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We Call It Pulling a Thread: Deconstructing Femininity at the Molly Brown House Museum

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Abstract

Despite making up around half of the global population, women are consistently underrepresented in museums. Where women's experiences are present in exhibitions and programming, they are often misrepresented within an entrenched heteronormative and patriarchal framework. Through this thesis, I show how Denver's Molly Brown House Museum works to upset traditional narratives through their dynamic interpretation of the life of their namesake, Margaret Tobin Brown. Using new museology, feminist anthropology, and performance theory, I analyze data from staff interviews and tour participant observation to explore how the museum deconstructs popular understandings of historical femininity. Through visitor surveys, I measure the extent to which the museum is changing visitors' perceptions of womanhood in the past. By relating Mrs. Brown's experiences to those of modern-day visitors, the museum joins several other notable institutions nationwide in re-shaping the way museums represent women.

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by

Emily J. Starck

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Advisor: Esteban M. Gómez

ABSTRACT

Despite making up around half of the global population, women are consistently underrepresented in museums. Where women's experiences are present in exhibitions and programming, they are often misrepresented within an entrenched heteronormative and patriarchal framework. Through this thesis, I show how Denver's Molly Brown House Museum works to upset traditional narratives through their dynamic interpretation of the life of their namesake, Margaret Tobin Brown. Using new museology, feminist anthropology, and performance theory, I analyze data from staff interviews and tour participant observation to explore how the museum deconstructs popular understandings of historical femininity. Through visitor surveys, I measure the extent to which the museum is changing visitors' perceptions of womanhood in the past. By relating Mrs. Brown's experiences to those of modern-day visitors, the museum joins several other notable institutions nationwide in re-shaping the way museums represent women.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

"Woman"

What should a woman be?
At the first all leal and true
When the song of love sing two.
What should a woman be
When her love is pledged to thee?
All purity.

What should a woman be
When the two to one have grown?
When each heart has found its own?
What should a woman be
When her life is linked to thee?
Sincerity.

What should a woman be
(Still more love the angels bring'
Still the song of love they sing.)
What should a woman be
When the song of love sing three?
Maternity.

So should a woman be;
And whatever may befall
Let the song of love sing all.
So should a woman be;
So, love, I am to thee—
Fidelity.

Viroe 1896:29

In the late 1890s, the long-running American household manual and fashion

magazine *Godey's Lady's Book* published a poem extolling the virtues of womanhood. In

its next edition, the magazine marveled at the boldness of the "new" American woman, who was fast growing accustomed to freedoms and social opportunities unthinkable to their mothers and grandmothers. Ideas and ideals regarding the proper behavior and attributes of women were changing: poems and stories placing the woman fondly and firmly in the home were circulating as suffragettes were hoisting their banners, demanding a voice in the public political arena. Although this debate would touch the lives of all American women in some way, Margaret Tobin Brown was particularly familiar with the fight over femininity. Born in 1867, Mrs. Brown was a woman of contradictions. Impoverished but well-educated as a child, a sudden change in her husband's fortunes in the early 1890s catapulted her into the upper social echelons of Denver, Colorado, where the Brown family had made their home. Firmly establishing herself as a socialite, Mrs. Brown filled her days with both high fashion and high adventure, traveling the world in the latest styles. A refined wife and mother, Mrs. Brown was also a tireless philanthropist, advocate for social reform, aspiring politician, and hero of the sinking of the *Titanic*, which elevated her to national prominence despite her husband's disapproval. Her fame would continue after her death in 1932, when highly fictionalized versions of her life appeared on page, stage, and screen.

Throughout her life, Mrs. Brown had pushed the boundaries of "acceptable" femininity, challenging the social norms that sought to define women as dutiful daughters, wives, and mothers, regardless of their personal inclinations. Four decades after her death, her fight was taken up anew when her beloved Denver home became the Molly Brown House Museum (MBHM). Since its founding, the museum has been

dedicated to presenting Mrs. Brown's story to the public; many of these visitors are drawn to the house by the fictionalized accounts of her life as portrayed in popular media. Others come to the MBHM for the same reasons thousands of visitors descend on historic house museums across the country: the desire to walk the same halls trod by the famous or the infamous, to feel closer to the events that shaped the nation's history and the individuals who shaped those events (Smith 2002). For decades, the United States' most beloved house museums have upheld traditional stories and legends about their occupants— Monticello celebrates Jefferson's creative genius, Mount Vernon lauds Washington's heroism, and New Salem commends Lincoln's industriousness and honesty (Bruner 1994). The 21st century has seen museums upending their established narratives in favor of asking deeper questions about their structure and objects and the people who owned and used them. Prompted by theoretical developments originating in the "new" or "critical" museology, this approach has allowed museums to connect to new audiences as they tell more daring stories (Smith 1989; Donnelly 2002).

The elevation of these previously-silenced voices remains an ongoing process, and many minority groups continue to find themselves incompletely or incorrectly represented. Museum theorists and professionals (e.g. Smith 2002; Dubrow and Goodman 2003; Deepwell 2006; Levin 2011; Huyck and Strobel 2011) have commented on the notable and enduring marginalization or absence of women's stories in museums of all types and sizes. Historic house museums are not immune from this convention: although hundreds of American historic houses and sites are dedicated to the legacy of their illustrious male residents, very few are devoted to telling the story of the women

who called those houses home (Dubrow and Goodman 2003). The Molly Brown House Museum is an exception.

Before my first visit to the museum in January, 2016, I had only heard the name "Margaret Brown" once. Technically, I had overheard it— a coworker at the historic house in which I worked was talking about how much he had enjoyed visiting her house museum while in Colorado. After moving to Denver for graduate school, I remembered that conversation, and decided to pay Mrs. Brown a social call. Our tour guide was careful to mention the musical and film caricatures of "Molly" Brown— and then gently instructed us to throw all of those images out. The real Margaret Brown, I learned, had lived many lives: immigrant factory girl, store clerk, miner's wife, mother, millionaire, fashionista, socialite, philanthropist, traveler, outdoorswoman, scholar, politician, ambulance-driver, actress. Her home, in which we now stood, bore testament to this multifaceted life. The scandalous nude statue she had brought back from her adventures in Paris seemed like it belonged in her parlor as much as her proper white china belonged in the formal dining room. As Margaret's story unfolded, our guide also built connections between her life and those of the millions of other women who lived when she did— coming of age with the Victorian Era and dying with the Great Depression. Although it bore her name, the museum, I realized, was not "only" about Margaret Brown.

I left the museum excited for a few reasons. As a student of both feminist anthropology and museology, I was keenly interested in how museums interpreted women's lived experiences. My years spent working at American historic house museums had me focusing on that type of institution in particular. But I also had other,

more personal motivations. As a woman and museum-lover, I have spent my life frustrated at the lack of representation of women in museums. When I did come across female representation, I was frequently disappointed to find it one-dimensional. As a bisexual woman, I look for stories of female diversity: women of different classes and ethnicities, women with different sexualities and bodies, wives and mothers but also doctors and politicians. The women I saw represented in art museum exhibits were always either queens or nudes, and anthropology museum dioramas were not complete without a weapon-toting father striding before a haggard-looking mother, children tugging at her dress.

Inspired by my experience at the MBHM, I began thinking about how I could develop these academic and personal interests into a research project. I soon arrived at the following research question: how does the Molly Brown House Museum deconstruct the concept of femininity for its visitors? My choice of words here was intended to connect my research question to broader lines of museological and anthropological inquiry. Since the 1980s, museums had followed anthropology in challenging, or "deconstructing," established institutional narratives; I sought to understand how the MBHM fit into this wider museological trend. I also wished to focus on how the museum impacted its visitors; this emphasis on visitor experience was not always present in a discipline that has long privileged researchers and curators over the public. Finally, third-wave feminist anthropology stresses interrogating the concept of "femininity" rather than treating "woman" as a universal category (Moore 1988). I chose to focus on how the

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museum deconstructs femininity, rather than Mrs. Brown's life story, in order to engage with this feminist anthropological concern.

Key Terms and Concepts

Before providing the detailed background information that will lay the foundation for my analysis, several fundamental terms should be clarified. The first two form the basis of my research question and will be explored in greater detail in the "Theory" chapter. "Deconstruction" here refers to the process of isolating and critically examining the language and practices used to represent women in museums (Porter 2004; Wickramasinghe 2010). "Femininity" is much more difficult to define. Following Holland (2004:8), I consider "femininity" to be "a concept which refers to a set of gendered behaviors and practices and yet which is fluid and not fixed, and can mean as many different things as there are women." In other words, "femininity" can encompass the suite of values and daily actions considered appropriate or ideal for women in a particular time, place, and culture. The tension between what is thought to be appropriate for women and what women find to be appropriate for themselves is central to the MBHM's interpretation and in my own analysis of that interpretation.

My third key term has also already been encountered. Despite the museum's name, Margaret Tobin Brown was never called "Molly" in her lifetime, although her parents and siblings called her "Maggie" when she was young. After her marriage, she preferred to be known by her husband's name, as "Mrs. J.J. Brown" or "Mrs. Brown." Museum staff refer to her either as "Margaret" or "Mrs. Brown." I have chosen

to use "Margaret" when describing Margaret Tobin Brown's childhood and "Mrs. Brown" when analyzing how the museum presents her adult life.

The term used to describe the time period in which Mrs. Brown lived merits further consideration as well. The period between the 1837 and 1901 is commonly designated the "Victorian era" in the United Kingdom, United States, and regions under their influence. The subsequent Edwardian period came to an end around 1910. Mrs. Brown's life bridged both of these eras, and she would also live to see the rise and fall of the Roaring '20s. Since the cultural systems associated with the Victorian era were not suddenly abandoned at the turn of the century, I have chosen to use the term "Victorian" rather broadly to refer to objects, events, and people associated with the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century. This usage follows the example of the MBHM, which refers to the house as "an enduring symbol of the Victorian era" (The Molly Brown House 2011).

