nisqually by dressing with the intention of historical authenticity and accuracy? For the vast majority of women living and working at Fort Nisqually were Metis, so perhaps that is whom I ought to portray.

## Chapter Two “A Living Artifact”: Theoretical Framings<sup>18</sup>

Living history rests at the intersection of history, public education, and museum studies. Like any cultural phenomena, it can be studied anthropologically. While other scholars, notably Snow (1993), have focused on exploring the liminality and ritual of living history (after the work of Victor Turner), in this project I contemplate the role of living history in history-making projects. I frame living history as a cultural performance of embodied historical narrative.

### An Image of the Past: Cultural Performance, Historicity, and Collective Memory

Living history can be understood as a cultural performance. Just as in other performances of social life, the experience of life lived is “prized” (Schechner and Turner 1992:4). With living history, the performative focus is on life *as it has been lived*. Through acting or enactment, as in other cultural performances, living history interpreters “may come to know themselves better through observing and/or participating in performances” informed by the lifeways of historic figures (Schechner and Turner 1992:81). Understanding living history as a cultural performance, we are able to learn more about the human experience by looking to the past revealing how traces of the past are felt in modern life.

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<sup>18</sup> Austin 2022.

Yet historic life is not simply imitated in living history, it is more complex than simple behavioral imitation. Through living history, historical events, persons, and really the category of history itself is reshaped, evaluated, and reflected back upon in the manner of cultural performances (Schechner and Turner 1992). As we perform something about the past, a Thanksgiving pageant for instance, we determine the particular version of the past we want to share – do we emphasize the ‘friendly’ interactions between the ‘Pilgrims’ and Indigenous communities, or do we emphasize the colonial legacy of celebrating this holiday? In either capacity we are reframing historical events, reshaping and reevaluating what we know to be “history.”

Theories of historicity center on our cultural perceptions of the past. Scholars of historicity seek to understand how the past is constructed and represented in the present (Stewart 2016). To observe, study, and unpack the making of history requires a definition of history that extends to all the ways we acquire historical knowledge, the relations we have with the past, and the ways we imitate the past (Palmié and Stewart 2016:226). We can begin to understand the processes of history-making by looking at the cultural performances that render the past intelligible to an audience in the present.

Michel-Rolph Trouillot ([1995] 2015) advocates for understanding historicity in two parts: historicity one as the things that happened, and historicity two as the things which are said to have happened. In doing so, Trouillot posits a productive relationship between the past, present, and future. As we engage in historicity two, the process of recollection, ‘history’ is (re)produced in the present. To move from historicity one to historicity two, four moments of production stand in the way. *Facts* must be created through sources, assembled in *archives*, retrieved as part of a *narrative*, and then imbued

with the *retrospective significance* that bestows the term ‘history’ (Trouillot [1995] 2015:26).

### Telling the Past: Narrative

As we discovered above, such stories about the past are never solely about the past – they are created, rewritten, and (re)told in present moments. The past cannot be divorced from the present, and vice versa. In this project, I define historical narratives as the stories that recount the events and experiences of past life. Such narratives are influenced by present concerns and characteristically place historical events in temporal and causal sequences. In this section, and the following chapters, I employ anthropological theories and concepts about personal and everyday narrative to explore and understand historical narratives. This is particularly illuminating for the narratives that arise from and are the products of living history interpretation. As they mend a shirt, set a beaver trap, and cook a meal, interpreters demonstrate semblances of the ordinary. Thus, my employment of personal narrative as a model for understanding historical narrative is grounded in historical moments of the everyday and past lived experiences.

When narrative tellers such as interpreters recount narratives of human experiences, they organize events in terms of “human time, wherein the experienced present is tied to a remembered past, an anticipated future, and/or an imagined moment” (Ochs 2006:273). In other words, narratives can hold “the intermingling of imaginings and rememberings” and tellers “may traverse multiple temporal domains in the course of ordering a sequence of events in narrative form” (Ochs 2006:275). In the case of living

history, interpreters recount the past experiences of historic others. They traverse the temporal domains of their modern present into a remembered past to share historical narratives with visitors. In so doing, historical narratives are shared not just through the words of interpreters, but also through their bodies and actions.

As interpreters move from an archive of facts to a constructed narrative, certain elements are included while others are excluded. For Trouillot, “any historical narrative is a particular bundle of silences,” and this is certainly true in living history interpretation ([1995] 2015:21). At FNLHM, living history interpreters search for the curiosity of the visitors by “reading” those who enter. Interpreters frequently commented that once visitors’ interests were identified, they were able to use that interest to construct a historical narrative. The interest serves as a springboard to talk to visitors about historic life more broadly and to reveal interesting, “tailored” historical facts. This also means that other information, such as global contexts and colonial practices, remain unsaid and unheard.

#### How Past is the Past?: Embodiment

Anthropological theories of embodiment articulate a connection between the body and experience. To embody something is “to express, personify, and give concrete and perceptible form to a concept that may exist only as an abstraction” (Sen and Silverman 2014:4). Embodiment also refers to “patterns of behavior, inscribed on the body or enacted by people, that find their expression in bodily form” (Strathern and Stewart 2011:389). Living history interpretation occurs in and through the body. It offers

opportunities for patterns of historical behavior – dress, skills, and lifeways – to be felt, experienced, and inscribed on interpreters’ bodies. Interpreters are then able to express, personify, and interpret an abstract nineteenth century Pacific Northwest history in tangible ways thereby bringing history to life.

Through bodily display and patterns of behavior such a dressing in period-clothes interpreters embody Fort Nisqually history. Joyce, a volunteer interpreter at FNLHM, dresses as a Metis woman, a person who has a European/Euro-American parent and an Indigenous parent, whereas I dress as a European woman. While I wear a Victorian dress that reaches the toes of my boots and fluffs out over three petticoats, Joyce wears a short dress (essentially a tunic-length, long-sleeved shirt) and a shorter skirt that reaches her calves with leggings underneath. A group of women came into the Laborer’s Dwelling where we were spending the afternoon and asked why we were dressed differently. Joyce and I were able to interpret our outfits, explaining what pieces we were wearing, to share the types of experiences different women had at Fort Nisqually. Just as it went for me and Joyce, staff interpreter Austin remarked on this “tailoring” of Fort Nisqually history:

...how you’re dressed is also another way that you’re going to tailor the message. If you’re dressed upper class, your experience at the Fort is going to be *completely different* that if you’re a general laborer at the Fort...If you’re a woman at the Fort, your experience is going to be *totally different* that if you’re a man. So, if you’re Native or Metis at the Fort, *total different* experience. (2022, emphasis mine)

Facts of historic life are symbolically displayed and expressed through interpreters’ clothing. Our experience and Austin’s words demonstrate that the way one dresses affects the particular stories they embody.

Implicitly requiring bodies on display, living history materializes historical facts on the bodies of interpreters. An interpreter’s body almost ceases to exist as their own

twenty-first century body. Instead, interpreters' bodies become sites of a forgotten historical time and place. Austin conceptualizes the display of his body (and the bodies of others) as visual representations of history, likening its display to that of other artifacts at FNLHM: "You're part of the museum. You're-, you're an artifact just as much as anything else in the walls here...So it's your job to be the voice for all the artifacts that can't speak. You're the one that gives them the voice, and you're doing so as a *living artifact*" (Austin 2022, emphasis mine). Artifacts are belongings associated with historic persons, places, and events; they are tangible echoes of an otherwise unknown past. Austin speaks to the blurring of roles, between inanimate and animate "artifacts" in living history, revealing a transformation of his body into a "living artifact," something that is no longer his own but the museum's.

To embody something also suggests "the act of becoming part of a body" (Sen and Silverman 2014:4). For some interpreters, getting dressed in period clothes is also a time to take on a particular historical mindset: "when I'm getting dressed, I'm starting to put myself into that mindset of I'm in the 1850s" (Austin 2022). For Austin, outward expressions of historic life permeate his mind and body such that he begins to embody history from the inside out, enhancing his "revelations." Interpreters, as we'll discover in the next few chapters, tend to place themselves within history such that the boundaries between interpreter and place, past and present, teller and spoken narrative are entangled, overlapping, and porous.

## Remembering the Past: Collective Memory

Anthropologists and historians often encounter the concept of memory when it comes to studying the making of history. Memory is entangled with notions of personhood and individuality, but also with notions of a collective. I have memories of things that have happened to me or things I have done, and I also have memories about what it means to be a part of a collective (as a Whitman College student, for instance). Collective memory is often considered to be an example of social memories, the memories we have from being a part of a group. French philosopher Maurice Halbwachs, credited with developing the concept of collective memory, defines his concept in the following way: “a specific representation of the past based on present concerns” (quoted in French 2012:339). In other words, collective memory refers to the ways we encounter the past while standing in the present. This knowledge about the past is “shared, mutually acknowledged, and reinforced by a collectivity” and perhaps even embodied (French 2012:340).

Often scholars of collective memory, and those in memory studies more broadly, focus on the ways that collective memory is lived, experienced, and felt by those a part of particular groups. Thus, the notion of collective memory carries with it a critical focus on historical trauma, the presence of pain in remembering and/or forgetting. Collective memory intends to make present that which has been rendered absent (i.e. [un]intentionally forgotten) – due to reasons such as distance, trauma, and time. In doing so, the past is recalled, reconstructed, and recreated “based on present concerns” (French 2012:339). Collective memory is one way of making sense of the temporal relationship



between the past and present: “representations of the past are temporally displaced from, yet implicated in, the present moment in which they are invoked” (French 2012:346).

French historian Pierre Nora conceptualized the location and embodiment of collective memories in *les lieux de mémoire*, or sites of memory. Nora’s memory sites are “places” that take shape in varied forms: language, monuments, memorials, landscapes, and testimonies, but also narratives and embodied performances. Collective memory is produced in and through the memory acts of remembering and forgetting. As individuals compile historical facts into narratives and embody historical experiences through living history, they too engage in the social production of collective memory. Understanding living history as the cultural performance of embodied historical narrative gives us the framework for understanding how it also functions as a memory site.

Framing living history in such a way reveals that it is a practice much more nuanced and complex than a simple hobby. It is an educational medium entangled with history-making subject to the reshaping, reevaluating, and reflections of its performers, the interpreters. With this in mind, we begin to uncover how interpreters inhabit and embody the past they portray. In the following chapters, I argue that as interpreters render a particular place historical (chapter three), align the past and present so they can step through time to that historical place (chapter four), and then share historical stories (chapter five), their twenty-first century selves come to inhabit a nineteenth century past.

## Walking in the Footsteps

**FORT NISQUALITY**  
LIVING HISTORY MUSEUM  
METRO PARKS TACOMA

### Self-Guided Tour



**Outside of the Palisade Walls . . .**

**Field Crops 18**  
The Puget Sound Agricultural Company grew wheat, oats and barley to sell to domestic and international customers. They also grew mangel wurzel, a type of beet which was fed to livestock, and field peas eaten by both people and animals. Field crops also included turnips, pumpkins, and Indian corn. Produce grown at the Fort today is based on the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century history of Fort Nisqually. We use heirloom seeds that date back to that period.

**Orchard 19**  
Fort Nisqually's original orchard was planted east of the Fort; descendants of those trees can still be seen in DuPont today. Although the exact species are unknown, the orchard consisted of apple, pear and plum trees.

**Meadow 20**  
The Nisqually tribe hunted and gathered food from the Nisqually prairie. The same area was used by the Puget Sound Agricultural Company to graze livestock and grow some field crops. Today, the meadow is used for the same purposes.

**Barn (Coming Soon) 21**  
Several barns and agricultural buildings were constructed around Fort Nisqually, outside the palisade walls. Similar to other structures within the Fort, this structure was built using the post-in-sill method. The barn was a place of work. Woodwork or "country carpentry" would have been done here. Farm implements would have been stored here. Also, the barn sheltered activities such as the threshing of wheat. The barn did not often house animals, but animals might come inside for different reasons.

**FORT NISQUALITY**  
LIVING HISTORY MUSEUM  
METRO PARKS TACOMA

Located in Point Defiance Park • 5400 N. Pearl St., #11  
Tacoma WA, 98407 • (253) 404-3970  
FortNisqually.org  
Facebook.com/FortNisqually • Twitter.com/FortNisqually  
Instagram.com/FortNisquallyMuseum

Fort Nisqually, the first globally connected settlement on the Puget Sound, was established in 1833 by the Hudson's Bay Company as a fur trading outpost. The decline of the fur trade meant that Fort Nisqually's focus shifted to commercial agricultural enterprises with the establishment of the Puget Sound Agricultural Company (PSAC) in 1839. Based at Fort Nisqually, the PSAC raised cattle, sheep, and horses along with crops such as wheat, barley, oats, and peas across the 160,000 acres claimed by the company.

By 1855, the date the museum portrays, this British establishment was surrounded by American territory and faced increasing pressure from settlers who wanted the farmable land for their own use. The Hudson's Bay Company sold its holdings to the United States government, withdrawing from Washington Territory in 1869, and Fort Nisqually became the homestead of the last manager, Edward Huggins.

Fort Nisqually was originally located in what is now DuPont, WA. The Fort you see today was reconstructed in the 1930s by the Works Progress Administration (WPA). Civic-minded citizens preserved and donated two of the original structures, the Factor's House and Granary, to the Metropolitan Park District of Tacoma. The museum gives residents and visitors a chance to experience what life was like on Puget Sound in 1855.



The sales shop, front palisade, or wall, and bastion, at right, are essentially complete in this photograph from September 1, 1934. The work underway in the foreground is the squaring and shaping of additional pickets for the remaining three sides of the palisade that surrounded the reconstructed historic site. Fort Nisqually's original site was 15 miles south, near DuPont.

Figure 2a. Screenshot of FNLHM's self-guided tour brochure (front). Downloaded from FNLHM's website on April 3, 2022 by author.

**Factor's House 1**  
Construction began in 1854 for Scottish-born physician William Fraser Tolmie and his growing family. Completed in 1855, this house was built in the new "Yankee Style" with milled lumber instead of the standard post-in-sill, heavy-timber style used elsewhere in the Fort. Dr. Tolmie, his wife Jane, and their children lived in this house from 1855 until 1859. The house was subsequently occupied by Edward Huggins, his wife Letitia (Jane's sister), and their children until 1860. The house is now a National Historic Landmark.

- Dining Room:** Dr. Tolmie and his family would have dined and entertained guests in this room. It also was often used as Dr. Tolmie's business office. The large table offered a place to easily spread out maps or documents.
- Parlor:** The Parlor was another room where the family would entertain guests or themselves. Reading, music, parlor games and domestic crafts would have occupied this space daily.
- Master Bedroom:** Dr. Tolmie, his wife Jane, and their youngest children would have slept here. In 1855, bedrooms would have been built for the other Fort laborers.
- Children's Bedrooms:** Dr. Tolmie and Jane had six boys: Alexander John Tolmie (1851-1903); William Fraser Tolmie Jr. (1852-1926); John Work Tolmie (1854-1926); James Work Tolmie (1855-1917); Henry Work Tolmie (1857-1939); and Roderick Finlayson Tolmie (1858-1934).