The Industrial Revolution and the Victorian era it encompassed has been credited with the rise of the British and American middle class, who used their newfound wealth to aspire to a standard of living once reserved for the social elite (Mullins 1999; Summers 2001). "Middle-class" behaviors were intended to emulate the upper class. As Mrs. Brown grew up in a working-class family, she likely would have employed the aspirational strategies developed by the middle class as she adjusted to elite society. In discussing ideals and expectations for Mrs. Brown and other Victorian women, I therefore use "middle-class" and a related term, "genteel," as shorthand for both the

middle class proper and the elite whose status they sought. The temporally-specific meaning of "genteel" is explained in greater detail in the background chapter.

Finally, the museum devotes great attention to exploring how aspects of Mrs. Brown's personality did and did not fit with contemporary expectations for women. From the beginning of this research, I have found myself struggling to label these behaviors. "Traditional" and "non-traditional" femininity seemed subjective, static, and ultimately inadequate; if, as the MBHM suggests, women have been defying feminine norms throughout history, how could any description of femininity be considered "traditional"? "Conventional" and "unconventional" were a poor fit for the same reasons. I discarded "ideal" and "alternative" as well— ideal and alternative for whom? Eventually, my background research brought up another set of binaries: the male "public" and female "private" spheres into which Victorian life was ideologically divided (Corbett 1992). This dichotomy seemed to offer a way to talk about individual patterns of behavior in a way that fit with museum docents' descriptions of Mrs. Brown and contemporary women. In analyzing aspects of the MBHM's interpretation focused on women as wives, mothers, and homemakers, I will therefore use the term "private femininity" in place of "traditional," "conventional," or "ideal." When characterizing the museum's description of women who moved beyond the home, I will use "public femininity"— not to imply that these women were less "feminine" and more "masculine", but that they would have been perceived by their contemporaries as acting outside of normative domestic female roles. I further understand the individual actions of individual women to lie along a

continuum of femininities from "public" to "private," rather than aligning with one or the other component of a binary pair.

In addition to tackling these definitions, I should address a couple of ethical considerations before moving on. Respect for the privacy and safety of interview participants should be at the heart of all ethnographic research (Buch and Staller 2007), leading many ethnographers to use pseudonyms for their interviewees. I have decided to use the real names of the museum staff I interviewed according to their stated preferences. I have not included the names or identifying characteristics for any museum docents or visitors. The second ethical consideration is more theoretical. In developing my thesis interests, I initially intended to focus on the representation of women of color, working-class women, or lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered women in museum exhibits and programming. As I became more drawn to the MBHM and the stories it presented, I became concerned that studying an institution dedicated to a wealthy, white, and presumably heterosexual person would merely be replicating museums' traditional focus, despite the fact that this particular white heterosexual elite was a woman. The MBHM's descriptions of Mrs. Brown's working-class origins and its dedication to connecting her story to those of women from different backgrounds alleviated my concerns. Furthermore, I realized that leaving the museological representation of an elite, white, heterosexual woman unanalyzed runs the risk of perpetuating that identity as the default or "normal" femininity (Kahn 2000). All other women who did not fit into that category would then be cast as deviations from that "norm"— an implication with dangerous social consequences. By studying the museum-based portrayal of Mrs. Brown,

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I seek to understand whether the MBHM critically interrogates, or deconstructs, her racially-, sexuality-, and class-specific femininity.

Thesis Layout

In this thesis, I begin exploring my central research question by providing museological and historical context through my background chapter. I first focus on the development of historic house museums, the founding of the MBHM, and the representation of women in museums. I then summarize Mrs. Brown's biography and use historical and archaeological sources to explore definitions of femininity in late 19th- and early 20th-century America. My second chapter builds on that background information by detailing the theoretical foundations of my thesis work. I begin with theories of gender and gender performance, before moving into new or critical museum theory. Both of these subsections include a review of key authors and literature that have contributed to the development of each set of theories. The third chapter begins by bridging theory and research methods through the discussion of the museological, anthropological, and feminist methodologies that informed my research design. The "Methods" chapter also includes a description of the population I chose to study, along with my rationale for choosing to conduct research based on semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and visitor surveys. In the "Analysis" chapter, I report the results of my research and consider how those findings can be used to answer four guiding questions derived from my main research question: "are they deconstructing?", "what are they deconstructing?", "how are they deconstructing?", and "how effective is the

deconstruction?" Finally, my conclusion summarizes the museological and cultural statements made by the MBHM and lays out suggestions for future research.

In 2001, a survey commissioned by the American Alliance of Museums found that the American public believes that museums— not academic researchers, local newspapers, or the national government— are the most trustworthy sources of information. History museums and historic sites were considered particularly trustworthy. Clearly, visitors depend on museums to provide accurate information, particularly about the past; leaving women out of museum narratives effectively leaves women out of history (Vergo 1989). Conversely, as institutions invested with a high degree of public trust, museums have the power to legitimize groups, events, and concepts that may otherwise have remained obscure or forgotten (Ames 1992; Tseliou 2013). Museums are therefore crucial to raising public awareness of the existence of diverse femininities in the past, and of the historicity and legitimacy of diverse femininities in the present. Exploring how the Molly Brown House Museum and other institutions create that public awareness is key to understanding the social role played by museums in the lives of their visitors.

CHAPTER TWO: BACKGROUND

Introduction

It's July, 2012. The floorboards of the 1870s stagecoach inn creak as I stride across the kitchen to the stove, apron full of firewood. The morning is already hot and humid, but I'm making soup today and I need to get the water boiling early. My corset joins the chorus of creaking as I bend to stoke the fire. Before leaving for work, I had drawn in my last full breath for the next eight hours to fasten the corset across my ribcage and over the camisole I had donned to reduce chafing. Then came two petticoats, next the cage-like bustle, then stockings and shoes. I had pulled the ruffled pink skirt over my head and shrugged on the matching jacket and apron, finally tying my feathered straw bonnet below my chin.

The bustle dress is heavy. Combined with the heat crackling off the stove, I'm already sweating. Fortunately, the soup will be easy. At some of the other houses I work at in this living history museum, I chop wood, till the garden, chase chickens, haul water, and wash wool in my corset and petticoats. Turning with my bowl of tomatoes to the cutting board, I roll my eyes as a fork clatters to the floor from the table behind me. How women in the 1870s wore bustles without constantly knocking everything over, I will never know. Maybe they did.

As I discovered during my summers as a living history interpreter, an excellent way to begin understanding how Victorian women experienced their world is to step into their shoes— somewhat literally, in my case. But my shoes were modern work boots, ergonomic and waterproof. Convincing as they looked, they could not help me imagine the thousands of tiny tasks that Victorian women performed every day in order to present their version of femininity to the world. I have never used a buttonhook, nor successfully darned a sock, much to my grandmother's disappointment. As the physical remnants of the past, museum objects provide priceless insight into the daily lives of thousands of 19th-century women, each of whom experienced femininity in her own way. But alongside these objects have survived 19th-century idealizations and generalizations that attempt to corset the concept of femininity into narrow categories. The ways in which museums interpret conflicting ideas about women in the past is informed and determined by their own history as culturally- and politically-bound institutions. In this chapter, I will trace the development of the historic house museum, changes in the museological representation of women in general, and the history of the Molly Brown House Museum in particular. Finally, I attempt to outline the competing Victorian perceptions and definitions of femininity that today's museums seek to interpret, in order to provide a backdrop for my analysis of my experiences at the Molly Brown House Museum.

Gender and the Historic House Museum

From their first incarnations as cabinets of curiosity, museums have long found a home in the houses of the wealthy. While many of these early *Wunderkammern* were devoted to natural history specimens or ethnographic objects (King and Marstine 2006;

Vogel 2008), by the 1850s, the focus of the museologically-minded turned to elite houses themselves. The surging patriotism of the mid-19th century saw museums made out of the former homes of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and other "Great Men" in the hope that these residences would serve as civilizing shrines of morality and national pride (Smith 2002). Through the 1880s and 1890s, historic houses began emphasizing the aesthetic value of their furnishings and other objects as nostalgia for American decorative arts swept the nation.

Colonial Williamsburg, founded in the late 1920s, incorporated greater historical research into its interpretations of historic structures, but the patriotic emphasis of most historic houses would persist until the middle of the 20th century (Butler 2002). The Great Man museum was finally challenged in the 1960s and 1970s by the rise of the "Social History" house museum. While these historic houses expanded their focus to include women, the working class, and African-Americans, they tended to deify the same vision of the American Dream that had been enshrined at Great Man museums (Butler 2002; Smith 2002).

This nascent shift in emphasis coincided with legislation and funding promoting the establishment of historic house museums; Butler (2002) estimates that roughly 6,000 new institutions were opened between 1960 and the new millennium. These thousands of houses have received millions of visitors, becoming firmly embedded in the American cultural and educational landscape (Dubrow and Goodman 2003). Reflecting these increasing— and increasingly diverse— audiences, historic house museums have begun infusing the mission and methodologies of the new or critical museology into the "Social

History" model developed in the 1970s. From the late 20th century onwards, staff at

many historic house museums have sought innovative ways to tell diverse stories at their

sites, looking to historic structures, objects, and documents for new clues about life in the

past (Donnelly 2002; Ellis 2002). Chicago's Jane Addams Hull-House Museum, for

example, encourages visitors to choose their own caption for a pair of portraits of

reformer Jane Addams and her close companion, Mary Rozet Smith, raising the

possibility that the two were in a lesbian relationship (Schoenberg 2007). In New York

City, the Lower East Side Tenement Museum reconstructs the lives of working-class

immigrant families in the cramped spaces they called home (Lower East Side Tenement

Museum 2017).

Despite this increased focus on elevating subaltern narratives at the historic house,

Butler (2002:18) offers the following definition for "historic house museum":

> [A historic house museum] centers on the maintenance, care, and interpretation of
> either a single, historic residential structure or a complex of structures associated
> with and including a residence that serves as the primary focus. The interpretive
> emphasis of a historic house museum is primarily the residential structure itself
> and the lives of individuals related to that structure.

Adair (2011:268) concurs with this description, offering as a summary the view that

historic houses' "mission of collection, interpretation, preservation, and education must

transpire via the lens of the individual or individuals who lived in the home." Brooks

(2002) further divides the genre into three subtypes based on their interpretive emphases:

the "documentary" historic house, focused on a house's decorative and architectural

features; the "aesthetic" house, containing a mix of period rooms and furnishings

intended to immerse visitors in the aesthetics of a particular era; and the "representative"

house, which values objects that might be used to explore a particular time and place regardless of whether or not those objects are original to the house. While homes in the first two groups hearken back to earlier forms of historic house museums, many "representative" houses are working to ensure that the definition of "individuals related to that structure" (Butler 2002:18) or "the individuals who lived in the home" (Adair 2011:268) is expanded beyond the traditional focus on elite white men (Ellis 2002).

The task is, however, a Herculean one. Centuries of unquestioned androcentricity have necessitated decades of debate regarding the portrayal of gender and sexuality in historic houses and all other types of museums (Tseliou 2013). Many of these critiques have come from the new museology, which arose in the 1980s to challenge established narratives and authorities in museums (Ames 1992). The new museological project has been powered largely by developments in anthropology, including postmodernism and postcolonialism (Kahn 2002). Specifically documenting the unique experiences of women of different races, classes, abilities, and life stages, meanwhile, is a key concern of 21st-century feminist anthropology.

These developments are slowly being reflected in museums of all types. The 1970s saw the gendering of museum exhibits taken up as an object of feminist inquiry. By the 1980s and 1990s, art museums were beginning to include more female artists— but almost exclusively in exhibits about portraying the body (Deepwell 2006). In 1994, Gaby Porter's study of the representation of women in museums revealed the need to increase the inclusion of women's stories at multiple levels of museum operation and interpretation in addition to staging more exhibits centered on women (Tseliou 2013).

Sharp (2003) and Moon (2003) were two of many analysts also reporting a lack of women's history in museums and historic sites throughout the 1990s. Ten years later, Porter (2004) would still be calling for expanded critical feminist research in museums. Mayo (2003) echoed Porter's concern with reference to historic sites, noting that after 25 years of increased attention to presenting women's stories in museums, institutions were still simply adding women in to existing androcentric histories, rather than rewriting historical narratives and categories to focus on both men and women. By the early 2000s, the 65,467 properties listed on the National Register for Historic Places Information System included only 360 directly connected to "significant" women (Shull 2003); around the same time, a mere 6 of the nation's 365 National Parks were specifically associated with women (Miller 2003). Women of color, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender women, disabled women, and working-class women continue to be underrepresented even at the few gynocentric museums and sites that do exist (Adair 2011; West 2003).

While acknowledging the magnitude of the work yet to be done, Huyck (2011) credits several institutions, organizations, and initiatives with their dedication to increasing the visibility and diversity of women's stories over the past two decades. The Women's Historical Landmark Project and Women's History Education Initiative both worked effectively with the National Park Service; the first group focused on identifying women's historic sites, while the second advocated for the integration of women's stories into existing sites and institutions (Miller 2003). These projects centered around the realization that women have been present even in arenas traditionally thought of as male-

focused, from presidential birthplaces to Civil War battlefields and Alcatraz Island (Brandon 2010; Huyck and Strobel 2011). At these sites and in museums in general, curators, interpreters, and historians are recognizing that leaving women out of history— or art, science, culture, and so on— means their visitors are leaving with only half the story (Miller 2003). From storytelling to reinterpreting the "everyday" objects in their collections as integral to women's experiences, museum professionals across the discipline are working to tell the whole story in innovative, inclusive, and accessible ways.

The Molly Brown House Museum

Even though most historic houses are named after and devoted to elite heterosexual white men (Diethorn and Bacon 2003; Moon 2003; West 2003), women have played a key role in the historic house museum since a group of female volunteers rescued Mount Vernon in 1858 (Butler 2002). In the 21st century, the majority of sites explicitly devoted to women take the form of historic houses (Miller 2003). Denver's Molly Brown House Museum is one of those institutions. Designed by architect William Lang in 1889, the three-story Queen Anne/Romanesque Revival home was purchased by Margaret and J.J. Brown around 1894. The family occupied the house for the next several years, attended by servants who worked and slept in a small wing in the back of the structure. The small property also included a carriage house and small flower gardens. By the late 1910s, the globe-trotting Mrs. Brown was renting the home out, spending her time instead on the East Coast and in Europe (Malcomb n.d.)

Following her death in 1932, the house became a home for "wayward" girls, then a boarding house for men. In the 1960s, the home nearly fell victim to the urban revitalization campaigns sweeping Denver's historic downtown neighborhoods, but was saved from the wrecking ball in 1970 by a group of devoted volunteers (Iversen 1999). Under the name "Historic Denver," this group would become the first interpreters of the newly-opened house museum (Denver Public Library). Today, the museum is operated by a small all-female staff supported by paid and volunteer docents, who provide special events and guided tours in accordance with the museum's mission:

> Historic Denver's Molly Brown House Museum is committed to enhancing the city's unique identity by telling the story of Margaret "Molly" Brown's activism, philanthropy and passion through educational programs, exhibits and stewardship. By exploring the dynamic between past and present, we shape a stronger community for the future and inspire engaged citizens (The Molly Brown House 2011).

Open year-round, the museum works to bridge the gap between Victorian Denver and the present day for thousands of visitors from across the city, the country, and the world.

While few of the objects currently placed in the home actually belonged to Mrs. Brown, museum staff relied on photographs taken of the home's interior in 1910 to faithfully redecorate each room. The use of 1910 photographs in reconstructing the home's decor indicates that the museum's current visual interpretation of the house is also set around 1910. Although this date falls in the Edwardian (1901-1914) rather than the Victorian Period (1837-1901), the house's construction in 1889 left it with a highly-compartmentalized and firmly Victorian floor plan (Figure 1a-c), rather than the open designs coming into vogue at the turn of the century (Praetzellis and Praetzellis 2001). Many of the objects featured in the house date to earlier than 1910, and certainly do not

reflect the emphasis on light and airy furniture characterizing the Arts and Crafts Period

(Praetzellis and Praetzellis 2001).
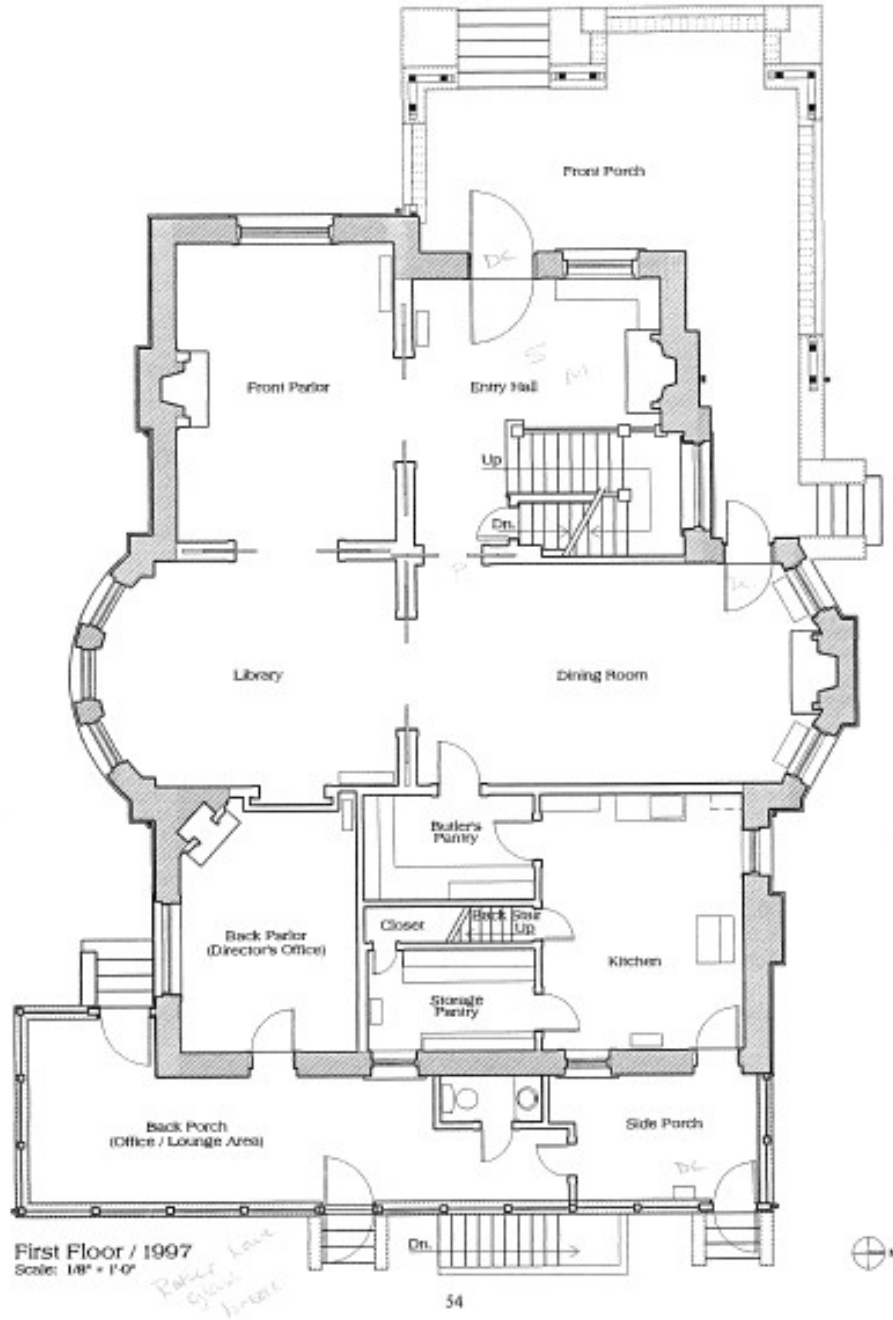
Figure 1a. The first floor of the Molly Brown House (Molly Brown House Museum).