**Kitchen 2**  
Originally constructed in 1851, the kitchen was located close to Dr. Tolmie's house for efficient service. It contained a large cooking stove and had a lean-to, believed to have been used by the blacksmith and as a bakery. The kitchen served meals to the family, its guests and Fort laborers.

**Wash House 3**  
This structure was for the laundry of the Fort laborers and was originally built in 1854.

**Root Cellar 4**  
Built and constructed in 1854 to store root vegetables. Because preservation did not exist, so cellars were a way to provide cool storage and preserve food longer.

**Smoke House 5**  
In January 1851, laborers began "making ready smoke houses" for Fort laborers. The laborers used such "ready-made" tongues in smoke houses, were noted in the Journal of Occurrences. The original location is not known, but the value of the contents may have tempted theft and loss by man or beast if built outside the fort's walls.

**Poultry House 6**  
Records indicate that the first poultry house survived until 1853. Fort Nisqually actually acts as a conservatory for heritage breeds. The round-log construction of this poultry house differs from other Fort structures inhabited by people.

**Laborers' Dwelling 9**  
The Laborers' Dwelling actually represents two different interiors, a home for bachelor laborers and a laboring family's house.

- Dwelling House, the home of the bachelor laborers.** They were often transient and kept all their possessions in a sack or small portable case or trunk. It is not known how many men shared a room, but likely four or more. The exterior of our Visitor's Center is modeled after the outside of the original Men's Dwelling House. Laborers were often from certain geographic locations including English, Hawaiian, and Native American.
- The room to the right represents the quarters of a laboring man and his family.** Most of these families lived outside in the Fort's walls in a small village. Objects in the room suggest permanence. Most of the laboring men's wives were Native American or Metis (part Native American). They did laundry, dug potatoes or other tasks and were paid in goods. Children slept on the bed with the parents, or on the reed mats on the floor. The sleeping mats were rolled up in the corner when not in use.

**Bastions 10**  
Standard HBC forts included a walled perimeter and bastions at the corners for security. They were also used for storing ammunition and wall guns. Although available for defense, these guns were primarily used to signal approaching ships. At other times, this structure was used as a detention cell for unruly people or an extra apartment for laborers.

**Smoke House 11**  
In January 1851, laborers began "making ready smoke houses" for Fort laborers. The laborers used such "ready-made" tongues in smoke houses, were noted in the Journal of Occurrences. The original location is not known, but the value of the contents may have tempted theft and loss by man or beast if built outside the fort's walls.

**Cart Shed 17**  
This represents a shed built to store one of the Fort carts and later Dr. Tolmie's buggy. The original probably was built of rough-hewn logs.

**Large Store 17**  
The large store was built in 1844. It warehoused supplies imported from Britain and the Puget Sound Agricultural Company's outstations and held goods destined for other HBC forts in the region. PSAC products consisted of salted beef, salmon, potatoes and wheat. Much of this was bound for Russian Alaska. Wool and a few furs were stored here before shipment to London markets.

**Clerk's House 13**  
This small cabin replaced an older version of quarters for the clerk. In 1855, this was the home and office of clerk Edward Huggins. It was noted that the new Clerk's House was a "superior building" and was built in the "Yankee Style" with milled lumber. **STAFF ONLY**

**Store House 2 14**  
This building was used primarily as a storeroom or warehouse where goods were kept. By the 1860s, it became a workshop. Today, we operate the Blacksmith Shop and Carpenters' Workshop here.

**Granary 15**  
As the headquarters of the Puget Sound Agricultural Company, the Fort's primary business was agriculture. This Granary was built in 1850 and is one of the Fort's two original structures. It was used to store grain and produce. After the grain was thrashed and winnowed in the barn, it was hauled by wagon to the Granary. Besides wheat, oats and barley, it stored Peas, Beans, and Corn. The building was saved from demolition and moved to Point Defiance in 1933. The Granary was listed on the National Registry of Historic Places in 1970.

**Sale Shop 16**  
The sale shop was completed in 1849. Originally used as a third warehouse, it became a sale shop in 1852, and contained "every imaginable commodity likely to be needed". Goods were imported from Britain and elsewhere in the United States. It was both a showroom and a salesroom. In 1855, more American settlers were moving to the Washington Territory; after arrival, they purchased whatever goods they needed.

**Men's Dwelling House 17**  
This structure was built in 1846 and served as the residence for all the Fort laborers. The original Men's Dwelling House was located at the center is modeled after the outside of the original Men's Dwelling House.

Figure 2b. Screenshot of FNLHM's self-guided tour brochure (back). Downloaded from FNLHM's website on April 3, 2022 by author.

### Chapter Three **“On Almost the Exact Same Land”: Creating Historical Place<sup>19</sup>**

History is often tied to place. But how are historical places created? Typically a place is made historic when the documentary record supports that ‘this happened (t)here.’ In anthropological theory, place refers to a physical location, an existence that “can be either real or imagined,” with a meaning that is “constantly reinterpreted and reclassified” (Sen and Silverman 2014:3). In the case of Fort Nisqually Living History Museum, it is a reconstructed version of Fort Nisqually sixteen miles away from the original site. Therefore, it is up to the living history interpreters to make the modern FNLHM into a historic place. In this chapter, we unpack the ways that Fort Nisqually has been variously imagined as a colonial place and as a nostalgic place, and now today as a historic place. Staff interpreters Austin and Sarah’s voices speak the strongest and reveal an *immersive trifecta* at work in living history interpretation consisting of the (re)built environment, movements of interpretation, and sensorial experiences. It is this *immersive trifecta* that creates an embodied historic place out of the colonial and nostalgic landscape of FNLHM’s Fort Nisqually.

#### Historical Context: The Making of Colonial Place

In 1670, Charles II of England awarded a royal charter to the Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC). Its purpose was for “adventurers” to discover the availability of “some

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<sup>19</sup> Austin 2022.

trade for furs, minerals, and other considerable commodities” in the north and west regions of the North American continent (Royle 2011:4-5). HBC assigned Chief Traders and Chief Factors to its outposts, planting European men in and amongst the inhabitants of otherwise unknown areas of the continent. In 1821, HBC merged with its biggest competitor, the American fur trading organization the North West Company, and acquired two NWC holdings west of the Rocky Mountains. Some of this land would later become British Columbia and the rest included a tract of land within what was called Oregon Country and would come to be called the Columbia District under HBC management. Fort Vancouver, built along the Columbia River in 1825, became the headquarters of Columbia District HBC operations under the oversight of Chief Factor and Superintendent Dr. John McLoughlin. Fort Nisqually, built in 1833, served as another trading post strategically placed along Puget’s Sound in between Fort Vancouver and Fort Victoria (along the Fraser River).

Trading companies such as HBC were particularly useful and economically safe organizations for colonialist and imperialist projects. Nation-states or their monarchs would license companies that could take the risks of trade and travel without draining national coffers (Royle 2011:3). Through the exercise of duties and taxes upon licensed trading companies, the state could still participate in the profits, as was the case with HBC due to its management in London and its partnership with ‘the crown’ (Royle 2011:1-14).

HBC practiced economic colonialism. It was a colonial project that sought to exploit, extract, and explore rather than discover and settle (which was the model of American settler colonialism). HBC set up trading posts on land they explored and

created relationships with local Indigenous communities for intercultural interaction that enabled HBC to extract furs, in particular, and other goods to be shipped back to England. As HBC took over the land upon which Indigenous communities had been living and working since time immemorial, the men of HBC (re)made the land of the Columbia District, and Fort Nisqually, into colonial places through economic and extractive activities.<sup>20</sup>

For the entirety of Fort Nisqually's existence up until 1855, the surrounding geopolitical space – called the Oregon Country/Territory by the British and U.S. governments – had been jointly occupied. This joint occupation, in legal terms, was an agreement between the U.S. and British governments dating to a treaty signing in 1818 (and amended in 1826). This definition of joint occupation leaves out a valuable and key population – the Indigenous communities whose land these foreign governments were claiming as their own. In 1846, representatives from both colonial governments signed the “Treaty with Great Britain, in Regard to Limits Westward of the Rocky Mountains,” informally called “The Oregon Treaty,” which establishes the forty-ninth parallel as the primary international boundary between British and American holdings. Under this treaty British subjects, HBC forts, and PSAC operations are allowed to remain for a time in this newly created American territory (see Articles III and IV).<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> For a history of Fort Nisqually centered on the Indigenous communities with whom HBC lived and worked, see Cecelia Svinth Carpenter, *Fort Nisqually: A Documented History of Indian and British Interaction*. (Tacoma, Washington: Tahoma Research Service, 1986).

<sup>21</sup> The treaty in its entirety can be viewed online thanks to the Avalon Project. “Treaty with Great Britain, in Regard to Limits Westward of the Rocky Mountains” [“Oregon Treaty”], June 15, 1846. Avalon Project - British-American Diplomacy. Source: Statutes of the United States - Volume 9. [https://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th\\_century/br-1846.asp](https://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/br-1846.asp)

Seven years later in 1853 (two years before FNLHM's 1855 portrayal), a portion of the land within the Oregon Territory is carved out to establish the Washington Territory. In true form, the U.S. government decided to strengthen its settler colonialist project through a series of treaties with Indigenous tribes. This series of seven treaties is informally called the 'Stevens Treaties' after territorial governor Isaac Ingalls Stevens and includes the Treaty of Medicine Creek (1854), the Treaty of Hellgate (1855), the Treaty of Neah Bay (1855), the Treaty of Point Elliot (1855), and the Treaty of Walla Walla (1855). The main tenets of these treaties ceded the vast majority of ancestral lands to the United States government and resulted in the removal of Indigenous communities to reservations.<sup>22</sup>

For the British men and families at Fort Nisqually, the 1854 Treaty of Medicine Creek was negotiated and signed about five to ten miles away from the original Fort site. Seven hundred Nisqually, Puyallup, Squaxin, Steilacoom, and other landowners whose territory amassed to four thousand square miles became the target for Stevens' Medicine Creek Treaty. The treaty terms ceded most of this land to the U.S. government in exchange for \$32,500, designated reservations, and acknowledged Indigenous communities' rights of access to traditional hunting and fishing grounds. Additional treaty terms forbade Indigenous communities to continue their trading actions with the remaining British presence in the area (i.e. HBC). Allotment of ceded land to American citizens and assimilation of Indigenous communities are key tenets of American settler colonialism. As a result of unfair treaty terms and forced relocation to reservations, land

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<sup>22</sup> A complete list of 'Stevens' Treaties' with transcribed treaty terms can be found at the Washington State Governor's Office of Indian Affairs' website: <https://goia.wa.gov/resources/treaties>.

conflicts all over the territory of Washington erupted in the years immediately following (1855-1856). These armed conflicts are colloquially called the Treaty Wars and resulted in an era of coercion, internment camps, insular reservations, assaults, casualties, and land appropriation (Reddick and Collins 2005:374-397).

Since the time of its establishment, Fort Nisqually has been a contested place. The Fort was created as a colonial place characterized by economic pressures, resource extraction, and the exploitation of Indigenous peoples and land by the Hudson's Bay Company and the British government. As it sits on a tract of land variously claimed by Indigenous communities, the economically colonist British government (*vis-à-vis* HBC), and the settler colonialist American government, the Fort Nisqually of the mid-nineteenth century was reimagined as a *contested* colonial place.

#### A Reconstructed Fort: The Making of Nostalgic Place

In the 1930s Fort Nisqually was reimagined, yet again, into a particularly important, *nostalgic* place. As part of greater trends in early-mid twentieth century nostalgia for the frontier days of the West and the celebration of the American pioneering spirit, Fort Nisqually was reconstructed at Point Defiance Park in Tacoma, Washington as a Works Progress Administration project with the manpower of the Civilian Conservation Corps. For historic-minded individuals in the 1930s, (re)claiming Fort Nisqually as a vital piece in the story of the making of Washington state and the American West meant disregarding Fort Nisqually's entanglement with British colonial history. Instead, American citizens reframed this British legacy as something distinctly American – Fort



Nisqually was integral to the establishment of Washington state, so it should be remembered and preserved as such.

FNLHM as it portrays Fort Nisqually today is a location that represents a colonial, nostalgic, and historic place and simultaneously imagines its historic atmosphere. The natural environment surrounding the historic Fort and the museum are significantly different landscapes. The historic Fort

would've been on an oak flat, an oak plain...[and] the tallest trees surrounding them would've been probably 20, 30 feet tall...Where we're [at FNLHM] surrounded by, you know, huge pine trees. They would've had a nice gentle slope down to the water, whereas we have that just sudden drop to the water" (Austin 2022).

FNLHM's current site would not have been a good choice for a trading outpost. High on a cliff, steamships and canoes coming down Puget's Sound would have had a tricky time offloading their cargo and bringing it to the Sale Shop to trade. FNLHM is also nowhere near a fresh water source, something really important in the days before indoor plumbing.

Today at FNLHM, the majority of the sixteen reconstructed buildings are nearing their own 100-year birthdays, while the Granary and the Factor's House are coming up on their 175-year birthdays. Clearly, the Fort Nisqually of FNLHM is far from original. It is in its third location and the buildings that FNLHM calls "original" (the Granary and the Factor's House) are from its fourth layout. The disappointment in visitors' voices is often evident when they discover FNLHM is not in its original location and that the buildings they see are reconstructions, but as Austin pointed out, "it's either move it sixteen miles north...or this Fort doesn't exist...when it comes down to something like that, that's what [historic] preservation is all about" (2022).

## An Immersive Trifecta: The Making of Historic Place

While it might seem that the sixteen-mile difference along Puget's Sound does not add up to much, it means that interpreters and visitors alike must imagine the environment of historic Fort Nisqually even as they stand inside FNLHM. Imagining the historic environment of a different place as you stand somewhere else is an act of embodied placemaking. Placemaking is how "through our consciousness, actions, and interactions the physical landscape is brought into existence" (Sen and Silverman 2014:3). Embodied placemaking expands embodiment theories (refer back to chapter one) by understanding place as an embodied abstraction; place becomes part of a body. It "underscores the human element upon which making place hinges" in both the physical construction and social production of place (Sen and Silverman 2014:4-5). Interpreters situated within the (re)built environment, their movements, and the sensory experiences of living history form an *immersive trifecta* which takes a reconstructed, slightly ahistorical, and arbitrary Fort Nisqually and makes FNLHM into a grounded, historical place, imbuing this place with a sense of history, of pastness, of otherworldliness.