Second Floor / 1997
Scale: 1/8" = 1'-0"

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Figure 1b. The second floor of the Molly Brown House (Molly Brown House Museum).
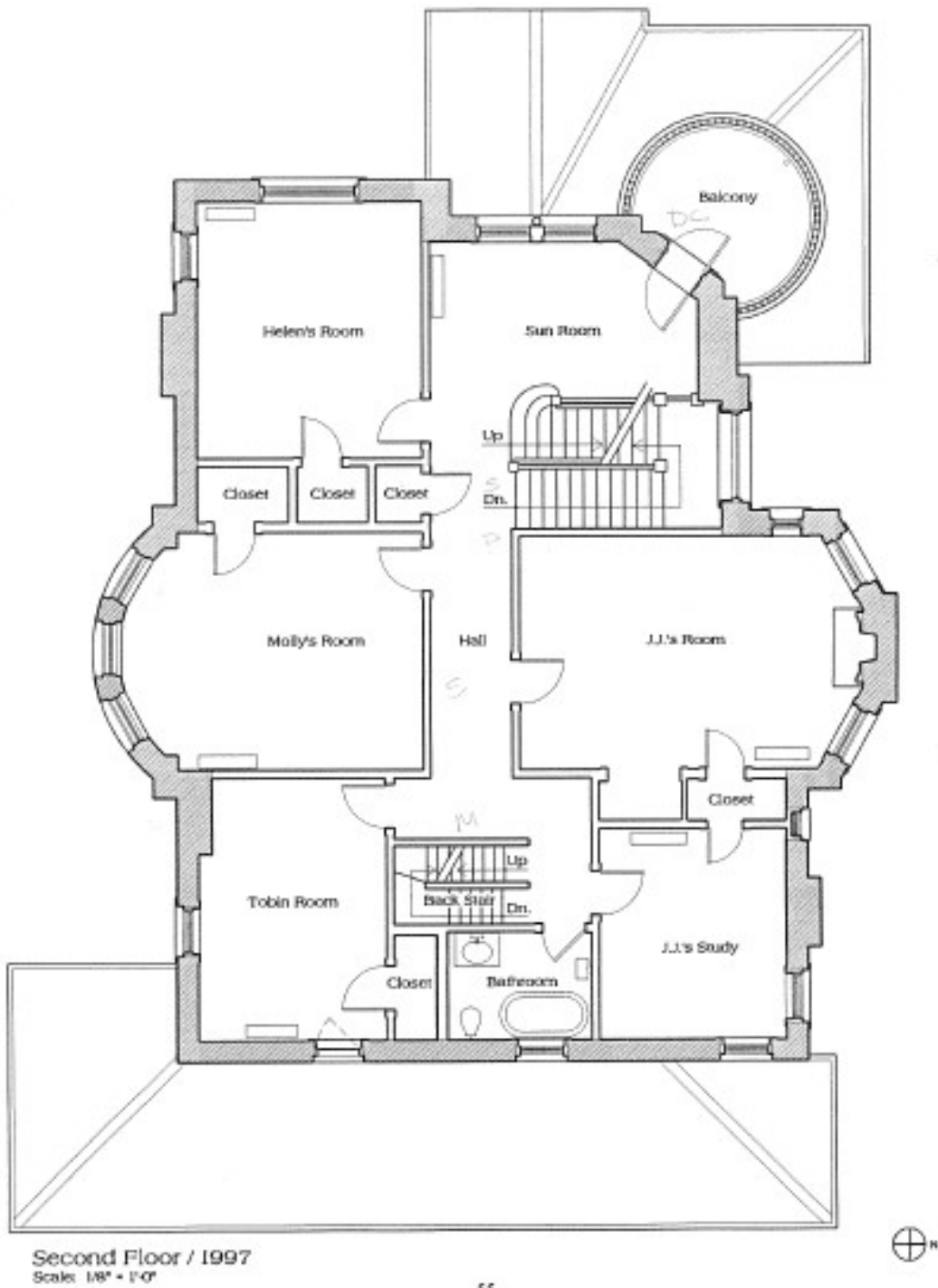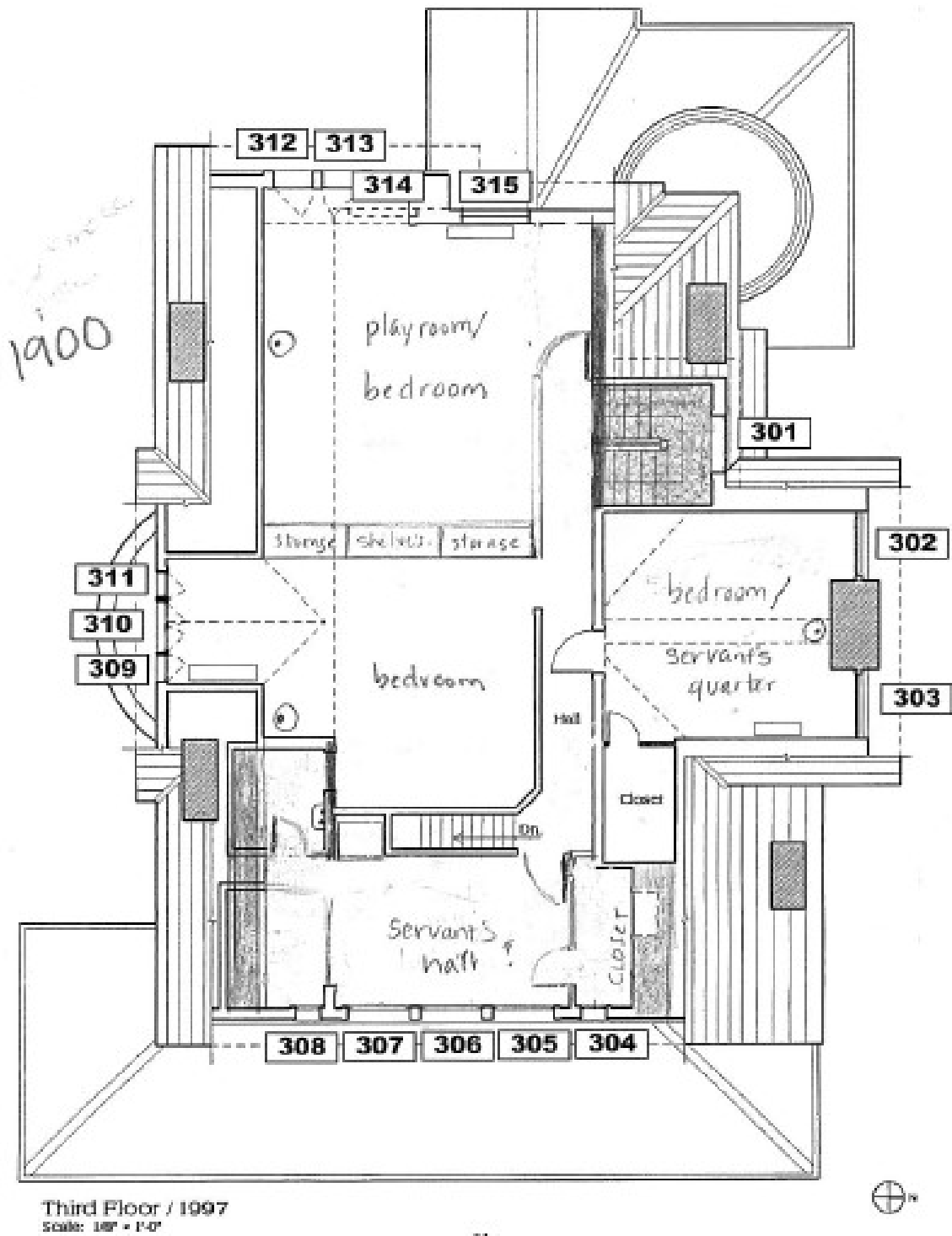
Figure 1c. The third floor of the Molly Brown House (Molly Brown House Museum).

House museums often incorporate objects older than their interpretive date to give their spaces a "lived-in" feel reflecting the continued curation of heirloom and other objects well after they went out of style (McLean 1992; Levy 2002). Victorian decorating styles remained remarkably stable through the 19th century, suggesting a degree of ideological conservatism that did not simply end with the death of Queen Victoria in 1901 (Kinchin 1996; Rohan 2004). Finally, museum staff seem to associate the house more firmly with the late 19th, rather than the early 20th, century; many of the historical and biographical events they discuss take place prior to the turn of the century. The museum's website specifically refers to the home as "an enduring symbol of the Victorian era" (Molly Brown House 2011). It therefore seems appropriate that docents interpret the house and its contents through a mainly Victorian context, and many do take care to mention that the meaning of specific rooms and objects evolved as the house and its occupants passed into the 20th century (Praetzellis and Praetzellis 2001).

The Life and Times of Margaret Brown

In 16 rooms and 45 minutes, docents are charged with familiarizing visitors with Mrs. Brown's biography— no small task, considering the shroud of myths and misconceptions surrounding Mrs. Brown and Victorian women in general. Born in 1867, in Hannibal, Missouri to John and Johanna Tobin, young Margaret was called "Maggie" by her parents and six siblings (Molly Brown House Museum n.d.). Irish immigrants involved in both abolitionism and labor activism, the Tobins ensured that all of their children, including Margaret and her sisters Helen, Catherine, and Mary Ann received an

unusually high level of education. Teenage Margaret began working at a local tobacco factory (Molly Brown House Museum n.d.). A few years later, she joined her brother Daniel in Leadville, Colorado in search of better work opportunities and, perhaps, a husband. The former, she found as a shop clerk; the latter came in the form of 32-year-old J.J. Brown, a fairly penniless miner and fellow Irish-American Catholic. Despite their age difference and her desire to marry a wealthy man to help support her parents, Margaret, 19 and lovestruck, agreed to marry J.J. after three months of courtship (Iversen 1999). At their tiny home in the Rockies, the Browns welcomed first a son, Lawrence, or "Larry," and then a daughter, Catherine, called "Helen." Although the family scraped to get by, Mrs. Brown later recounted her Leadville years, full of socializing, charity work, and continued education, as the best of her life (Field Notes 7/14/2016 1:00 PM).

The family's fortunes would change drastically— and literally— when J.J. directed his colleagues at the Ibex Mining Company to take a second look at the Little Jonny Mine, long thought to be defunct. Under J.J.'s direction, the walls of the mine were shored up with hay bales and the shaft sunk deeper than it ever had, eventually striking the largest and purest vein of gold yet discovered on earth. The mine owners rewarded J.J.'s ingenuity with company shares, turning the Browns into millionaires (Molly Brown House Museum n.d.). In 1894, the family relocated to Denver, quickly slipping into the city's high society. Like many society women, Mrs. Brown threw herself into philanthropy and travel, becoming well-known in Denver for her formidable fundraising abilities, keen fashion sense, quick wit, and independence.

Never long absent from the front page of the *Denver Post*, Mrs. Brown's name made global headlines following the 1912 sinking of the R.M.S *Titanic* on its maiden voyage across the frigid North Atlantic. Mrs. Brown had been vacationing in Egypt and boarded the ship at the last moment, after learning via telegram that Larry's son, her first grandchild, was seriously ill. Jarred from her bed by the fatal force of the *Titanic* striking the iceberg, she ignored the crew's reassurances that nothing was amiss and headed up on deck, after grabbing her warmest clothing and $500 cash from her stateroom. As passengers grew increasingly aware of the horror of their situation, Mrs. Brown assisted panicked women and children into the ship's few lifeboats, entering one herself only after being tossed in bodily by a crewmember. Peeling off layers of her clothing to share among the lightly-clad women aboard her lifeboat, she and her companions wrested control of the boat from the terrified and useless crew member who had clambered aboard. After rowing for hours in search of help, Mrs. Brown's lifeboat and the few others nearby were picked up by the *Carpathia*, which had arrived to answer the distress call issued by the *Titanic* before it went down. Once onboard, Mrs. Brown resumed doing what she did best. Fluent in fundraising and five European languages, she asked wealthy survivors for donations for the few third-class passengers who had struggled aboard the *Carpathia*, well aware that many of these passengers were immigrants who had lost everything in the disaster. In a highly effective move that museum docents recount with delight, she ensured that all of her wealthy companions donated by posting a notice in the *Carpathia*'s dining room— on one side was a list of all the donors and the amount of

money they had contributed. On the other side was a list of everyone who refused to donate (Field Notes 9/25/2016 12:30 PM; Iversen 1999).

   After arriving in New York, Mrs. Brown refused to leave the *Carpathia* until all of the third-class passengers had contacted friends or family or made other arrangements. As news of the disaster spread, she became a high-profile advocate for the reform of maritime law, having witnessed families torn apart by the ancient "women and children first" maxim. In some instances, women had chosen to stay aboard the sinking ship rather than be separated from their husbands, fathers, brothers, or sons. Because these men were the sole breadwinners in most families, women and children who did survive were left without a source of income, and many quickly grew destitute (Molly Brown House Museum n.d.). After returning to Colorado, Mrs. Brown continued to advocate for the most vulnerable members of her own community, advocating for humane society and juvenile court reform. She stood on the side of miners and their families after the 1914 Ludlow Massacre. This labor activism further alienated Mrs. Brown from J.J. The couple had permanently separated in 1909, never formally divorcing because of their devout Catholic beliefs. Allotted a monthly allowance in the settlement, Mrs. Brown continued travelling, socializing, charitable giving, and activism. Her years of involvement in the women's suffrage movement culminated in two campaigns for the U.S. Senate— years before the 1920 ratification of the 19th Amendment gave women the right to vote nationally. Her bids, ultimately unsuccessful, were a high-profile symbolic action, paving the way for future female lawmakers. In her later years, Mrs. Brown spent most of her time in the fashionable resorts of the East Coast, even as the family's fortune began to

dwindle. Still, she remained active, insisting that there was no reason to be idle and "grow mildewed at 40" (qtd. Iversen 1999:178). At the time of her death in 1932 at New York City's Barbizon Hotel, she was giving acting lessons, having taken up some of Sarah Bernhardt's stage roles.

As an opinionated and independent high-society woman, Mrs. Brown frequently drew the attention of Denver gossip columnists, who freely exaggerated details about her life for their eager audiences. The rumor mills did not stop churning after her death. That same year, she was featured in Gene Fowler's *Timberline*, which turned her larger-than-life personality into the stuff of Old West tall tales. Fowler's book was followed up in 1936 by Caroline Bancroft's *The Unsinkable Mrs. Brown.* Frustrated with the way the media had caricatured their mother, Larry and Helen refused to respond to inquiries about her life, sealing away many of her papers; the fantastical stories spread unchecked. Mrs. Brown's fictionalized biography found its way to the stage and then the silver screen in the form of the musical *The Unsinkable Molly Brown*, in which Molly, an incorrigible bumpkin with a heart of gold, is rescued from a flood as a baby by fellow Hannibal resident Mark Twain; begs her husband to teach her to read; accidentally burns her family's fortune in the stove, where she had placed it for safekeeping; and is permanently exiled from Denver high society for her boorish, low-class manners. The character of "Molly Brown" would appear again, most notably portrayed by Kathy Lee Bates in James Cameron's 1997 blockbuster *Titanic* (Iversen 1999). Although this Molly is less cartoonish than her musical counterpart, she is still shunned by her fellow first-class passengers for her country drawl, loud humor, and tacky finery, thick-set where the other

women remain fashionably waifish. The only posthumous portrayal of Mrs. Brown, either written or visual, to meet with her descendants' approval finally appeared in 1999, in the form of Iversen's family-endorsed biography.

Gentility and Femininity

While Mrs. Brown's high-profile and adventurous life makes her case exceptional, many aspects of her experience as a woman were shared by her female contemporaries. Beginning in the high Victorian Era, encompassing the Edwardian Period and the Roaring 20s, and ending during the Great Depression, Mrs. Brown's life spanned a period of immense change in women's social roles. During Mrs. Brown's formative years and much of the time she spent in Denver, middle-class and elite femininity were idealized, shaped, and constrained by a cultural system she would have known as "gentility." Called "Victorianism" by modern-day historians and archaeologists, gentility encompassed the suite of behaviors, values, ideals, and possessions thought proper to people of high class or good breeding across the 19th-century Anglophone world (Praetzellis and Praetzellis 2001). Arising at the same time as the white middle class in the United States, Britain, and British territories, gentility had as its goal upward socioeconomic mobility. Ambitious middling families emulated upper-class genteel behavior and material culture in the hope of one day joining those elite circles. These refined behaviors took the form of daily practice: visiting neighbors for tea, hosting dinner parties, leaving calling-cards, trips to the seaside, and employing servants were all routinely-reenacted genteel acts. These behaviors were enacted and mediated

through a dizzying array of material culture. Houses are objects writ large, and owning a stylish home in a fashionable neighborhood was an essential part of genteel social display (Reid 2002). Tea-time in the genteel home should feature printed porcelain tea-sets, but whiteware would do, so long as everything matched (Garman and Russo 1999). Dinner parties could only proceed if each guest had more utensils than they knew what to do with, and more courses than they could eat at one sitting. Calling-cards must be left in a specially-designated dishes or trays— the more ornate, the better (Ames 1978). Particular clothes were a necessity for seaside vacations, and a family could not return without souvenirs to cram onto the crowded shelves of knicknacks bedecking the parlor (Logan 2001). Of course, servants were necessary to keep a middle-class family's things in good order for maximum impact the next time a guest came calling (Fitts 2001).

Gentility, as manifested through behavior and possessions, also encapsulated the ideological division of family life into the male "public" or business sphere and female "private" or domestic sphere (Corbett 1992; Massey 1994; Sewell 2003). This spatial metaphor was translated into reality through the compartmentalized design of the typical Victorian home. Some spaces within the home, including the entry hall, dining room, study, and gentleman's parlor or billiards room— were nominally male-coded. Other rooms— the parlor, in particular— were the specific domain of women (Kinchin 1996). However, women were generally seen as controlling overall home life and decor through participation in two additional systems within gentility: the Cult of Domesticity and the Cult of True Womanhood (Christensen 2012; Jameson 1984). The "True" woman was to be pure, submissive, gentle, chaste, and motherly (Corbett 1992; Gupta 2001); J.J. Brown

was famously of the opinion that a woman should only appear in newspapers at her birth, marriage, and death (Field Notes 7/14/2016 1:00 PM), an ideal reflected in an illustration in the 1851 edition of *Godey's Lady's Book*.

Figure 2. The stages of a woman's life, here divided into "Baptism," "Communion," "Marriage," and "Death" (Hale 1851).

The ideal genteel woman's life was defined entirely by her relationships to her religion, husband, and family. "True" and "Domestic" women were therefore responsible for nurturing their families' spiritual well-being by turning their homes into peaceful and well-decorated Gardens of Eden (Shields 1880; Jameson 1984; Roper 1996; Rohan 2004). Filling the parlor with potted plants helped turn the home into an earthly paradise, free from the dust and corruption of the outside world (Fitts 2001); white china molded in "Gothic" patterns reminiscent of cathedral windows also encouraged purity and piety (Garman and Russo 1999).

In addition to outfitting their homes with specific furniture and decor, genteel ladies were also responsible for outfitting themselves in a manner reflective of their modesty and good taste (Summers 2001; Rohan 2004). The Victorian Era saw fashionable gowns balloon out into hoopskirts, twist into flouncing bustle dresses, and finally streamline into slimmer skirts, albeit with massive leg-of-mutton sleeves (Figure 3a-c). Part of keeping up with the trends in each of these eras required a vast wardrobe of different outfits specifically designed for particular occasions or activities; a wealthy woman changed her clothing repeatedly throughout the day to accommodate this rule (Field Notes 8/5/2016 10:00 PM). Each dress style also constrained and redirected movement in its own way (Figure 4).