### *The (Re)Built Environment*

In the case of FNLHM, the placemaking of historic Fort Nisqually is expressed and made concrete through physically reconstructing buildings in a known layout of Fort Nisqually. Through living history immersion, both history and historical place are embodied at FNLHM. As a visitor or interpreter (and I have experienced it both ways), historical places become a part of our bodies as we imagine ourselves 'back in time.' Interpreters bodily represent Fort Nisqually history even to the point where they blend

into the (re)built environment becoming an “artifact just as much as anything else in the walls here” (Austin 2022).

Interpreters, myself included, often find themselves tailoring the history of the Fort they share with visitors based on their physical location within the palisade. FNLHM has sixteen built structures and two garden spaces inside its walls (see the brochure reprinted at the end of this chapter for a map). Sarah, a staff interpreter, talked about how historic themes are better situated to “fit” in certain buildings:

I like when...someone is in almost every building...cause then the Sale Shop becomes, like, a time to talk about the Hudson[’s] Bay Company and the fur trade and all that. But then it’s kind of hard to go into everything else and you’re in here, *it really doesn’t fit*...But then you know...in the Factor’s House, then someone can talk about the Factor and about classism and about employees versus boss and all of that. (2022, emphasis mine)

Reaching for pieces of Fort Nisqually history that “fit” within a building is an interpretive technique. It grounds both the visitor and the interpreter in a physical place within the storied landscape of Fort Nisqually and explores a variety of historic themes. Austin also talked about this “fitting”: “when I’m in the Laborer’s Dwelling...the majority of what I’m talking about is the laborers, the life there, what they were eating, when they were getting up, what kind of jobs they were doing” (2022). For Austin, the experiences of daily life are tied to particular places.

Of course, interpreters do not need to be inside or even tied to a building to interpret Fort Nisqually history. Jim interprets through tinsmithing on the Factor’s House porch, Paul and John interpret while blacksmithing, and Dave interprets as he strides around the grounds moving firewood and feeding the chickens. Dave is the interpreter most willing to walk along with visitors or guide them over to a new part of the museum related to their curiosities. Another interpreter feels a little uncomfortable portraying a

Metis woman in the Factor's House, so she prefers to stick to places where she believes Metis women would have more commonly frequented.

### *The Movements of Interpretation*

The bodily movements of living history interpreters function in concert with the (re)built environment to imbue FNLHM's reconstructed Fort Nisqually with a sense of history. Three more techniques of living history interpretation ground stories about the Fort in place: gesturing to objects, practicing heritage skills, and walking about.

FNLHM manages two object collections. The first is a collection of permanent artifacts that date to the period FNLHM portrays (1855, but the 1850s more broadly) and/or were the possessions of those associated with Fort Nisqually. A second collection of living history objects includes reproduction objects, permanent collection items deaccessioned due to condition, or out-of-period artifacts that all serve a hands-on purpose. This is the collection that can (and should) be touched, picked up, and manipulated by interpreters and visitors for hands-on learning. Often interpreters gesture to the collection objects around them as well as any reproduced maps, photographs, or trade ledgers to support their oral storytelling. Each building is furnished with items from both collections seamlessly interspersed so only the collection label and a keen eye notes which item belongs to which collection. Having observed both the interpreters and myself, gesturing to objects is a large part of interpretation because it grounds a story in the place in which it is told. Setting the beaver trap and weighing coffee beans in the Sale Shop are ways visitors can learn through their own actions about the historic lifeways portrayed at FNLHM. Likewise, one of the ways that interpreters connect with visitors is

to say, “There’s so many objects in here. Do you want to learn about those?” (Sarah 2022). The predictable presence of historic objects makes the space in which they reside into a historic place.

For those who interpret through heritage skills, their bodily movements become experiences of historical placemaking. Many things fall under the category of heritage skills such as sewing, knitting, fire-starting, and more technical work like blacksmithing and tinsmithing. The key is that no matter the skill practiced, it must be done in a historically appropriate way. I can knit anywhere but knitting in Victorian dress in the Laborer’s Dwelling is very different than knitting on my couch watching *Frontier*. It is the feeling of how something was done in the location *where* it was done that produces a sense of historical place. It is the act of “taking a lot of what you’ve read about and you’re actually putting it into practice...you’re essentially researching something by actually living it” that is simultaneously immersive learning and a way to embody history grounded in place (Austin 2022).

Walking and simply being also offer moments to reflect on one’s existence within a place. On his first day of work at FNLHM, Austin remembers that “when I walked in the gate, the second I walked in, you kind of get that feeling of, you know, I’m in a different time” (2022). FNLHM’s giant palisade gates mark a threshold between the modern world and a place where “it’s always 1855.” The sensation of temporal disconnect that Austin describes, and I too experienced, further inscribes a sense of history into the material environment of a reconstructed Fort Nisqually. During 2021’s Brigade Encampment, Austin had the chance to stay overnight in the Laborer’s Dwelling. He described getting up at 3 a.m. and walking around inside the walls as a “completely

different experience...that definitely put you in the experience, that okay, it's 3:00 a.m., it's 1855, this is awesome" (Austin 2022). The bodily movement, or nonmovement, of simply being allows one to consider the human experience (past, present, and future) and its connection to place. In both of Austin's examples, his present became an imagined version of the past, even for a brief moment, such that his own actions reinscribe FNLHM with history marking it (if not physically than certainly within his mind) as a historic place in which he stands concurrently embodying the distinct temporalities of the past and the present.

### *The Sensory Environment*

Anyone who has ever smelled something and is instantly transported to a place in their memory knows that one's sensory environment plays an important role in placemaking. Senses are the products of particular times and places that signify our presence in the world. At FNLHM, the sensory environment rounds out the *immersive trifecta* and offers an invitation to situate oneself within Fort Nisqually history. FNLHM's Fort Nisqually demands all five senses. It commandeers all the ways we sense our world to make this geographic location into a historical place.

As described earlier, FNLHM's (re)built environment is visually interesting because it is made up of old buildings (almost 100 years or more) with large hand-hewn logs and post-on-sill construction. With planed lumber siding like modern buildings, the Factor's House is often mistaken as the newest construction even though it is the second oldest. The insides of the buildings are all dim (with minimal to no electric lighting) and

rough-looking – weather worn and furnished with historic objects as old buildings are expected to look. As Austin described earlier, large evergreens stand sentinel outside the palisade walls, the grass is green inside the gates, and interpreters walk around carrying out tasks in Victorian dress. The ways in which FNLHM’s Fort Nisqually looks ‘old’ are the very things that affirm it as a historic site, just as the palisade walls mark a visual boundary between the past and the present. The HBC flag flies overhead signaling a particular moment in history when Fort Nisqually was a British holding in American-claimed territory, one where the geopolitical future of this land was at one time contested.

Listening beyond the words of interpreters and the conversations of visitors, myriad voices wing about FNLHM’s Fort Nisqually. The creak of old doors, the wind in the evergreen trees and the HBC flag, the call of the rooster, the crunch of gravel underfoot, and the clang of the blacksmith’s hammer against his work. Outside the palisade walls, cars and motorcycles in the parking lot make their modern noises and overhead the occasional airplane or military helicopter announces itself. Some of these sounds are familiar – cars, airplanes, wind – but others are a little more place (and time) specific. Buster (the resident rooster) and the clucking of the hens, the creak of old wooden doors, Dave and his crosscut saw, and the bellows pumping in the blacksmith’s forge all bring this historic place to life. At special events like Brigade, the sound of black powder arms signals the otherworldly sense of time at FNLHM. Discharging black powder is not a sound commonly heard today, so it auditorily marks FNLHM as a historic place.

It is one thing to see a blacksmith in a television show or movie, but to experience “what the blacksmith shop would’ve smelt like” even a moment “just as tiny as that” is

really in fact much more valuable than we think (Sarah 2022). The smell of coal is a unique scent that renders the blacksmith's shop a historic place, for not much today smells of burning coal. While I was chatting with a group of visitors in the Sale Shop, a woman said, "it smells like wood" with a note of surprise and a questioning inflection. Her companion teased her, "of course it smells like wood," and gestured around them at the wooden building in which we stood. I chuckled along with them but interpreted her question not of the damp wood smell of the building, but rather the smoky smell from the wood-burning stove. It is a smell I associate with campfires and a smell that many visitors commented upon and deemed "good." The smokehouse is another scented stop: "one of the biggest kicks that people get is going over [to] the smoke house and leaning over and smelling" (Austin 2022). Just a couple weeks ago, the smell of frying bacon in a cast iron skillet instantly transported me into the Kitchen of FNLHM. Frying bacon is probably another familiar smell for most, but burning coal, wood stoves, and smoking meat are more unique smells that correlate to the heritage skills of blacksmithing, fire-starting, and meat butchering.

Since I did my fieldwork in the winter, senses of touch at FNLHM mostly had to do with temperature. Whether felt in our bones or on the surfaces of our skin, temperature is nonetheless an experience explored through touch. Austin mentioned how questions from visitors arise from their sensory environment:

A lot of times people do talk about cold weather here because it does get chilly here. Like last week, we were getting a lot of questions about, well, how did they stay warm if they didn't have a fireplace? Or what if they were outside and they were, you know, doing one of the cattle drives and they had to stay warm? And you have to talk about the clothing they're wearing and why wool is so important and why fire is so important and how to start a fire and how to maintain dry wood. (2022)



Austin’s quote speaks to how the “chilly” environment resulted in visitors’ curiosities about keeping warm, even to the point where he can interpret the importance of wool and fur top hats. Both wool and beaver fur help keep water off the body and have associated tactile sensations. Most people have some familiarity with wool, so the HBC point blankets in the Laborer’s Dwelling are not an unfamiliar touch. Beaver pelts in the Sale Shop, on the other hand, receive more tentative touches. The presence and feeling of beaver pelts especially render FNLHM a historic place because of the common association of beavers with the fur trade as a distinctly historic economic operation. The door latches also often trip visitors up, especially younger visitors who are not sure how to operate them, further marking FNLHM as a historic place.

Austin and I had slightly different takes on taste at FNLHM. Before COVID-19, interpreters in the Kitchen would make food to share with other interpreters and sometimes visitors. Without handouts happening now, few to any things are able to be tasted at FNLHM, which was Austin’s position. I disagreed:

Austin: You-, you can’t taste it, but,  
Colby: You can, though.  
Austin: You can buy the candies.  
Colby: Well, yeah, but, like, I feel like, like fresh air tastes like something.  
Austin: Yeah, okay.  
Colby: Wood smoke tastes like something.  
Austin: Yeah, you’re right, you’re right. So when they have, like, the blacksmith going, you can kind of taste that in the air.  
Colby: The coal.  
Austin: The coal. (2022)

Granted, most of the things I identified as “tastes” also count as smells, but I still stand by my sense of what history tastes like at FNLHM: fresh air, wood smoke, coal. Perhaps they are ‘almost-tastes,’ ones you can feel a trace of on your tongue or in the back of your

throat. And yes, as Austin pointed out, you can buy candies or the hens' eggs in the Gift Shop and fry yourself up an omelet at home. These are both acts that bring history as experienced at FNLHM into your home and into the modern present.

Our mysterious 'sixth sense' in some lists is proprioception, the ability to sense where our bodies are in space. But what if we could envision imagination to be our mysterious sixth sense in placemaking endeavors? To imagine is to form a mental image or concept of something, but it is also the ability to visualize an experience for oneself that is not really happening. Imagination and pretending at FNLHM borrow notions of understanding where our bodies are in space from proprioception and considers what it would be like for our bodies to inhabit historical times and places. To imagine is to wonder what life would have been – how it looked, how it sounded, how it smelled, how it felt, and how it tasted.

Historical education through immersion is the purpose of living history. Sarah finds that “sometimes when you get to do something hands on or experience it...it gives you a chance to kind of take that in and process it in a different way...Reading a book or seeing pictures or even looking at historical objects, don't make the same amount of sense” (Sarah 2022). Reading, seeing, and looking are all actions that happen with sight, only one of our five standard senses. Sarah explains her job as an interpreter is to help “the person you're talking to...understand it [history] more fully...how can I make it so that they can *understand* it, not just, like view it” (Sarah 2022, my emphasis). Viewing history is again confined, just like reading, seeing and looking, to *one* of our many senses, while understanding requires a more immersive experience. When I asked Sarah what she hopes people walk away with after visiting FNLHM or talking with her, she

replied, “it kind of varies a little bit, but I think generally I just hope that they have some idea of what the time felt like, or at least a tiny image of what this place would have been like in 1850” (2022). In describing her hope, Sarah identifies how experiencing, imagining, and embodying history are multisensorial encounters. Austin spoke about this too, “you know when you’re using all five senses, you don’t have, you-, you can’t be distracted. If all five senses are taken up with what you’re concentrating on, there’s nothing that can distract you” (2022).

### Remembering Place as Historic

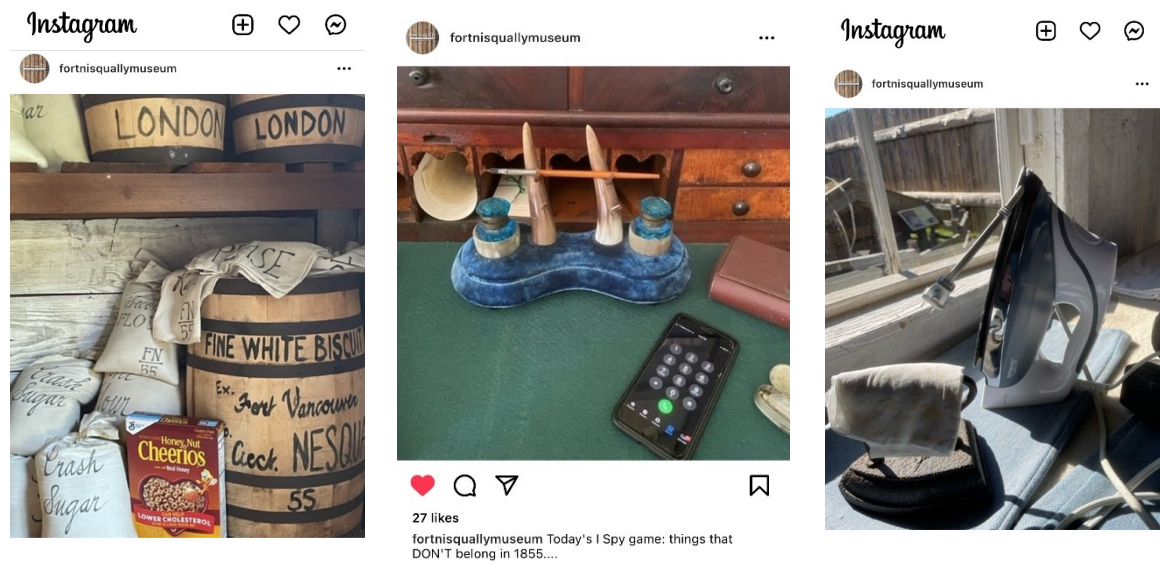
This place where “it is always 1855” is a site of collective memory. It is a place that embodies the historical memory of *what life would have been like* – a life that is imagined as colonial, nostalgic, and historical. FNLHM as a physical location in Tacoma, Washington is a collective memory site “constituted spatially” (French 2012:341). These collective memories of Fort Nisqually are “imagined as bounded and inscribed with meaning from the past that resonates into the present” (French 2012:341). The collective memories interpreters simultaneously produce and share are spatially constrained to the stories within the palisade walls. These stories and the landscape they are placed within come to “index the past for those who inhabit it in the present” (French 2012:342). Interpreters choose to remember Fort Nisqually as a memory site bounded spatially and temporally. *It is 1855 and these are the stories within these walls.* Self-described, FNLHM hopes to share the history of “Fort Nisqually, the first globally connected settlement on the Puget Sound,” but interpreters often fall short of sharing such

grandiose, global history. Very rarely do their stories (or themselves for that matter) breach the palisade walls.