Figure 3a. Hoopskirts characterized women's fashion in the 1850s and 1860s (Drew 1897).

Figure 3b. Bustle dresses became fashionable in the 1870s and 1880s (Drew 1897).

Figure 3c. The 1890s saw skirts slim as sleeves ballooned (Drew 1897).

1869.

1869.

1859.

1865.

1869.
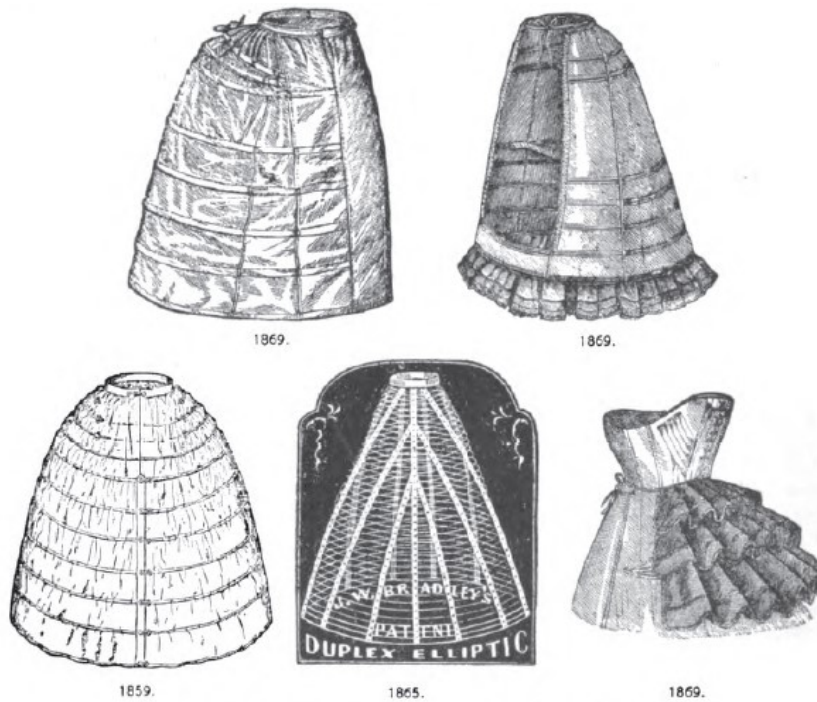
Some Instruments of Torture from the Hoop Skirt Period.

Figure 4. Heavy and cumbersome hoopskirts were held responsible for dangers ranging from crowding on public transit to increased deaths from kitchen fires (Drew 1897).

Hoopskirts required tiny, mincing steps to keep the skirt from tipping upwards, revealing the legs; using public transportation, navigating a kitchen, or even sitting down were all but impossible (Drew 1897). Bustle dresses had to be carefully crushed aside when a woman was seated. Like hoopskirts, bustles were best suited to small strides, although swaying the hips showed off the gowns' ruffles to full advantage. Even the simpler skirts of the 1890s and early 1900s restricted mobility, as running or even brisk walking causes the skirt to wrap tightly and treacherously about the ankles. Beneath each of these fashions, genteel ladies donned petticoats and the notorious corset, which flattened the bust, permanently narrowed the waist, and made vigorous physical activity— or even breathing— a challenge. Through clothing and corseting, women could literally embody genteel values; by dressing and corseting their daughters, they ensured that the next generation would grow up ready to perpetuate gentility (Fitts 2001; Summers 2001). Breaking with these genteel convention was not without risk: women who resisted corseting were often castigated by their peers until they laced up (Summers 2001).

Historians and archaeologists have been careful to note that 19th-century etiquette manuals, decorating guides, and ladies' magazines provide evidence for ideal behavior only, and are not necessarily reflective of what Victorian men and women actually believed and how they truly behaved (Higgs 1983; Seidman 1989; Roper 1996). Many women with aspirations to upward mobility appeared to have practiced some aspects of gentility— Mrs. Brown, for example, is pictured in the 1890s wearing a stylish gown (Figure 5), and images of her home show fashionable furnishings (Figure 6).

Figure 5. Mrs. Brown dressed for her first ball following the family's move to Denver in 1894 (Denver Public Library).

Figure 6. The back parlor or library featured potted plants, neat bookshelves, and stylish furniture (Denver Public Library).

Individual women did, however, have the agency to act outside of the genteel ideological system. Furthermore, behavior thought appropriate for women seems to have varied by location. Many women in Colorado and the rest of the American West, for example, found that frontier conditions offered them greater occupational and behavioral freedom than women on the long-settled East Coast. As they broke ground on new farmsteads, kept house in mining camps, and performed "men's work" when necessary, these women actively blurred the neat ideological division between the "private" female sphere and the "public" male sphere (Jameson 1984; Herr 1995). Despite the permeability of gender boundaries in the actual lived experiences of women on the frontier, Western women were still caricatured in popular literature written mainly by men (Herr 1995). True Women of the American West were pious and submissive civilizers, missionaries of genteel domesticity in the savage wilderness. Fond images of the stoic, hard-working, uncomplaining pioneer housewife were also acceptable manifestations of True Womanhood in the West. The raucous saloon girl, meanwhile, represented the prostitutes, boardinghouse-owners, and dancers who were often the first women to arrive in newly-conquered American territory (Herr 1995). While these tropes portrayed an idealized and satirized image of femininity in the West, they were pervasive in the 19th century and remain so today, manifested by characters like Molly Brown, whose heart of gold made up for her lack of feminine gentility (Jameson 1984).

Most descriptions of 19th-century femininity were written about, rather than by, women; this situation will hopefully be rectified by the increasing availability of personal documentation in which women describe their own experiences (Herr 1995). While

women as a broad category have largely been silenced in the historical record, the silence deepens around specific groups of women who experienced idealized femininity very differently from their white middle-class peers (Adkins and Skeggs 2004). Most accounts of the lives of working-class women in the late 19th century come not from the women themselves, but from middle-class moral reformers and charity workers who had a vested interest in spreading sensationalized portrayals of the working class (Perkins 1987; Fitts 2001; Gupta 2001). Charity work was often carried out by middle-class women as an extension of their roles as nurturers and civilizers (Williamson 1897; Willis 1897). Dispensing aid to the working class also allowed these ladies to demonstrate their good Christian morality, with the added benefit of displaying the fact that they possessed both the leisure time and the money to help the needy.

The middle class further believed that these "needy" were not created equal. Some members of the impoverished working class were made so by unfortunate circumstances; these families wanted to be self-sufficient, but had been left without an income by illness, death, or abandonment. Such "worthy poor" (Gupta 2001), who earnesty aspired to the genteel values of honesty, sobriety, morality, industry, and cleanliness, were deserving of middle-class assistance. "Worthy poor" women further demonstrated their good intentions by maintaining a meek demeanor, good personal hygiene, and a tidy house, the latter perhaps decorated with a genteel potted plant or Biblical print. Many of these women wore corsets and dresses cut very similarly to those worn by their middle-class peers, although the cheaper fabric bore fewer decorations and more patches (Summers 2001). These efforts were looked upon with favor by middle-

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class reformers, who had so internalized the female Cult of Domesticity that the system seemed both perfectly natural and within the reach of even the poorest members of society, if only they were willing to work for it (Garman and Russo 1999; Fitts 2001).

But not even nurturing and moral domesticity could save members of the other category into which the middle class placed working-class women and their families. The "depraved," "unworthy," or "undeserving" poor, also known as "paupers," were thought to live in squalor by choice, refusing to improve their condition by at least attempting to fall in line with the Cult of Domesticity (Gupta 2001). By stereotyping and sensationalizing the supposed wickedness of this sector of the working-class, middle-class commentators threw their own genteel values into high relief. "Depraved," immoral women cared nothing for their appearance, raised their children in filthy and violent tenements, and were given to drunkenness and promiscuity (Rosner 1982; Fitts 2001). These vices clearly resulted in misery, while the genteel, moral adherents of Domesticity, who were neat, nurturing, sober, chaste, and (mainly) Protestant, lived in comfort. Because "worth" and gentility were made manifest mostly in the variety and quality of material possessions, certain types of poverty were thought to be curable through domesticity, and because women were responsible for adhering to the cult, working-class women were often blamed for their families' descent into "depravity," even if a husband's drunkenness, death, or abandonment was actually responsible (Ruswick 2011). While most written descriptions of working-class women resulted from the misconceptions or deliberate exaggerations of the middle-class, real-life "worthy" and "depraved" women took steps to control how the middle class viewed and interacted with

them. Upon being informed by a charity worker that her only recourse was to move to an old-age asylum, an elderly woman might refuse to go, instead depending on her own social networks for food and rent money. A young widow might place genteel objects in her home in case a reformer stopped by to judge her need for aid; her dress, while clean, might be patched to simultaneously suggest poverty and industrious "worth." But these strategies were deployed under duress, and often with an element of risk; the elderly woman's social network might fall through, or the reformer might spot dirt lurking in the corners of the young widow's rooms and dismiss her as "depraved"— or fabricating her poverty in an attempt to cheat the system (Ruswick 2011). Despite the efforts of working-class women to control their lived experiences as working-class women, it would be the middle-class stereotypes of working-class femininity that would survive well into the next two centuries (Fitts 2001).

As they devoured lurid accounts of failed femininity and heartbreaking tales of well-meaning but downtrodden widows, the Victorian middle class further internalized gentility as the only path to a moral and comfortable life. Fueled by stereotypes of working-class women, charity work was an arena for the negotiation of class-based power relations. As middle-class families increasingly sought refuge in suburban or country homes, charity work— or reading about charity work— was one of the only instances in which the middle class glimpsed the alleged consequences of not adhering to genteel femininity (Fitts 2001). The other routine situation in which middle-class and working-class femininity came, literally, face-to-face was the genteel practice of employing domestic servant women. In emulation of the large staffs employed at stately

English manors, middle-class American families often hired at least one live-in servant as a sign of their status, taking on day servants for assistance with laundry, gardening, special events, and other larger tasks (Roper 1996; Mullins 1999; Pooley 2009). Groundskeepers and drivers were typically male; almost all other servants were female and ideally in possession of the traits thought appropriate to servile femininity (Roper 1996). Between 1880 and 1920, "Help Wanted" advertisements in Louisville between 1880 and 1920 requested that female applicants be "good, competent, capable, industrious, honest, neat, stout or healthy, young, experienced, and reliable" (Perkins 1987). Many of these traits were identical to those expected of the "worthy" poor, and for good reason: many women entered domestic service out of need rather than by choice, although the position was viewed as good practice for one day maintaining a household of their own (Gupta 2001; Sager 2007; Pooley 2009).

Like the "worthy" poor, however, servant women were thought to teeter at the brink of depravity, and needed a kind but firm mistress to teach them morality by providing a good example and a genteel home environment (Sager 2007; Pooley 2009). Despite the close, even intimate working relationship between middle-class mistresses and their servant women, gentility required an ideological separation between the two groups. A proper mistress should not grow too familiar with her staff, calling them by their first names only— never a nickname— and never entering their sleeping quarters (Roper 1996). For their part, servant women were to remain invisible, working behind the scenes from dawn to dusk to ensure that their mistress presented a flawless image of feminine gentility to the outside world (Pooley 2009). Personal documentary evidence

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does suggest that these boundaries were largely prescriptive, and many employers— Mrs. Brown among them— considered some of their servant women lifelong friends (Iversen 1999). But as with the "worthy" and "depraved" poor, the perceived need to create behavioral delineations between working- and middle-class women points to the relational nature of both types of femininity.

In addition to citing particular personality traits desirable in prospective servants, many of the Louisville advertisements also specified a preference for servants of particular ethnicities or nationalities. Domestically-born American women were largely thought to be independent, high-spirited, likely to start their own households, and altogether unsuitable for domestic service. In the North and West, the preference was mainly for European immigrant women who, as new arrivals in a foreign country, would be dependent on their employers and therefore more likely to remain at their posts (Roper 1996; Sager 2007). In the mid-19th century, many of these women were Irish, fleeing the ravages of the Potato Famine. After their arrival, Irish immigrant women found some employers preferred to employ servants from their home country. Mrs. Brown was one of these employers, always mindful of her own background as the daughter of working-class Irish Catholic immigrants (Sager 2007). Other mistresses, however, categorically rejected Irish women, especially in the North. As one employer commented (in somewhat of a huff), "a great many very ignorant girls can get housework to do, and a[n experienced serving] girl who has been used to the neatness and refinement of a good home does not like to room with a girl who has just come from Ireland and does not know what neatness means" (Perkins 1987:131). The late-19th-century perception of Irish serving women as

untidy and ignorant was extended to immigrants in general, who were often counted among the "depraved" poor by charity workers who watched in dismay as foreigners poured into American urban centers (Fitts 2001). The middle-class injunction against drunkenness in working-class women and men unofficially— but not inconspicuously— targeted Irish, German, Italian, and other largely Catholic immigrant groups, for whom casual drinking played an important role in social cohesion (Fitts 2001). Immigrant servant women were thus caught in a double-bind, stereotyped as immoral and ignorant failed women by virtue of being both working-class and foreigners in an increasingly xenophobic America.

In addition to immigrant and working-class women, many 19th-century women of color experienced and performed femininity differently from contemporary middle-class white women. African American women met with both racist and classist assumptions when interacting with white charity workers in Indiana (Ruswick 2011), and middle-class descriptions of African Americans living in New York's Five Points neighborhood took care to equate darker skin tones with inferior moral character (Fitts 2001). Young working-class African American women were also disparaged as "precocious temptresses" (Gupta 2001:114), and observers in Annapolis cast African Americans in a decidedly patronizing light in the decades following the Civil War (Mullins 1999). A series of turn-of-the-century postcards analyzed by Mellinger (1992) depicts visually the widespread racist image of African Americans as animalistic, ignorant, lazy, and violent; this imagery was also applied to people of Hispanic, Asian, and Native American ancestry.

With race playing an even more prominent role in American social relationships following the Civil War, women of color were forced to negotiate femininity differently from white middle- and working-class women. In the 1870s, seafood exploded in popularity and availability along the Atlantic Coast. Genteel African American women, conscious of the racist trope of the lazy, rural, ignorant African American fisherman, avoided serving their families fish, while their white counterparts had no such concern (Mullins 1999). By consciously adopting other symbols of gentility, women of color led their families in actively defying middle-class white stereotypes and generalizations. While non-white women in British colonies around the world scoffed at corseted English ladies panting in the tropical heat, women of color in the United States wore corsets and other aspects of genteel dress in order to further their socioeconomic aspirations (Figure 7). Women of color also participated in the Cults of Domesticity and True Womanhood by filling their homes with genteel material culture (Mullins 1999; Fitts 2001; Praetzellis and Praetzellis 2001). More important to middle-class and elite African Americans living in Annapolis, however, was exhibiting genteel values, including education, morality, and sobriety (Mullins 1999). In California, Chinese and Hispanic families engaged in a strategy of "impression management," using material culture as "props" to demonstrate their shared gentility to their middle-class white neighbors (Praetzellis and Praetzellis 2001).

Figure 7. The shape and creasing of the dress bodices worn by Nellie Franklin (left) and an unnamed woman (right) suggests that both are wearing a corset (Alvan S. Harper Collection/State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory).

Figure 8. Most popular at the turn of the century, postcards bearing racist portrayals of African Americans reflected white American views of African American femininity (Mellinger 1992).

And yet, even these displays of genteel material culture and behavior could not render irrelevant the entrenched racism faced by women of color in their daily lives. Several of Mellinger's (1992) postcards portray African American women wearing assorted genteel clothing, improperly arranged; one woman wears a corset, but the genteel narrow waist she has gained from it is offset by the fact that she is wearing the corset outside of her blouse (Figure 8). By stereotypically displaying African American women alongside mangled symbols of gentility (Praetzellis and Praetzellis 2001), these postcards and their white senders and recipients mock the idea that women of color could ever correctly perform genteel femininity (Mellinger 1992). Many female domestic workers, especially in the South, were African American women who bore the triple crosses of racism, the classism associated with domestic servitude, and the sexist expectations and assumptions of the day. Like working-class white women, these women would be heavily criticized for acting or dressing "outside of their station" in an attempt to socially prohibit them from accessing symbols of gentility, cutting them off from social advancement (Summers 2001). Still, women of color consciously deployed genteel material culture and behavior despite considerable social obstacles, demonstrating their agency to defy white middle-class expectations of their femininity (Gupta 2001).

Conclusion

In considering stereotypical portrayals vis-a-vis actual lived experiences of Victorian femininity, womanhood must be understood as intersectional and localized (Corbett 1992). Femininity is not, nor has ever been, one-size-fits-all; there have been as

many femininities as there have been women. The task facing museum staff who interpret women's experiences for the public is therefore a daunting one, to say the least. Fortunately, many of these women left behind objects that provide a glimpse into their personal womanhood. Historic house museums may be the most fortunate museums of all, presiding over the stage in which the women of the past actually acted out their version of femininity. As the Molly Brown House has discovered, stereotypical understandings of Victorian femininity are deeply socially entrenched. With the right museological and anthropological tools, historic house museums can begin dismantling those stereotypes, rebuilding in their place a more complicated— and more human— image of past womanhood.

CHAPTER THREE: THEORY

Introduction

Disney's Beauty and the Beast *came out on November 22, 1991; I myself debuted almost exactly 5 months later. As a result, it has always been "my" movie. I must have seen it a hundred times as a toddler, while my sister and I served "tea" to each other from my plastic Mrs. Potts tea set. On Halloween when I was 4, I trick-or-treated in Belle's sparkly gold ball gown, already a little princess. I pretended my own stuffed animals, Belle-patterned sippy cup, dresser, and clothes were enchanted just like the characters in the movie. When* Toy Story *was released in 1995, my secret conviction that all my inanimate possessions were actually alive was confirmed. To this day, there are certain childhood toys I can't get rid of for fear of hurting their feelings, and I have found myself patting this laptop affectionately when I put it to bed for the night.*

Given that my formative years were filled with talking candelabras and sentient potato heads, it is hardly surprising that I ended up studying museums. At every museum I've worked in, a curator has said something to the effect of "that sculpture lives on that shelf" or "let's make it a nice box, to keep it happy." Clearly, I am not alone in my belief that objects have minds and lives of their own. Neither was my past life as a four-year-old princess— with spunk!— unique. Watching Belle in my family's living room, I learned that acting like a princess could mean both ballroom dance and rescuing your

eccentric dad from foul-tempered beasts in castle towers. At one living history museum,

my fellow hoopskirted employees grumbled about not being allowed to work in the

blacksmith shop. At another historic house, my coworkers and I sought to bring 19th-

century female servants and entrepreneurs back to life. When I arrived in Denver, I was

elated to see the Molly Brown House Museum take this approach to new heights,

portraying women in all their complexity and individuality. As Disney's Princess Merida

would say in Brave *(2012), to a whole new generation of princesses— "there are those*

who say fate is something beyond our command. That destiny is not our own, but I know

better. Our fate lives within us. You only have to be brave enough to see it."