We can critically unpack what stories any place holds, particularly the landscape of FNLHM's Fort Nisqually, using the frameworks of collective memory and memory sites. This (re)constructed landscape holds colonial stories about trading interactions between HBC men and Indigenous communities, nostalgic stories about preserving a historic Fort in such a way that requires its relocation, and historic stories about life at Fort Nisqually during the 1850s. Interpreters contend with the colonial and nostalgic aspects of Fort Nisqually memory by integrating pieces of those stories within their narrative.

As interpreters render this relocated and reconstructed Fort into a historic place, leaving the colonial and nostalgic legacies intact, they rely on an immersive trifecta to (re)inscribe a sense of history within the landscape of FNLHM. The (re)built environment, movements of interpretation, and multisensorial experiences form an *immersive trifecta* which grounds living history interpretation at FNLHM in the historic time and place of Fort Nisqually. All the sensorial entanglements of embodied placemaking designate FNLHM's Fort Nisqually as a grounded, historical place, imbuing it with a sense of history, of pastness, of authenticity, and of otherworldliness.

On April 1, 2022, colloquially known as April Fool's Day, FNLHM staff placed modern items in and amongst the historically furnished landscape of FNLHM (see Figure 3). As discussed earlier in this chapter, the historic furnishings from both the permanent and living history collections render this place historic. What happens when staff intentionally rupture this pastness? How do our sensorial entanglements shift? Do our senses of pastness and presentness collide? Do we in fact travel through time?



*Figure 3. A couple of FNLHM's Instagram posts in the days leading up to April Fool's Day.*

*Screenshots taken by author on March 29 (left), 31 (right), and April 1 (center), 2022.*

## **Chapter Four** **“Wearing Modern Boots”: Stepping Through Time<sup>23</sup>**

I remember one afternoon during January – gray, rainy, and with slow visitation. I found a spot on the Factor’s House porch facing east (away from the front gate) with no other human in sight. I sat, simply listening.

*Imagine this to be your life, I asked myself, what would be different? Would Fort Nisqually have been busier on a gray January afternoon like this? Imagine you are one of the three European women at Fort Nisqually – how would that have felt? Imagine this to be debated territory – is this British land or American land? It is certainly Indigenous land, but would that have been my concern if I lived here in the 1850s?*

And then I heard it. The airplane flying directly overhead. A very modern sound thundering through an otherwise historic place. I was frustrated. It had disrupted my thoughts – it had pulled me promptly back into the world of the twenty-first century.

Among popular culture renditions of time travel – movies and historical TV shows, science fiction novels, virtual reality, and computer gaming – sits living history as yet another common example. This chapter asks if time travel is felt by third-person interpreters at FNLHM, and if so, how? The words and experiences of the interpreters reveal that travelling through time does indeed happen at FNLHM and it has two main

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<sup>23</sup> John, Paul and John 2022.

characteristics. First, it relies on a copresence of temporalities, an alignment of past and present, such that interpreters can immersively embody both the past and the present simultaneously. Second, this model of time travel is a social experience for interpreters – their adventures of time travel are enhanced when they are among other interpreters.

### Time Travel and the Human Experience

Time travel is a peculiar thing. It is the stuff of “Choose Your Own Adventure” books – *‘Which side will you fight on? To become a Union soldier, turn to page 28; To become a Confederate soldier, turn to page 52.’* Archaeologist Cornelius Holtorf defines time travel “as an experience in the present that evokes a past (or future) reality” (2009:31). It is a particular state of being that calls upon (“evokes”) another temporal existence. Reality, as Holtorf uses the term, refers to “the sum of human experiences and social practices,” not just what is physically present (2009:34). A summation of human experience requires an observation of the implied inclusive “all”: the sum of *all* human experience. To think of *all* human experience entails a rethinking of the divisions between the past, present, and future.

Holtorf advocates for a notion of coexisting temporalities. One in which the “past and future are not distinct from our own [present], but dimensions that contribute to shaping different human experiences and social practices in the present” (Holtorf 2009:35). Understanding human experience(s) to be full of “dimensions” of time helps us envision the temporal qualities all our lives have – a pastness, a presentness, and a futureness/futurity. Anthropologists Charles Stewart and Stephan Palmié succinctly

affirm Holtorf: “all humans live in pluritemporal lifeworlds” (2016:216). This pluritemporality is exactly what Holtorf outlines – a way of understanding the human experience as imbricated with traces of the past, present, and future concurrently. Our lived experiences are full of alignments of the past, present, and future. The copresence of many different temporalities reveals the many different realities that influence our conceptions and understanding of our own lifeworlds. The things of the past are still with us in the present affecting the things we think, the things we say, and the ways we encounter others.

At FNLHM, time travel is an experience of temporal alignment, not simply temporal crossing. It is an encounter with “the *presence* of another [time] period” (Holtorf 2009:31, emphasis mine). Temporal crossing operates under the assumption that if one were to travel in time, one would cease to be in the twenty-first century and instead appear in some other time. Understanding time travel as the (co)presence of another period (temporal alignment) means that, as a twenty-first century person, one takes all their twenty-first-century-ness with them as they encounter some other past time. Put another way, we can envision time as coming or going, depending on these two perspectives. In time travel as temporal crossing, I *go* to the time period. In time travel as temporal alignment, the time period *comes* to me aligning with my lived experience.

From a methodological perspective, it is important to note that conversations regarding time travel arose after my direct ask. In some cases, discussions of time travel were unrelated to prior conversation (Paul and John), grew from a conversation on the pros and cons of first- and third-person interpretation (Joyce and Austin), or came out of other conversations regarding time travel adjacent topics such as “pretend(ing)” or



“imagine(ing/ation)” (Sarah and Austin). I was the first to use terms like “time travel,” “pretend,” or “imagine” in each interaction. I interpret this to mean that without my prompting, time travelling is not something these living history interpreters think extensively (or at all) about – it is not their primary motivation for engaging in living history. Some are motivated to educate. Sarah and Austin are staff interpreters for the purpose of public education and at one point Joyce described herself as “a frustrated teacher who never was” (2022). Others are motivated by a desire to experience doing something the way things were historically done (Austin, Paul, and John). They all enjoy speaking with the public, which is how they found themselves interpreting at FNLHM.

## Temporal Crossing and Personal Identity

### *First-Person Interpretation*

As discussed in the prologue, first- and third-person interpretation are two styles of living history interpretation. First person is the taking on of a persona, while in third person one simply portrays something about the past while speaking as oneself. First-person interpretation means an interpreter severs all connection to their modern world and crosses into the world of the person they portray. This is an example of conceiving of time travel as temporal crossing – an exchange of one time period for another – and it is perhaps the most common example of the ‘living history is time travel’ cliché.

For some interpreters at FNLHM, the idea of becoming someone else is not appealing. It is uncomfortable and serves no purpose. Jim, volunteer interpreter and

tinsmith, described a feeling of discomfort that he associates with first person. Before coming to FNLHM, Jim was a part of a rendezvous club which he joined for the purpose of learning how to shoot a muzzle loader and stayed because of his interest in history. His friends in the rendezvous community were pushing him to develop a “character,” but he felt differently: “And I go, why? I’m just not, that’s just not something that really drives what I do or what I want to do....the idea of having, pretending to be something or someone just doesn’t do anything for me” (Jim 2022).<sup>24</sup> For Jim, first-person interpretation would mean a complete disregard of his own individuality. He would have to “pretend” to be someone he is not which is something he does not find “comfortable” (Jim 2022). Jim reveals a sense of uncomfortable disjuncture. If he were to become someone else, he would have to undergo a complete transformation into “something or someone” else without retaining his own personal identity.

Sarah had a similar, yet slightly different, stance on first-person interpretation. We had a long discussion of the pros and cons of first- and third-person interpretation, and Sarah has quite a bit of enthusiasm about giving first person a try, with the realization that it takes a lot of research and effort to stay in first person. “I think it’d be fun to do,” she said, “but it’s very difficult to do, because you have to be so completely knowledgeable about all the aspects of not only the time and place, but then the person who you [are] because *you’re not yourself*” (Sarah 2022). In Sarah’s eyes, and Jim’s, in first-person interpretation one becomes someone else. One’s experience as a twenty-first

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<sup>24</sup> Interestingly, Jim also attributed his discomfort to his own childhood in which he “was never into theater or anything like that” (2022). This common assumption, that living historians and reenactors come from a performance or theatre background, is not always the case. For the connections between theatre studies and living history, see Snow (1993).

century person is exchanged for the experiences, lifeways, and mentality of a historic other.<sup>25</sup> Jim and Sarah both demonstrate that whether they realize it or not, they are conceptualizing of past and present time as separate entities. In first-person interpretation, in order to portray a historic other an interpreter must cross into the past, letting go of any relationship to their own modern present, and exchange their identity for that of a historic other.

First-person interpretation at FNLHM happens on rare occasions, reserved for special events such as Candlelight Tours in October. During these nighttime tours, visitors park down the hill in the Point Defiance Zoo and Aquarium parking lot and are bussed up in groups to FNLHM. During the bus ride, volunteers and staff dressed in modern clothes give a quick history of Fort Nisqually and some context for the events visitors will see during their tour. In FNLHM's parking lot, visitors are sectioned off into smaller groups and guided through FNLHM by docents also dressed in modern clothing. These smaller groups observe a sort of *tableau vivants* stopping at each tent set up in the Meadow, winding through the buildings inside the walls, to finish back outside the palisade.<sup>26</sup> Volunteers in each scene interpret entirely in first person. Some are assigned to portray specific historic figures associated with Fort Nisqually such as Dr. and Mrs. Tolmie, while others portray more generic roles like U.S. Army soldiers, fur trappers, laborers, and Metis women. Interpreters are not meant to "see" the visitors, so interpreters

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<sup>25</sup> In this case I am interpreting this "you are not yourself" idea not as a liminal stage, but as an exchange of modern self for the embodied self of a historic other. For discussions on liminality and living history, see Snow (1993).

<sup>26</sup> My first memory of FNLHM was attending a Candlelight tour as part of an eighth-grade field trip for my Washington state history class (I grew up in Olympia) and I was completely enraptured. I had the privilege of returning as a docent in October 2021, and while I had more responsibilities to make sure my group was cycling through on schedule, I was still completely caught up in the scenes that more than once I missed the 'change scenes' signal.

and visitors do not interact. Visitors are asked to keep out of doorways so interpreters can walk around FNLHM as if they are going about their daily life.<sup>27</sup> Visitors and docents are not supposed to interact either, and visitors are asked to save their questions for the final stop, the temporary visitor center. This converted picnic shelter has a few exhibit panels providing additional contextual information and a few other veteran volunteers (again dressed in modern clothing) to answer questions. All in all, visitors are encouraged to pretend to be ghosts from the future travelling back in time.

Candlelight is a particularly interesting example of conceptualizing time while in first-person at FNLHM. First-person interpreters portray, as historically accurate as possible, an evening in 1855. They are required to let go of their modern selves and become a historic other. In addition, interpreters must deliberately close their eyes to the modern world for two reasons: a) visitors can be distracting, and b) it must be an immersive experience for both the interpreters and the visitors. Next, visitors are ghosts from the future. FNLHM portrays a moment in time that modern visitors must travel back in time to experience. The ritualistic experience of parking down the hill, bussing up to FNLHM, and splitting into tour groups all happens while it is dark. Granted, the first tour happens around dusk, but for the rest of the night the darkness impairs visitors' (and docents') sights of other tour groups and any markers of modernity. Their eyes (like those of the interpreters) must adjust to the lights of the candles. At Candlelight, the portrayed nineteenth century past (peopled with interpreters) is the time to which visitors must travel and meet the interpreters already there. Visitors arrive in a peopled past through a

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<sup>27</sup> This is extremely important at the kitchen doorway – beware the toss of the wash water!

series of rituals and sensory impairment that has separated them from their twenty-first century present and placed them within a nineteenth century past.

### *Third-Person Interpretation*

In first-person living history, interpreters are asked to sever their own ties to the modern world and cross into a different time. They are asked to set aside their own personal identity and become someone else, a historic other. First-person interpretation operates within a framework of understanding time as periodized – the past, present, and future are distinct entities. To travel from the present (forgoing any attachment or connection to the present) into the past characterizes the experience of first-person interpretation. Third-person interpretation, on the other hand, frames time differently. Even as third-person interpreters initially felt unsure if their experiences counted as time travel, they spoke of aligning temporalities and described experiences when they felt simultaneously in the past and the present while retaining their own senses of modernity and personal identity.

During our conversation, volunteer interpreter and blacksmith Paul first answered my question about time travel with a laugh, then contemplated for a moment, before answering.<sup>28</sup> “I don’t really feel like, ‘oh I’m back there’,” he said, “because mentally I don’t feel like I’m an 1850s person” (Paul and John 2022). Paul went on to describe how “it is nice when you look out, I mean I guess I like it better when I look out in the field

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<sup>28</sup> My question was as follows: “Okay, last question, I promise. Is there an aspect of time travel for you in any of this?” (Paul and John 2022).

and I see only reenactors in period clothes rather than people in modern clothes,” but distinguishes that experience as perhaps different from time travelling in his next claim: “so I don’t know if that means I’m time travelling or not” (Paul and John 2022). Paul’s words reveal a couple of assumptions about time travel. First, that in time travel, one might become someone else “mentally” and, second, that time travel might also include seeing other interpreters dressed and acting in historic ways. Paul explains that he does not feel as though he is “travelling back in time” because he does not feel “like an 1850s person” (Paul and John 2022). He implies that one cannot retain one’s twenty-first century-ness while observing or travelling to another past time.

John, Paul’s interview compatriot, was also unsure if he experiences time travelling. He answered my question in this way, following immediately after Paul’s words above: “I like the idea of experiencing as close as possible what somebody might have experienced” (Paul and John 2022). Now this might seem like more of an answer to “why do you do living history?” but instead, John chose these words to speak about the possibility of time travel. His words reveal a proximal nature to living history and, by extension, to time travel. He wants to get “as close as possible,” but inherent in his description he implies *without actually being there*. John articulated this again as he stumbled over his words a bit: “It’s not, you know, I’m wearing modern boots, so I’m not [Paul laughs, then Colby and John laugh] I know, I know I’m not *there*, but I’m as close as I can get” (Paul and John 2022, emphasis mine). John knows he is not “there” in the past, because he is wearing modern boots just as Paul “mentally” does not feel like “an 1850s person.” These markers of modernity – work boots, modern mentalities, and

perhaps even COVID-19 masks<sup>29</sup> – act as some sort of barrier to time travelling that Paul and John attribute to keeping themselves situated in the modern present.

Paul and John’s thoughts point to an idea that *‘I am not time travelling because I’m still me.’* Paul retains his own modern mentality and John continues to wear his modern boots. I wore modern layers underneath my Victorian dress and continued wearing my eyeglasses, and other interpreters continue to wear their modern hearing aids. Yet Paul and John articulate that these barriers keep them from being “there,” from “travelling back in time,” yet they articulate a desire to get “as close as possible.” If they aren’t “there” in the past, then are they fully *here* in some kind of present? Is the past something distinctly distant, something over “there” that one would travel *into*, and yet something for which one longs? The desire to come “as close as possible” to the past shows that the way interpreters think about time is not entirely periodized. Yes, in their minds, the past is separate from the present for Paul and John, but in trying to get “as close as possible” their actions change the relationship between temporalities. They take a linear relationship (past leads to present) and move to overlap them, standing in their present “experiencing as close as possible what somebody might have experienced” in the past (Paul and John 2022). They align their past/present temporalities even as they say they do not time travel.

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<sup>29</sup> This was not something we talked about in January, but I did talk to a few interpreters about this the previous summer. COVID-19 facemasks are distinct markers of an ongoing pandemic occurring from 2020 to the time of writing in 2022. At first, interpreters made and wore facemasks from of period-appropriate fabric, and now, as long as you are wearing a mask, it matters not if it matches the “authenticity” of dressing in period clothes.

## Experiencing Other-time: External Influences

The third-person interpreters who experienced some feeling of a different time attributed this experience, in part, to their surroundings at FNLHM. Austin described his first day as an especially sensational experience. “My first day of work here when I walked in the gate,” Austin said, “the second I walked in, you kind of get that feeling of, you know I’m in a different time” (2022). FNLHM’s gate has an important role in Austin’s memory. Heavy and well over twelve feet tall, the palisade’s gate serves as a threshold keeping out the present so one can arrive inside the palisade walls and feel “in a different time.” In this remembered moment, Austin was neither interpreting nor was he dressed in period clothes – he was simply twenty-first century Austin entering FNLHM’s reconstructed nineteenth-century Fort.

After the most recent Brigade Encampment, Austin was asked to stay overnight as an available staff member.<sup>30</sup> He stayed inside the palisade walls in the Laborer’s Dwelling and “was able to get up at 3:00am, when everyone’s asleep” and walk around (Austin 2022). It was a “completely different experience” in part “because they had all the lights turned off and everything, all the park lights” (Austin 2022). “That definitely put you in the experience, that okay, it’s 3:00am, it’s 1855, this is awesome,” he said (Austin 2022). In both cases, Austin conceptualized the past as something “different” from his present, which it certainly is, and also uses language about placement – “I’m *in* a different time” and “that put you *in* the experience.” Through his actions and the environment around him, he is placed in a time different from his modern present, but is

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<sup>30</sup> Volunteers are invited to camp in period style in the Meadow outside the palisade walls during the night between the two days of the event.



it so separate? It is certainly some sort of destination, a place one finds oneself *in*, but in these examples, he is not interpreting at all – he is simply Austin experiencing something for and by himself.

Paul, who laughed when I asked him if he felt any element of time travel in anything he does, described his own experience of being in another time. Like Austin’s sensations, Paul located some factors of this experience in his surroundings. Paul initially told me, “I don’t really think I’m travelling back in time, but, I mean, it feels very nice in a certain way to sort of look out that door and sort of see a scene that pretty much could have existed, and to see the other [interpreters] in period clothing kind of going around, it’s become a very pleasing experience to me” (Paul and John 2022). After John talked for a few minutes, Paul made an additional claim: “I think I’d say where it got to the most, the most pronounced feeling like that was at the Brigade Encampment...I didn’t camp out at Brigade this year, but at other years, that’s a really cool feeling...it just has that sort of *other-time* feel to it...that was really nice, [a] nice experience, it’s been like the most kind of *transporting* sort for me anyway” (Paul and John 2022, emphasis mine). In both quotes, Paul located his feeling of “other-time” as a response to his environment, particularly the presence of period-dressed interpreters and the absence of modernity, broadly conceived. Paul uses sensationalist adjectives too. Austin referred to his experience as “awesome” and Paul described his as “cool,” “really nice,” and “very pleasing” (Austin 2022; Paul and John 2022).

Both Austin and Paul described experiences of a “different” or “other” time while at FNLHM. Theirs were experiences of finding oneself “transport[ed]” and “in” a time other than one’s modern present. According to Holtorf’s definition of time travel, “an

experience in the present that evokes a past reality...[an experience of] the presence of another period,” certainly Austin and Paul described moments of time travel (2009:31). They both described moments where things in their present brought to mind and evoked a past reality. Recall Holtorf defines reality as “the sum of human experiences and social practices” which includes the experiences and lifeways of historic persons (2009:34). For both Austin and Paul, a sense of being, appearing, and moving into another time has nothing to do with their own intentionality. Yes, Austin chose to walk through the palisade gates and chose to go outside at 3a.m., but the feeling of another time was not due to his intentional decision to time travel. Paul implies that his own experience was tied directly to the actions and presence of fellow interpreters.

Austin and Paul’s memories lead to a few observations. I interpret the senses of appearing, of being placed in, and of being transported to another temporality to reveal the ebb and flow of time in living history interpretation. While it might seem that Paul and Austin conceptualize time as separate and thus ascribe to the ‘time travel as temporal crossing’ ideology, a second glance at their words reveals the opposite. This brings us to observation one: Austin and Paul actually indicate the copresence of temporalities. I located this copresence of time in the way they leave out any sort of decision-making on their own part in regard to time travel; the feeling of being in another time comes to them. Observation two is that Paul admits that time travel is a social experience at FNLHM. His experience of another time is intrinsically tied to the presence of other interpreters around him.

John described his own experience of another time, unrelated to FNLHM, and also influenced by external factors. He talked about his experience in the 135<sup>th</sup> anniversary reenactment of the battle of Antietam.<sup>31</sup>

And where we were, we had just marched a mile from camp. We were at the head of a column. And we stopped because they knew we wouldn't all be able to cross the train tracks before the train got there. The band's playing, it's hot, feet hurt, and I turned around and looked, and I could see nothing but soldiers all the way back to camp. Well, that number of soldiers is exactly what any soldier would have ever seen. So, that was one of those out-, it's kind of like, here I am in the Forge, there's that house, you know, there's no telephone poles. There's no-, it gives me a hard-, a *flashback*. (2022, emphasis mine)

Just as Austin and Paul described above, if the surrounding environment (both the built environment and the social environment) is a reproduction of a historic environment (“exactly what any soldier would have seen”), one’s feeling of being in a different past time is heightened. John’s sensory experience helped ground him in imagining what the event would have been like for the historic persons who actually fought in the battle of Antietam. John uses this example to illustrate a time where he got “as close as possible,” experiencing for himself “what somebody might have experienced” (Paul and John 2022). He does not use the words ‘time travel,’ instead calls this experience a “flashback.”

A flashback.

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<sup>31</sup> Also called the Battle of Sharpsburg, the Battle of Antietam was a decisive battle in the Civil War, fought in Maryland on September 17, 1862. This battle holds the title of the deadliest one-day battle in American military history; twelve hours of combat resulted in 23,000 soldiers killed, wounded, or missing on both sides. As a side note, I have visited Antietam’s battlefield and walked Sunken Road (also called Bloody Lane) and talk about otherworldly place and sensory experience – an incredibly sad experience, it was a landscape literally soaked in blood, littered with bodies, and my goodness can you feel that history. For more information about the Battle of Antietam, visit the National Park Service’s website on Antietam National Battlefield at [www.nps.gov/anti/learn/historyculture/index.htm](http://www.nps.gov/anti/learn/historyculture/index.htm).

A flashback is a moment in which you envision something that has happened before and recall it to your mind. Typically it is a memory of something that has happened to you. John's quote provokes a key question: *can you have a flashback of something you never personally witnessed or experienced?* His "flashback" can be unpacked in two ways. First, we think about the event. The battle of Antietam has an important place in public collective memory as a decisive Civil War battle and, to date, the deadliest one-day battle in U.S. military history. John was on the historic battlefield one hundred and thirty-five years later engaging in a reenactment of the battle on its anniversary as a commemorative event. If we understand collective memory to be in the public domain (recall our discussion in chapter two), this leads to an assumption that yes, in fact, we can flashback to events of collective memory in which we ourselves did not participate. A second way to unpack John's quote is to think about where flashbacks reside – they occur in our minds. It is possible that in and through this experience John has entered the mind of a historic other, created a historical memory, and is flashing back to that. In the examples above, when Austin and Paul described themselves as in another time, it was an experience that happened while they were still their modern selves. On the other hand, John's example prompts the following question: where was modern John in this experience?

Common conceptions of time travel, like those described by Paul and Austin, happen on a physical level. The body is transported into the past while the mind retains its presentness. John's example reveals the mental aspects to possible time travel. To engage in a reenactment of a historic event and consider it to be a "flashback," John is time travelling in a mental realm. In his mind he becomes a historic other, but his modern

boots keep his feet firmly placed in the present. If we consider John's flashback indicative of a sort of collective memory surrounding the battle of Antietam, or the Civil War more broadly, we focus in on a piece of Holtorf's definition of reality: "the *sum* of human experiences and social practices" (Holtorf 2009:34, emphasis mine). It would seem that one could experience past realities because someone else's past life and one's own present life constitute a partial sum of human experience(s). Thus, as both an experience and a social practice (standing amongst other soldiers), John described a moment that evoked a past reality – a past reality he felt as a "flashback." John articulated a moment of temporal alignment. Whilst standing in the present, he flashed back to a memory of the past. Like Austin and Paul at FNLHM, John's "flashback" was aided both by his social environment (the presence of other soldiers in his column) and the natural environment (a historical battlefield lacking markers of modernity).

### Interpreting through Time

In the beginning of this chapter, Jim and Sarah shared their thoughts regarding first-person interpretation – it requires one to transform into someone else, it can be uncomfortable, and the underlying assumption is that one ceases to be oneself. How does time travel play out on a third-person *interpretation* scale? In other words, how does time travel affect the ways interpreters interpret? What Sarah, Austin, and Joyce reveal is that third-person interpreters are asked to retain a notion of their modern selves while portraying the past. They are invited to time travel physically, without time travelling

mentally. They maintain one foot in the past and one foot in the present, simultaneously, so as to render the past knowable to a modern audience.<sup>32</sup>

Sarah used the metaphorical language of “stepping” into another time to explain third-person interpretation. She described her work as a staff interpreter at FNLHM as an exercise in fostering visitor engagement and understanding:

You have to be able to *step out of the time* that you’re reenacting and to also make it so the person you’re talking to can understand it more totally...so if someone just walks through and watches a bunch of people living 1855, like that’s fun, but you kind of lose that extra step of them being able to actually understand what’s going on and know the reasons behind it, because all of that requires someone *stepping out of 1850*. (Sarah 2022, emphasis mine)

Here, Sarah conceptualizes time as something that we step in and out of. To step out of the 1850s, implies that one was once in it, even just a moment before. With third-person interpretation, in particular, is this a step *completely* out? For stepping out also suggests a corresponding upcoming moment of stepping back in. If a third-person interpreter steps out of 1855 to provide some context or answer a visitor’s question, they do not let go of their role as interpreter or their task of portraying a historic other. Rather, they become the connection. They embody the collision of past and present that occurs in third-person living history.

Later, Sarah used the language of “stepping” to refer to visitor experience, specifically children’s experiences at FNLHM. “There’s a little bit of like a magic to visiting a place like this, for little kids, right?” she said, “You’re kind of stepping into the past” (Sarah 2022). If visitors are “stepping *into* the past” and third-person interpreters are “stepping *out* of the past,” then where do they meet? Certainly not in the present!

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<sup>32</sup> For how interpreters use their voices, words, and narratives to make the past understandable to visitors, see chapter five.

Sarah implies visitors and interpreters meet in a middle ground, a place that is neither fully in the past nor fully in the present. In a linear conception of time, a distinct inhabitable boundary between the past and present exists. When we consider a view of aligned time, this boundary space exists as a simultaneous occupation of the past and present. So even if visitors have stepped *into* the past and interpreters have stepped *out* of the past, they can still meet because their temporalities have been aligned.

Austin also considered visitors to be moving from the present to the past while at FNLHM, again talking specifically about children.<sup>33</sup> He said,

For a child, I think an interactive museum like this is way more beneficial than taking them to just a regular museum...because they're thrown *into* the environment. It's not, you're in 2022 looking at artifacts from the 1800s, its *you're in 1855*, you know? So it brings them in with this different mindset that this is the time period I'm in, so I better start adjusting to it and learning about it" (Austin 2022, emphasis mine).

Austin's understanding of visitor experience, in part shaped by his own experiences at museums as a child, considers FNLHM visitors to be "*in 1855*." In my response I mentioned time travel, and, like Paul, Austin laughed. He described his experience with the palisade gates (featured earlier) and then talked about his getting-dressed routine: "I've kind of trained myself to that mindset that when I'm getting dressed, I'm starting to put myself into that mindset of I'm in the 1850s, but I definitely do. I mean I guess the best word is I *pretend* that it's 1855" (Austin 2022, emphasis mine). He then talked about living history and the concept of pretend more broadly:

I think one thing all living history interpreters and reenactors have in common that a lot of the general public doesn't have is that we still have that ability to be able to pretend and imagine...I talked to all my reenactor friends or my living history friends, and all of them still have that ability to pretend that they're *in* a different time period or that something's going on...One thing that really sets us

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<sup>33</sup> It was a common theme that living history might be most beneficial for a child because they are in their formative years, they can believe in the imagined scene, etc.

aside from other people is that you're able to *cast yourself out* of modern times and pretend that *you actually are in* period times (Austin 2022, emphasis mine)

Unlike Sarah, Austin sees both visitors and interpreters moving *into* the past. So for Austin, that meeting place of visitor and interpreter might just be in an inhabited and embodied past.

Without explicitly mentioning it, Joyce talked about the effect ideas of time travel have on third-person interpretation. She articulated that, as a third-person interpreter, her movement between the past, present, and future is intentional. Just as Sarah steps out of 1855 to engage with visitors and Austin casts himself out of modern times to pretend it is 1855, Joyce also moves through time:

Colby: Well so then, I guess kind of a follow up question, so because this museum is stuck in, 'okay it is 1855 and it will only ever be 1855,'

Joyce: Through '59, you can, we'll give you that much of a stretch.

Colby: Oh that's true. Like there, do you find that's a little limiting?

Joyce: No. Yes and no.

Colby: Okay.

Joyce: I find, because even though we represent that time period, because we do third-person interpretation, we can say, and then [gestures out forward with one hand] and then [gestures out forward with one hand], and I mean, just like this, [gestures in three small circles each moving out forward with one hand].

Colby: That's wonderful.

Joyce: At the end of the day, in 1869, we were bought out and we left the area. I'm not limited to saying, well, its 1855 and this is the world we know. (2022)

Joyce's gestures indicate she can move forward in time. She is able to fast-forward the story of Fort Nisqually through her words to bring visitors from their position immersed in a world where it's always 1855 up to returning to their modern present. It also works the other way around: "we can [also] say, well, this is what came before" (Joyce 2022).



As a twenty-first century being, a personality and personhood which is retained in third-person interpretation, Joyce can talk about the entire scope of history because she actually knows the past, present, and future of Fort Nisqually, with the present in this case being the year 1855. She can travel through all these temporalities and invite visitors to come along with her.

Living history interpretation is a prime example of aligned temporalities. It is the very nature of immersive storytelling that functions to (re)align the past/present temporalities. Through interpretation, in both first and third person, living history interpreters engage in some kind of movement through temporalities. First-person interpreters engage in time travel as temporal crossing, while third-person interpretation subscribes to a different temporal ideology. Third-person interpreters must have one foot in the past and one foot in the present, simultaneously. Their temporal worlds must align, coexist, and be navigable in each moment of interpretation. Navigating between past and present temporalities, third-person interpreters forge connections with visitors that enhance their engagement with and understanding of the past. To do so, interpreters rely on a few different narrative and interpretive techniques.

## Chapter Five **“Here, We’re British’: Narrative and Interpretive Techniques<sup>34</sup>**

Historians, middle school social studies teachers, and the nerds who read that little column in the local newspaper all love a good “On This Day in History.” These short fun facts are perfect examples of historical narratives in bite-sized form. Generally they all follow the same formula: *on this date, someone did something in such-and-such a place*. As this formula and the last two chapters attest, history is extremely grounded in place and time. Such context is key, two of the basic five Ws for making a story. That is what a historical narrative is after all, a story about the past.

In the previous chapters we have talked about living history’s relationship with place and time, and now we turn to interpreters’ words. As described in the prologue and in chapter two, living history can be understood as the cultural performance of embodied historical narratives. This chapter in particular focuses on how historical narratives are created and describes the ways in which interpreters rely on certain techniques to situate themselves within these stories. These techniques allow interpreters to render the past relevant and understandable for visitors. In specific, we will look at how interpreters use the words “we”/ “us,” “our,” and “here”; combinations of “you” and modal verbs; and modern comparisons to historic phenomena. Drawing from literary and narrative theory, we look at the narrative features of polyphony and metalepsis to discover how interpreters shift between narrative worlds. Finally, we look at two FNLHM-produced TikTok videos to uncover the role of nonverbal narrative in living history interpretation.

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<sup>34</sup> Sarah 2022.

## Historical Narratives and Participation Roles

A narrative is a story. It is a textual and/or oral medium for “construing events experienced in one’s imagination and in one’s everyday world” (Ochs 2006:285).

Narratives can be personal, autobiographical, fictional, historical, and recount traditional folklores. All narratives tend to have “core structural features” such as a preamble, overview, main body of narration, conclusions, and codas (Klein 1999:167-168). Due to its storytelling function, a narrative “links events in temporal and causal sequences” in “situationally relevant ways” (Ochs 2006:270-271, 285). In other words, a narrative establishes that event A might precede or afford the happening of event B. This “chronological dimension” is considered by some as “a central narrative property” (Ricoeur quoted in Ochs 2006:270).

Even though a chronological dimension is key in narrative construction, “temporality in narrative does not necessarily flow in chronological order” (Ochs 2006:274). For example, a personal narrative might open with today’s experience of eating lunch at a restaurant and then move to talking about the last time the teller was at the same restaurant. Going out to lunch today did not come before the eating out last month in terms of chronological order. The going out to lunch today occurred afterwards. The previous lunch-out experience was shared because it was *related* to going out to lunch today. The narrative linked these experiences in a temporal and causal sequence. The teller went to the same restaurant for lunch today because they had gone last month and enjoyed the menu.

In this project, I define historical narratives as stories that recount past events. Like personal narratives, historical narratives place historic events in temporal and causal sequences. They are told in terms of human time and are future-directed. Through a sequential ordering, tellers “unfold” “forward-moving events that are fueled by prior events and circumstances” (Ochs 2006:273). The future-directness of a narrative is a manifestation of its sequential ordering and chronological dimensions.<sup>35</sup> Just like other genres of narrative, historical narratives also have their own counternarratives, especially as historians continue to have different interpretations of documentary evidence.

To begin to notice the complex narrative features outlined above within historical narratives, let us take an ‘on this day in history’ example. “On March 4, 1933, at the height of the Great Depression, Franklin Delano Roosevelt is inaugurated as the 32<sup>nd</sup> president of the United States” (History.com). This one-sentence historical narrative places together two events, the Great Depression and FDR’s inauguration, in a temporal (and perhaps causal) sequence. The Great Depression preceded FDR’s inauguration and, because President Hoover (the 31<sup>st</sup> president) was often blamed for the Great Depression, it is possible that the Great Depression also afforded FDR’s inauguration (History.com). Its temporality does not flow in chronological order. The narrative begins “on March 4, 1933,” then moves slightly back in time to establish the ongoing Great Depression, and returns to March 4, 1933 in order to recount the event of FDR’s inauguration. If we recall that narratives are organized in terms of human time, we realize that it is the element which makes an “on this day in history” narrative so compelling. In my experience of the

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<sup>35</sup> It is also the reason narratives often are thought to have ‘lessons’ or ‘morals’ to them – some narratives are meant to be instructions on how to behave or not behave in future circumstances.

present (March 4, 2022), I searched for a remembered past (March 4, 1933), and then I anticipate and imagine the future (what will happen on March 4 in 2023? In 2050? In 2100?).

Historical narratives, in particular, raise questions about who is speaking in such narratives. In personal narratives, it is generally implied that I am recounting something that has happened to me. In the case of narratives recounting historical events, I might be the teller of the story but most likely I was not in attendance when the event occurred. Instead, I am retelling the experiences of those who witnessed and/or engaged in the historical event. Like all narratives, historical narratives come after the fact; they explain and name an event as “a significant marker of collective life-experience” (Schechner and Turner 1992:33, see also Trouillot [1995] 2015:22-26). Documentary-style narratives like diary entries, letters, and chronicles are usually written by first-hand witnesses. As I retrieve facts from first-hand witnesses to tell a narrative, I recount the personal experiences of historical others not my own. Rather than simply representing the past, narratives also construct particular versions of the past. When I retrieve the personal experiences of historical others to create a historical narrative, I inevitably limit my narrative to a particular perspective – including some historical voices while excluding others.

Erving Goffman helps us think about how narratives are coproduced through many tellers. In theorizing about voice, speakership, and narrative authority, Goffman has offered a model of three “participant roles” for understanding the different sorts of “alignments” people can have with words. The *author* is the originator of the words, the *animator* is the one speaking the words, and the *principal* is the person (or entity)

responsible for the words spoken (or the one in whose interest the words were spoken) (Goffman in Weidman 2014:42). Living history interpretation relies on sharing historical narratives in order to bring the past alive for visitors. Interpreters at FNLHM act as *animators* by sharing the history of Fort Nisqually through recounting events described by *authors*, historic persons who documented the events and lifeways of Fort Nisqually from a first-hand perspective. FNLHM is the *principal*, the one ultimately responsible for the historical narratives that interpreters share (their degree of historical accuracy, the manner in which interpreters interact with visitors, etc.).

#### Two Narrative Features: Polyphony and Metalepsis

Narrative as storytelling often appears as an area of interest in literary theory. Literary scholar Mikhail Bakhtin spent time theorizing about narrative literature, especially novels. Goffman's three participation roles examine how tellers have particular alignments to the words spoken, while Bakhtin's concept of polyphony considers the voices embedded in speech utterances themselves.

Polyphony refers to "the collective quality of an individual utterance" (Park-Fuller 1986:2). It is "the capacity of my utterance to embody someone else's utterance" even as it remains my own (Park-Fuller 1986:2). This can happen in obvious ways – when I quote or report someone else's speech, or if I appropriate or mock the speech pattern of another. In both examples, I "dialogue" with the other person and our two voices constitute a "dialogic relationship" (Park-Fuller 1986:2). The layering of voices

within polyphony might recall the layering of temporalities from chapter four. As interpreters engage in living history, notions about time shifted. The distinct past/present/future boundaries that constituted a linear relationship no longer existed. Instead, interpreters implied a layering and an alignment of temporalities; they occupy the past and present simultaneously. Polyphony is a similar layering of voices. Instead of understanding my voice as entirely my own, polyphony emphasizes that my voice holds within it traces of the words, ideas, and speech patterns of others. A polyphonic analysis of interpreters' utterances reveals the many voices embedded and invoked in the telling of historical narratives through living history. Third-person interpreters speak as their modern selves, but they also invoke the words, ideas, and perspectives of various historical others.

Before we get to the polyphonic analysis, metalepsis is another useful narrative concept to introduce. While polyphony is helpful for identifying the many voices imbricated within a narrative, metalepsis harkens back to the temporal ordering of events within a narrative while also thinking about the *act* of narration. I define narration as the verbal exercise in producing or compiling a narrative. Metalepsis refers to a “self-reflexive break” that occurs at the “sacred frontier” between narrative worlds – “the world *in* which one tells” and “the world *of* which one tells” (Smith and Watson 2019:3, emphasis mine). The distinction, and sometimes disjuncture between, the time *in* narration and the time *of* narration is called temporal metalepsis (Smith and Watson 2019:6). Temporal metalepsis occurs when the teller shifts from one narrative time-world to another. In other words, time is interrupted and the seamlessness ruptured exposing narrative time-worlds that are “at best contiguous” (Smith and Watson 2019:6). Living

history interpretation is full of temporal metalepsis. It especially occurs as third-person interpreters pause in recounting a series of historical facts to render the past relevant and knowable to a modern audience. In the next sections, we will explore forms of temporal metalepsis in the examples following our polyphonic analysis.

#### Indicators of Polyphony: “We”/“Us,” “Our,” and “Here”

When they share the history of Fort Nisqually with visitors, interpreters often use the inclusive pronoun “we”/“us” or the possessive pronoun “our” to signal a few things: their membership in the historical group whose experiences they are recounting, their role as interpreter, and/or their identity as a modern person. Applying a polyphonic analysis to the ways that third-person interpreters use the words “we”/“us” and “our,” reveals interpreters’ invocations of the words, ideas, and personas of historical others even as they speak to visitors as themselves.

Sarah, Dave, and Joyce use “we”/“us” and “our” to signal their membership in the historical group about whom they speak. Dave frequently used “we” when talking about aspects of daily life at the Fort with visitors. He portrays a general laborer at FNLHM, so when he talks about the sorts of activities a laborer engaged in at Fort Nisqually he relies on the inclusive pronoun “we”: ‘*we* chop wood, *we* work in the garden, *we* harvest apples in the orchard’ (emphasis mine). For Dave, the use of “we” is accompanied by verbs in the present tense. Not only are these actions things Dave actually does as a volunteer at FNLHM, but they are also the actions of historic laborers. Dave’s use of “we”



simultaneously signals his membership in a historical group of laborers, but it also references his role as interpreter. With his portrayal of a laborer comes certain historical tasks that he can do to help maintain the historical environment of FNLHM, and they include chopping wood, tending the garden, and taking care of the orchard.

While in the Sale Shop one afternoon, I heard Sarah say, “fur was *our* currency” as she talked about the role of the Sale Shop and what it meant to buy items on credit in the 1850s (emphasis mine). Unlike Dave, Sarah pairs the possessive “our” with the past tense verb “was.” Sarah asserts her embodiment of a historical group in this simple sentence. Joyce also uses the inclusive pronoun “we” accompanied by a verb in the past tense: “at the end of the day, in 1869, *we* were bought out and *we* left the area” (Joyce 2022, emphasis mine). Saying this, she signaled her membership in an organization, an entity, not just in a group of historic persons. Here, “we” refers on one level to Fort Nisqually, but on another to the Hudson’s Bay Company more broadly.

While Dave, Sarah, and Joyce all engage in historic skills and have a wealth of historical knowledge, none of them actually lived at Fort Nisqually in the 1850s. Thus, their historical narratives draw on the words and experiences of historical figures, supplemented by personal experiences of interpreting and learning heritage skills. Dave, Sarah, and Joyce do not see themselves as only modern persons interpreting the history of Fort Nisqually for an equally modern audience as a museum docent might. Instead, they consider themselves to be more than simple portrayers of the past. They embody the past, placing themselves within historical communities. Their words are entangled with the experiences of historic others. Dave’s use of “we” is accompanied by verbs in the present tense, while Sarah and Joyce pair “we” with verbs in the past tense. For Dave, history is

embodied and felt in his present. His temporalities align such that the responsibilities of historic laborers have become his own responsibilities. Sarah and Joyce tenuously occupy the past and present simultaneously. They claim Fort Nisqually history as their own but speak from a perspective that sees that history as something in and of the past.

Jim uses the word “we” in a slightly different way. Instead of signaling membership in the historic group he portrays, Jim relies on “we” to affirm his modernness. After our interview, Jim described a piece of his work to a group of visitors. He gave its historic name and then said, “*we* know them as gutters and downspouts” (emphasis mine). Unlike Dave, Sarah, and Joyce’s use of “we,” Jim uses “we” to align himself with visitors. In doing so, Jim also offers a modern comparison – this historic item functions just like a modern gutter. Jim’s comparison makes an unfamiliar historic item into a familiar item for his modern audience.

Interpreters also shift between using the inclusive pronoun “we” and the referential pronoun “they.” If the use of “we” signals group membership, then the use of “they” acts as a separator between modern interpreter and historic other. In the following excerpt, note Austin’s shift from “we” to “they” as he recounts British colonists’ interactions with Indigenous communities in the Puget Sound area:

[Visitors] have this negative mindset that they’re going to come here and *we’re* going to tell them that the Americans were terrible to the Natives, and the British were awesome to the Natives and helped them and *we* were their best friends and, yada yada yada yada...[but] that is not the reality of this place. *They* had a business relationship with the Native tribes. *They* had a less-than-peaceful relationship but a more peaceful relationship than the Americans do. Because, like I said, there was an understanding that this 161,000 acres is *ours*, *we’re* not going to go past it, *we’re* using it for money, and when *we* can’t make money, *we’re* out of here. (Austin 2022, emphasis mine)

In this short historical narrative offered by Austin, he talks about some of the uncomfortable parts of Fort Nisqually history, specifically HBC's treatment of Indigenous communities. Austin's first use of "we" refers to his role as part of a community of interpreters, and thus knowledgeable historians. He then transitions to talking about American and British presence, and the second "we" signals his membership in the British immigrant community he portrays. As he shifts out of visitor assumptions into "the reality of this place," Austin distances himself from British HBC by referring to the entity and its associated historic persons as "they." As he returns to talk about the temporariness of HBC presence in the Puget Sound region, Austin again establishes himself as included within the "we" of HBC's 161,000 acres. Just as Austin arrives at the uncomfortable reality of HBC presence, he shifts from including himself within that experience to a history that he is simply reporting – from "we" to "they." It is at that very moment and in that very speech action that Austin says, that is not *my* history.

These examples demonstrate that in living history interpretation, interpreters (un)intentionally share in the history they tell. The history they portray becomes their own such that they see themselves as part of the group of historical figures whose actions and experiences interpreters share with the public. The words and narratives of interpreters are polyphonic. Interpreters animate the words and experiences of historic figures (Goffman's authors) for visiting members of the public. As interpreters use inclusive words such as "we"/"us" and "our," they establish their identity as one amongst a group of historic persons and their narratives cease to be entirely their own. These stories are embedded with historical perspectives and voices.

Occasionally interpreters pair the inclusive pronoun “we” and possessive pronoun “our” with the demonstrative adverb-pronoun “here.” When talking about the joint occupation of Oregon Territory (that Austin referenced earlier), Sarah often says things like, “oh yeah, *here we’re* British...there’s not [sic] a lot of Americans *you’ll* meet when you visit *us*” (Sarah 2022b, emphasis mine). These two sentences include three interpretive techniques: “here,” “we,” and “you” accompanied by a modal verb. “Here” grounds Sarah’s narrative in historic time and place. “We” and “us” assert her membership in a group that was “here.” Her role as interpreter renders this narrative as embodied and gives her the capacity to animate the words and perspectives of historic others. “You” accompanied by the modal verb “will” is an invitation to visitors to immerse themselves in the historical narrative and imagine what life would have been like if they visited Fort Nisqually in 1855.

#### Metalepsis Part One: Invitations to Imagine and Modern Comparisons

“You” accompanied by a modal verb is a common interpretive technique meant to enhance visitor engagement and immersivity. It makes the past imaginable and thus knowable. Sarah’s invitation to visitors to imagine themselves in the 1850s, above, constitutes a metaleptic break in her historical narrative. She shifts out *of* the time of which she is narrating to invite those listening *into* the story she tells.

Sarah, Austin, and other interpreters often use imaginative language with children. Austin will begin by asking the visiting child’s age and says “guess what *you would* be doing? You wouldn’t be going to school...you wouldn’t be playing with your friends, you wouldn’t be riding your bike. *You’d* be out picking potatoes” (Austin 2022,

emphasis mine). Extending an invitation for children to imagine gives “a real-world aspect” and “connection” to historic life at the Fort: “no longer is this a Fort that they’re at, now it’s a Fort that a child who was their age *could* have been at...it does give them [a sense that] this is real” (Austin 2022, emphasis mine). Interpreters’ use of “you” and modal verbs “would”/“could” signals the possibility of children using their imagination to time travel recognizing that the things FNLHM portrays are “real.”

Paul employed a similar narrative technique with an adult couple visiting the Blacksmith Shop. In order to interpret the candleholder John was making, Paul narrated an imagined story in which the visitors were central actors:

So we’re forging one of our courting candles...it has an adjustable height, so you turn this little knob and raise and lower the candle...So the idea is that, this is something that when the young man comes to court *your* daughter, so then set this up and ‘you have that amount of time to make your case.’ And then, if *you* think, ‘oh this is going pretty well,’ maybe there’s a possibility here, *you might* give him a little more time. If he makes some remark about *your* horse that *you* don’t like, *you* can cut it down and say, ‘you got a little less time now.’ (2022, emphasis mine)

First, Paul explains how a courting candle works. Then, Paul sets up his story to make the candle’s use relatable. He asks the visitors to imagine that a young man is coming to court *their* daughter. Paul explains how the visitors *might* use the courting candle to signal their approval or disapproval for the match between the young man and their daughter. Paul’s narrative is at once a historical narrative and an imagined personal narrative. Historic persons actually used courting candles in the way Paul describes, but he interprets such history by creating an imagined personal narrative that features decisions the visitors might have made if they had lived in the 1850s.

Austin’s stories of historical childhood chores and Paul’s story about how to use a courting candle are examples of temporal metalepsis. Recall temporal metalepsis is

defined as the narrative breaks that occur when the teller shifts from one narrative time-world to another. Both Austin and Paul (and Sarah from before) shift from a narrative time-world that is historic to a narrative time-world that is modern. They take the facts from their historical narrative and break into the modern present. As interpreters embed the pronoun “you” accompanied by a modal verb (“would,” “could,” or “might”) in their stories, they intentionally and self-reflexively shift between narrative worlds. This shift happens so seamlessly, however, that it might not constitute the “rupture” that normally characterizes temporal metalepsis. Instead, the narrative time-worlds of past and present – like past and present temporalities from last chapter – are overlain and entangled.

As interpreters compare something historic to something modern, more metaleptic breaks occur. “Being able to make comparisons to what people know” is what Joyce sees as “the advantage of third-person” interpretation (2022). Joyce’s way of doing this is to tell visitors what the nineteenth century did *not* have. Travel to London with good weather took six months – “no Amazon Prime!” (Joyce 2022). Joyce also likes for visitors to recall that no indoor plumbing existed at Fort Nisqually meaning a person had to go down to the creek anytime they wanted a bucket of water. As Joyce shares historical facts about Fort Nisqually life, she invites visitors to consider what it would have felt like to live in the past without modern conveniences.

Many interpreters explain the function of the Sale Shop to visitors by stating it was the Target or Costco of the day – a one-stop shop for groceries, clothing, furniture, tableware, home décor, and more. Of course, this presupposes an audience that knows what products Target or Costco carry. Austin uses the example of Amazon to help

visitors understand the role of the Hudson's Bay Company. Remember, HBC is the trading monopoly whose employees established Fort Nisqually in 1833. Austin said,

When you're talking about a company like Hudson[s] Bay Company, there's not a lot of understanding about what they did. When you tell people what they did, people are like, okay well what did they *do* though? And when you relate them back to Amazon, a company that really does nothing; a company that contracts with other companies to sell their goods and then profits off of it, that's essentially what Hudson[s] Bay Company did. So you know, working in third person, yeah, you are able to use those modern equivalents. (2022, original emphasis)

Most people know about the global business catering to consumer demand that is Amazon. As Austin compares HBC to Amazon, he asks visitors to consider the role HBC played in connecting the Pacific Northwest with urban centers like London placing the Puget Sound on the map of globalized trade. In offering these modern comparisons, interpreters like Austin do much the same as Joyce. They invite visitors to look at past life through the lens of their present experience.

Oftentimes modern comparisons are interjections during a recounting of historical facts. As a way to make the past relevant and thus knowable, interpreters call upon something modern to use as a framework for explaining something historic. The two modern comparisons directly above (Sale Shop as Costco and HBC as Amazon) are invoked most frequently in the Sale Shop. The Sale Shop is often the first building (outside of the Visitor Center) visitors enter as they move through FNLHM. It is also the place where interpreters recount the establishment of Fort Nisqually and give a brief overview of contextual geopolitical information (this when narratives like the typical narrative opening chapter one are shared). Interactions usually begin with interpreters asking visitors some kind of 'where are you visiting us from' question and then they segue into sharing local history. Curiously, this "us" can either be the 'us' of FNLHM

staff and volunteers, or the ‘us’ that signals interpreters’ embodiment of and membership in a historical group of persons associated with Fort Nisqually.

Similar to using imaginative language, the interpretive technique of reaching for modern comparisons in order to make the past relevant and knowable is another example of what temporal metalepsis accomplishes. As they pause in their historical narrative to call upon a shared experience of the present, interpreters cross narrative worlds to respond to visitors’ questions. Interpreters break from world *of* which they are speaking (the historic past) in order to invoke the world *in* which they are speaking (the modern present) to make sense of historic phenomena. In other words, reaching for a modern comparison allows living history interpreters to reinterpret or reexplain some aspect of their historical narrative. This move is intentional; it is meant to foster greater understanding by making an unfamiliar past more familiar.

In the final section of this chapter, we explore temporal metalepsis as it occurs in visual, nonverbal narratives. To do so, we look at two videos posted by FNLHM on TikTok in the winter of 2021.

#### Metalepsis Part Two: Twin Tiktoks<sup>36</sup>

FNLHM posted on the viral video and social media platform TikTok for the first time in December 2020. Available internationally since 2017, TikTok was the most downloaded app during the first quarter of 2020 (from January to March) when COVID-

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<sup>36</sup> A note on terms: in the following section, TikTok (capitalized) refers to the social media platform and tiktok (lowercase) refers to the short videos posted.



19 lockdowns began all around the globe.<sup>37</sup> On TikTok, users create, watch, and share short videos. These videos can be layered with text, hashtags, images, effects, memes, and sounds. Just as people turned to TikTok and other social media outlets to express themselves and their experiences of pandemic life, so did companies and other organizations to spread promotional content and sponsored campaigns. Educational organizations and museums began using TikTok as a platform to reach new and diverse audiences.<sup>38</sup> In June 2020, TikTok announced a new initiative to promote and develop educational content on the platform. In a series of upgrades, TikTok expanded its video limits first from fifteen seconds to sixty seconds, then to three minutes in July 2021.<sup>39</sup>



Figure 4. Screenshot of FNLHM's TikTok profile (@fortnisquallymuseum) taken by author on April 25, 2022.

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<sup>37</sup> For general reading on TikTok and COVID-19 see Andreas Schellewald, "Communicative Forms on TikTok: Perspectives From Digital Ethnography." *International Journal of Communication* 15 (2021): 1437-1457 and Zoya Unni and Emily Weinstein, "Shelter in Place, Connect Online: Trending TikTok Content During the Early Days of the U.S. COVID-19 Pandemic," *Journal of Adolescent Health* 68 (2021): 863-868, among other scholars.

<sup>38</sup> As examples, see Tulane University's Admissions Office (@onlyattulane) and Carnegie Museum of Natural History (@carnegiennh).

<sup>39</sup> This was a key development over the summer while I was interning at FNLHM. Staff were very excited about this upgrade because it meant they could include more interpretive and educational content in each video, no longer constrained to a sixty-second limit.

Like individual TikTok users, FNLHM shares moments of everyday life with its viewers. In the following two videos, interpreters demonstrate ‘heritage skills.’ These videos are not tutorials or how-tos, nor are they staged demonstrations. They are everyday moments of a portrayed historic lifeway captured in a short visual narrative.

Posted within four days of each other, these visual and nonverbal narratives show the gendered divisions between what heritage skills were (and perhaps still now are) available to men and women. Just as the interpretive techniques above, the tiktoks below feature metaleptic breaks – moments where narrative worlds are shifted between and revealed to be entangled. As the tiktoks document moments of everyday (historic) life through a modern social media platform, FNLHM as narrative authority simultaneously occupies both past and present narrative worlds.

The needlework tiktok debuted first at the end of January 2021 (see Figure 5). In this short video (coming in at twenty seconds long), a female-presenting interpreter embroiders a hummingbird and flower scene on a piece of fabric. She is dressed as a Metis woman in a skirt and top of different florals blanketed in an HBC point-blanket with a kerchief tied over her hair, trade beads around her neck, and wearing a facemask (because it was recorded amidst the COVID-19 pandemic). She holds her project in an embroidery hoop in her hands and on the windowsill in front of her rests her “huswife” (a

portable sewing kit)<sup>40</sup> and a pair of scissors. Her seat by the window gives a sense of “at home”-ness to this tiktok.<sup>41</sup>

Accompanying the video is modern EDM (electronic dance music), albeit soft and calm EDM. Deliberately choosing to overlay the video with modern music, FNLHM engages in a sort of temporal alignment in which to document the possibility that one might see a woman practicing needlework when visiting FNLHM. The EDM music offers a familiar, modern sound as a pathway into the everyday (imagined) life of the interpreter as if she were a historic figure.



Figure 5. Screenshots from the needlework tiktok (@fortnisquallymuseum) taken by author on November

17, 2021.

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<sup>40</sup> “Huswifs” were portable sewing kits made out of fabric so they can roll up for easy transport. Soldiers were originally the main possessors of huswifs because they served as portable mending kits perfect for repairs away from home. At the museum, I observed one male interpreter leatherworking over the summer (a skill that requires some sewing) and another male interpreter mending a staff member’s dress. The second interpreter was asked by visitors about his busywork and took the time to mention that men at Fort Nisqually would have needed to know how to mend and sew in order to keep their clothes well-fitting and warm (i.e. not holey).

<sup>41</sup> This mimics and references other TikTok trends that documents everyday “at home” moments due to an increased time spent at home because of worldwide COVID-19 lockdowns (see Schellewald 2021:1445-1446).

Layered on top of the video and music are text annotations. Two quotes are written in black sans serif font highlighted with white background. In order of appearance, the first reads, “Needlework must be regarded as the sister art of painting,” and the second continues over two annotations, “the aim of the accomplished needlewomen of the present day,” “being to produce as true a picture of nature as possible” (see Figure 5). In the video and the caption, these quotes are left unattributed and yet they sound “old.” Each quote serves as a social reminder, both for the Victorian subject (represented by the female interpreter) and the modern viewer. Anonymous quotations allow the viewer to imagine that these were things that Victorian women might have heard throughout their lives. The quotations are also indicative of polyphony as visual, textual representations of the thoughts and words of historical figures.

A few days later on February 2, 2021, FNLHM posted a tiktok on blacksmithing (see Figure 6). In this video, also twenty seconds long, a bearded male-presenting interpreter demonstrates his blacksmithing skills. Unlike the needleworker, he stands dressed in earth tones with trousers, a shirt, vest, leather apron (which reaches from chest to knees), and a cap. His hands are bare, he has tools poking out of the pockets of his apron, and on his face are a pair of glasses and a fabric facemask (again for COVID-19 purposes). He wears no modern safety equipment.<sup>42</sup> In the first scene, he places a long metal rod into the flaming coals with his left hand, turns toward the camera, and rests his right wrist in the triangle of the bellows pull at about eye-level. The video then cuts to a

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<sup>42</sup> This is standard attire for blacksmiths at FNLHM. I have not seen any modern safety equipment save a pair of glasses and a COVID-19 facemask, and all blacksmiths wear leather aprons – either full length or half aprons. Paul and John described the absence of gloves to a visiting couple: gloves inhabit your tactile sensations of touch, texture, and weight. Blacksmiths use these sensations to guide their work, so gloves would just get in the way (Paul and John 2022).

couple seconds of the flames (in two scenes) and then to the next scene in which the hot end of the metal rod lays against the anvil and the interpreter shapes the hot metal with a hammer. Just behind and below the anvil is a half-barrel bucket full of water (used for quickly cooling metal or in case of a fire). The anvil takes up the majority of the frame and only the interpreter’s left hand is visible striking with the mallet. Unlike the needleworking interpreter, this interpreter is clearly “at work.”



*Figure 6. Screenshots from the blacksmithing tiktok (@fortnisquallymuseum) taken by author on November 17, 2021.*

Also accompanying this video is EDM-style music, but this sound has both electronic instrumentals and lyrics – it is significantly more dramatic.<sup>43</sup> At the beginning of the video when the interpreter is standing by the fire, the music is simple (even bare) beginning with a sort of a cappella style and the male vocalist sings, “I’ve always liked to play with fire” (with additional male vocals joining in on ‘play with fire’). The beat drops and the video immediately shifts to close-up scenes of the flames with the rest of the hearth shrouded in shadow. The flames are yellow, white, orange, with some blue color

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<sup>43</sup> The sound is “Play with Fire (feat. Yacht Money)” by Sam Tinnesz.

close to the coals. The music increases in tempo, volume, and complexity with the male vocals chanting “yeah” and “whoa” (distorted by the EDM), but in a hyping-up kind of way for the rest of the video. The lead male vocalist’s “I’ve always liked to play with fire” is repeated in the shot of the flames and later as the interpreter shapes the metal rod in the final scene. The masculine vocals, the hyping-up tone of the music, the strong beat all gender this video and the skill it depicts as utterly masculine.

The visuality of the tiktoks allows for viewers’ encounters with the past to be “experience-based, affectively interactive, and immersive” all while FNLHM delivers accurate cultural information and conveys historical fact-based content (Underberg and Zorn 2013:69). The two tiktoks serve as ideal examples of how FNLHM deploys these short videos to make history relevant to a modern audience from afar. Mimicking the TikTok genre of documenting moments of everyday life, FNLHM suggests that life during the 1850s in the Puget Sound region might not have been altogether different from modern life. People practiced needlework and blacksmithing, handcrafted with fabric and metal mediums, and had both “at home” and “at work” spheres. Both tiktoks focus predominantly on the task at hand, zooming in to frame the embroidery hoop or metal rod in the fire. The focus remains on the interpreters’ hands and their handiwork.

FNLHM’s tiktoks engage in temporal metalepsis. Yet the two tiktoks explored above do not have any spoken interpretation. They are visual narratives about the past and therein rests their uniqueness. In these day-in-the-life style tiktoks, metaleptic crossings happen at multiple moments. Each interpreter is masked due to COVID-19 health and safety mandates at the time of recording. Facemasks are familiar to viewers watching close to the time of posting reminding viewers that, under the masks and

Victorian clothing, these are real, living, twenty-first century people just like them. This overlapping of narrative worlds is unavoidable, due to the health concerns of the modern social world, and situates the production of these tiktoks in a very specific cultural present. Similarly, overlaying a moment of portrayed historic life with EDM music serves as another moment of time disjuncture. Historic persons would not have listened to EDM. Yes, they listened to music – but certainly not this dramatic techno-pop. Had FNLHM chosen to overlay the video with music from a harmonica, fiddle, or some other historic instrument, the narrative shift might not have been as jarring. Finally, videos that come to viewers through the TikTok platform are captured with a piece of modern technology. Given that TikTok is a relatively new social media platform, historic persons clearly would not have watched or created tiktoks. In using a platform known for sharing moments of everyday life (see Schellewald 2021), FNLHM uses all these metaleptic crossings to draw viewers into perceiving a semblance of relatedness between this past and their present. Crossing time and space boundaries, viewers can bring a visual narrative of history into their own homes and into their hands.

Living history interpretation shares historical narratives. Through the use of “we”/“us,” “our,” and “here,” interpreters embed themselves within the history they share. A polyphonic analysis of interpreters’ narratives reveals the many tellers within their stories: featuring both interpreters as modern persons, bearers of historical knowledge, and the historical authors they see themselves among. Interpreters’ imaginative language (“you” accompanied by a modal verb), comparisons that render unfamiliar historic items into a semblance of a modern familiar item, and nonverbal

TikToks reveal metaleptic crossings within historical narratives. These metaleptic breaks render the past relatable and thus knowable for visitors because interpreters shift between narrative worlds.

In narrative theory when time is interrupted, and the seamlessness of the narrative ruptured due to metaleptic crossings, narrative worlds and times are exposed to be “at best contiguous” (Smith and Watson 2019:6). Yet as narrations about the past, these examples have not revealed narrative worlds and times that are “contiguous.” Instead, it is a more intimate and inseparable relationship. These narrative worlds and times are not touching. They are colliding, intertwining, and entangled. The portrayal of a historic past happens simultaneously with a modern present. These uniquely layered acts of temporal metalepsis, at one point, tug the visitors into the imagined past and, at another, pull them back into their known modern present.



## **Epilogue: A Pastful Present**

Candlelight 2021. The Blacksmith's Shop. During his evening tour, my curious fiancé eavesdropped on Paul and another blacksmith's first-person conversation. "We've got to make all these crindels tonight," they said, "that's why we aren't at the party at the big house." As part of the immersivity of Candlelight, visitors are asked not to speak with interpreters, nor will interpreters respond if they did. Visitors are meant to be spectators – "ghosts from the future." Unfortunately, when visitors have a question about something happening within a scene, they must save their question for the end of their tour when they can ask volunteers in the temporary visitor center by the bus pick-up. When I reconnected with him after my last tour finished up, my fiancé asked, "Do you know what a crindel is?" I replied that I had never heard of one, but I thought one of the long-time staff members might know. We asked her, but she had never heard of a crindel either. All three of us searched the Internet together in the parking lot, to no avail.

I remembered the crindels when I was conducting my interviews in January. Paul, John, and I had just finished up our broader discussion about living history and I turned off my recorder to look over at Paul with "one final blacksmithing question: What is a crindel?" He took a moment, face blank, until I filled in, "When we were at Candlelight, my fiancé said you were making crindels?" Paul's face lit up and he chuckled, "It's a totally made-up word!" I flipped the recorder back on, realizing I would not be able to recount this story to my fiancé in the same way Paul was about to do:

Colby: Really? Crindel doesn't, it doesn't exist? Okay.

Paul: Not, well, it exists in a discussion that I had with [another interpreter].

And I made it up basically to mess with [him].

John: Well you know, he had just gotten Mrs. Tolmie's lecture at that point, so,  
Paul: (Laughs) Yeah, well [another interpreter] and I were signed up to do Candlelight, so I sent him a note, a couple, like two, weeks before Candlelight. [I] sent him an email just saying that I had gotten in trouble at the Fort, that they found me drinking, and they threatened me with my job, [but] they're keeping me around because I was a blacksmith, but I needed to get [in] their good graces. So I was going to have to work late this night and I also told him that there's going to be a party going on, [but] that I was going to have to be working here....and so I was hoping he could join me because I had all these crindels to make. We had to forge out the crindels and we had to straighten the marwicks. Both of which were words that I made up. So kind of out of the blue, yeah, I sent him this in-person, or in-character email. Which he totally got into, and he responded back saying that he had also gotten found drinking, and he had gotten caught with a bottle of mead, and blah, blah, blah. And that he had gotten this whole temperance lecture from Mrs. Tolmie. And so that was kind of our shtick that night – that we were underappreciated, and we ought to be able to enjoy ourselves having some libations every once in a while. And we were having to work here, and all the fancy people were partying over there. So that was just kind of, sort of our standard Candlelight banter. But yeah, I just made these things up cause I knew [the other interpreter] would want to research it, cause he would definitely want to figure out - 'okay, Paul's got a project for me, I'm going to study up on this thing and figure out everything about a crindel.' So there-, you can't find-, there is nothing about a crindel. So then we kind of carried that on into that night. We were talking about straightening the crindels which was just an inside joke which is really funny that your fiancé picked it up. (2022)

Paul ended up showing me what his 'crindels' were – the long “blanks” about twelve to fifteen inches long that would later be bent and shaped into a set of blacksmithing tongs. “Really what we were doing,” said Paul, “was prefabbing a bunch of handles for future tongs that we made up a story about what they were.” Enjoying himself through an inside joke with a fellow interpreter, Paul had no idea he would be caught fabricating history by my attentive fiancé.

Paul's crindel story points to the creative and immersive potential of living history interpretation. Telling stories about the past can be playful and they can be serious. They can be historically inspired and they can be historically inaccurate. The idea behind living

history is that through an immersive atmosphere, interpreters and their audience gain a greater understanding of the way life has been lived. As Paul takes on the imagined persona of a blacksmith during Candlelight, a first-person event, he embodies a historic other. As he introduces a fictionalized word to his “shtick,” Paul gets creative with his impression showing that living history does not have to be scripted or like delivering a lecture; it can be fun, playful and engaging.

Albeit a first-person interpretation example, Paul’s story reveals much the same as the previous chapters. Within the walls of the Blacksmith’s Shop, he creates a historical place through his actions, his words, and the objects around him; he realigns past and present temporalities through his own immersion (and the immersive experience of his audience); and he authors a narrative about the history of Fort Nisqually to share with visitors. Living history interpreters at FNLHM place themselves within the Fort Nisqually history they portray such that the boundaries between modern and historic place, past and present time, and interpreter and story are intimate, inseparable, entangled, and porous.

In other words, the lives of interpreters are *pastful*. As interpreters align the past and present through living history, they allow us to see that “everything in the present has a past” (Palmié and Stewart 2016:219). All the things we do, say, or even think hold traces of the past. Just as we discovered in chapter two from the concepts of historicity and collective memory, history and the historical narratives we author and share are not exempt from the influences of our modern present or our historic past. History, historical narratives, and human life can (and should) be seen as *pastful*. Just as living history as a

practice engages in *pastful* living by portraying historic lifeways, I came to see my own research as *pastful*, especially as I reckoned with my own feelings of nostalgia.

Throughout this writing process, nostalgia has been my coauthor. She has influenced the things I wanted to say and how I wanted to say them. Nostalgia is a peculiar emotion. It is a yearning, a sentimental longing, a wistful affection for the past. As we discovered in the previous chapters, interpreters sense time in ways that see the boundary between the past and present as porous and overlapping, rather than something separate and distinct. As I revealed in chapter one, I have my own personal attachments to FNLHM – from my first visit as an eighth grader to arriving as an intern last summer to returning this winter to interview interpreters for this project. Yet my nostalgia is greater than simple nostalgia for an eighth-grade visit or my recent summer internship. It is nostalgia for a past I did not live or experience, but a past I nevertheless embodied as I became a living history interpreter. It is nostalgia for a history to which I am now, somehow, connected. A nostalgia for that which was and that which is no longer.

French historian Pierre Nora defines history as “the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer” (quoted in French 2012:339). For living history interpreters, history may be a reconstruction, but it is also something that is intimately felt and experienced. To them, history refers to the lived experiences of historic others that they come to embody. Not “just abstract ideas and thoughts or pictures or words,” history refers to the “things people did and felt and saw” (Sarah 2022). Perhaps living history’s greatest value is that through participating or interacting with interpreters we find historic others are just like us. “History is more than big events, [it is] about people like all of us here” (Joyce 2022). The people associated with Fort

Nisqually in the 1850s “were just people; there’s nothing different about them than you, except for the time period that they live[d] in. That’s the only difference” (Austin 2022).

When we understand our lives as similar to those of historic others, we can see the ways in which our social lives (the ways we relate to each other) hold resonances of the past, especially in relation to remembering and forgetting. The ways we remember particular experiences are intrinsically tied to either what we know/think to have happened and/or what we are told happened (recall Trouillot’s two-pronged historicity from chapter two). In a similar vein, historian Mark Helmsing offers this distinction between the discipline of history and historical memory. “If we think of history as the formalized, systematic study of the past through sources and material left by people in the past,” writes Helmsing, “then historical memory is the *force* of those histories as transmitted socially, culturally, and politically through a group or community of people” (Helmsing 2021, emphasis mine). Put another way, historical memory refers to the processes, influences, and factors that affect the circulation of particular historical narratives within communities.

In simple terms, to encounter the past in the present is to forge a historical memory. As living history interpreters portray a semblance of past life, they make historical memories collective. Their portrayal of historic lifeways transmits historical narratives for a modern audience. They render Fort Nisqually history into something intelligible, knowable, and memorable for those who visit FNLHM. The concepts of historicity and historical memory help us critically consider the nature of transmission: *who wants to remember what or whom, and why?* In other words, *what version or perspective of the past is recorded and preserved?* As discussed in the preceding

chapters, living history interpreters embody a past that is temporally and spatially bounded. In the same way, the historical memories they transmit are often limited to one dominant perspective – that of a white Euro-American/European Hudson’s Bay Company employee.

Paul’s invention of the crindel is a playful exercise in (re)creating a historical memory. Just as other interpreters share historical facts, they also (re)shape historical memories about Fort Nisqually, Victorian era lifeways, and greater Pacific Northwest history to other interpreters and their modern audience. Engaging in the practice of living history, the twenty-first century bodies of interpreters create collective historical memories through their inhabitation of a nineteenth century past. They construct such memories by designating a place as historical; time-travelling to that place in such a way that does not exchange their present for the past; and by sharing historical narratives grounded in historical time(s) and place(s) with others. Positioning themselves within these places, times, and stories, the lives of interpreters are *pastful*. As *pastful* performances of embodied historical narratives, living history has the generative potential for (re)making historical memories.

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