In addition to seeing objects as dynamic, living beings, my fellow museum

employees sought to represent historical women as individuals with personality, agency,

and the ability to control their own destiny. These emphases were not always *de rigueur*

in the museum world. Underlying new understandings of museum objects and

presentations of women are decades of theoretical developments fueled by

epistemological shifts in anthropology and gender studies. Combined with an increased

acknowledgement of the need to put visitors and source communities at the center of the

museum world, these theoretical developments can revolutionize the social practice and

public impact of today's museums. I will begin exploring the role played by theory in the

way the 21st-century museum represents women by considering major conceptual

developments in feminist anthropology and gender theory. I then delve deeper into the

relationship between changing representations of women and the birth of the new

museology. By reviewing how particular writers and writings in both of these fields have powered changes in museum practice, I seek to understand how theory moves from the ivory tower into the museum, where it influences how visitors view the world around them and, ultimately, themselves.

Feminist Anthropology and Gender Theory

Literature Review

In contrast to their omnipotent and omniscient predecessors, museums are increasingly opening themselves to critique as producers of knowledge. Many institutions are also growing into their role as arenas for cultural debate, embracing controversial issues and interrogating narratives otherwise considered sacrosanct. While museums have been slow to challenge gender and gender roles through their programming and exhibits, the concept of femininity and the category "woman" have met with critique from within anthropology. Developing out of the anthropology of gender in the 1970s, feminist anthropology originally took as its subject that classic focus of anthropology: the "exotic" cultures of the "third world" (Moore 1988). In "Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?", Sherry Ortner (1974) explored what was presumed to be the worldwide subordination of women. Her peers, including Michelle Rosaldo, also focused on the supposed separation of cultural life into domestic and public spheres. While these conclusions seem to follow the system of analytical dichotomies associated with Claude Levi-Strauss and other prominent structuralists, Ortner and her colleagues did sense greater complexity within the binaries (Ortner 1974). Writing in the early 1970s, Marxist

feminist Eleanor Leacock challenged the assumption that women were universally subordinated (Patterson 2001); Marilyn Strathern further critiqued the notion of the domestic sphere as necessarily devalued (Moore 1988). With the rise of third-wave feminism in the 1990s, feminist anthropology began focusing on the differences in women's experiences worldwide, rather than defining womanhood through "sameness." In doing so, feminist anthropologists have prompted the field as a whole to return its focus to cultural difference— but in celebration of diversity, rather than the exoticization of the "Other" that consumed the field for so much of the 19th and early 20th centuries (Moore 1988).

The transition away from modernist and structuralist feminist anthropology and towards an intersectional "difference" feminism reflected anthropology's broader postmodern and post-structuralist turn. French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's notion of the *habitus* captured the process of building culture through daily habitual acts; culture was now understood as a series of processes rather than pre-existing entities. With her explosive 1988 essay "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution," queer theorist Judith Butler developed these constructivist notions into a processual theory of gender. Rather than understanding gender as an innate quality with which individuals are born, Butler would in later works treat gender as a series of habitual, discursive, and culturally-informed actions (Wickramasinghe 2010). *Gender Trouble* (1990) expanded upon this theory of gender performativity, emphasizing that the goal of gender-as-process was to disguise its processual nature. Because of this naturalization, gender seems innate, fixed, and above critique. For Butler, understanding gender as a verb, rather than a noun

(Wickramasinghe 2010)— a doing, rather than a being— was key to interrogating, and ultimately breaking down, "traditional" gender roles. Butler is careful to note that the fact that gender is culturally-constructed and capable of disruption does not make it any less real (McLaren 2002): "because gender is a project which has cultural survival at its end, the term *strategy* better suggests the situation of duress under which gender performance always and variously occurs" (Butler 1990:178). As Bourdieu and Foucault predicted, individuals who stray too much from culturally-prescribed gender norms can meet with social stricture, ostracization, or violence.

Butler's theory of gender performativity would prove to have a wide-ranging influence within anthropology and gender theory. The title of archaeologist Rosemary Joyce's 2000 study of constructing maleness and femaleness through embodiment in the Aztec empire, *Girling the Girl and Boying the Boy*, directly reflects the idea of gender-as-action. Other archaeological studies, including Gilchrist's 2000 consideration of medieval religious femininity and Loren's 2001 consideration of the significance of dress in colonial America, also drew on the role of objects and buildings in structuring the gendered experiences of individuals. Increased understanding of the performative nature of gender was also reflected in cultural anthropology and in changing definitions of the concept of femininity. Holland's 2004 *Alternative Femininities* considered how modern-day American women create their own identities outside of a perceived feminine norm. As they described how they dressed, moved, and behaved in their daily lives, Holland's informants captured Butler's conception of gender as a "stylized repetition of acts" (qtd. Holland 2004:8). Holland is also careful to consider the role of mass media and consumer

culture in building up images of femininity that are then used as models by individual

women; in this light, no area of culture is too trivial to be considered a viable object of

feminist inquiry.

Gender constructivism has also found a home in museum anthropology; feminist

archaeological insight into the gendered and gendering properties of material culture has

obvious implications for museum objects. In addition, Gaby Porter's *Seeing through*

Solidity: A Feminist Perspective on Museums (2004) employed post-structuralist methods

to interrogate how assumptions about masculinity and femininity are naturalized in

museum displays. Contributors to Amy Levin's 2011 edited volume *Gender, Sexuality,*

and Museums also explored the role of museums in constructing gender in settings as

diverse as Israeli settlement museums (Katrial 2011) and American historic houses

formerly owned by gay men (Adair 2011). In 2013, Maria-Anna Tseliou would reference

Butler in her discussion of the representation of homosexual relationships in museums. In

addition to opening up new lines of anthropological and museological inquiry, the activist

and policy-oriented goals of feminist anthropology have the potential to be emancipatory

for individuals who do not feel comfortable within normative gender roles.

Responses and Critiques

Feminist anthropology and gender theory were founded in the spirit of critique,

discourse, and dialog; fittingly, these bodies of work have not escaped criticism

themselves. The emphasis of Bourdieu, Butler, and related theorists on the role of action

in constructing gender have been criticized as anti-humanist, shifting analytical focus

away from the individual. Nayak and Kehily (2006:460) accuse Butler of robbing

individuals of their agency at the precise moment that gender theory was coming to celebrate individual difference. Butler's (1990) suggestion that sex, long since established as the biological correlate to cultural gender, is also culturally constructed has also come under fire. As an extension of this extreme cultural constructivism, Sofaer's (2006) radical understanding of the human body as material culture has been accused of re-objectifying the body and minimizing individual autonomy.

While Butler's imagining of gender and the body does emphasize process, she does not obscure the fact that those processed originate in the daily choices of individuals: "construction is not opposed to agency; it is the necessary scene of agency, the very terms in which agency is articulated and becomes culturally intelligible" (1990:187). An understanding of sex as culturally-created, meanwhile, does not necessarily ignore the biological aspects of sex. Rather, as Voss and Schmidt (2000) argue in the context of archaeology, sex and gender should both be understood as complex interplays of culture and biology. Finally, the conceptualization of the body as material culture can be seen as a declaration of autonomy: individuals have the agency to influence how their bodies are seen in, move through, and represent them in the cultural world. The idea of bodies-as-objects also references how the agency of individuals may be threatened or constrained by social attempts to regulate the appearance and behavior of the body. Emphasizing the performative nature of gender does not, therefore, ignore the materialization of gender in the body, nor does it depersonalize gender in favor of an anonymous actor. Current constructivist theories instead advocate for an exploration of gendered life in all its complexity, mirroring the concern of 21st-century "difference"

feminists that "woman" be understood as a series of diverse, intersectional categories

(Brooks and Hesse-Biber 2007).

The troubling of "woman," "feminine," and "femininity" as cohesive cultural

categories has largely resulted from postmodernism, which stresses the individual,

subjective, and situational nature of all knowledge (Brooks and Hesse-Biber 2007).

While this development has served to decenter and destabilize traditional heterosexual,

white, and male epistemologies, it has also spawned a postmodern paradox: if truth and

objective knowledge no longer exist, then no statements made by individuals about their

lived experiences can be considered truthful or factual (Kahn 2000; Mascia-Lees and

Sharpe 2000). In other words, all discourse ceased to be authoritative at the same moment

that women and other minority groups finally gained a voice in that discourse. One key to

unraveling this dilemma may lie in Geertz's "thick description": statements made by

individuals about their own experiences can be taken as authoritative, but only with

regards to that individual (Ames 1992). By combining statements made by groups of

individuals, researchers can compile a "text" that may be searched for broader cultural

patterns, with the understanding that those patterns are specific to the time, place, and

group under consideration— approaching a "strong objectivity" (Brooks and Hesse-Biber

2007).

Finally, the postmodern influence on the constructivist nature of the category

"woman" has called increased attention to the diversity of the female experience, but

threatens to undercut the solidarity needed to effect changes in political policy (McLaren

2002; Brooks and Hesse-Biber 2007). In order to elevate the female voice, a certain

pragmatic essentialism may be necessary. By recognizing aspects of the female experience that are shared among different categories of women, feminist researchers can accomplish the discipline's activist goals while continuing to engage with the intersectional emphasis of 21st-century feminist theory.

The New Museology

Literature Review

One of the objectives of this feminist activism is affecting institutional reform—changing popular attitudes towards women will eventually lead to structural change in organizations, programs, and policy-making. Fueled by the postmodernist and postcolonial turn in anthropology, this "gender mainstreaming" (Wickramasinghe 2010) is slowly being reflected in museums. Until the late 20th century, American and European museums had remained prisoners of their own genealogy, serving as academic mausoleums and shrines to nationalist pride as they had for the previous two centuries. Published in 1989, Peter Vergo's *The New Museology* captured how museums were beginning to dismantle that legacy. In his introduction, Vergo offered a name and definition for the spirit of social critique and community responsiveness that was beginning to infiltrate museums of all types: the advent of the "new museology" marked "a state of widespread dissatisfaction with the 'old' museology, both within and outside the museum profession...what is wrong with the old museology is that it is too much about museum *methods*, and too little about the purpose of museums" (Vergo 1989:3). The essays that followed saw contributors expanding upon that theme, exploring topics

including "Museums, Artifacts, and Meanings" (Smith 1989), "Objects of Knowledge: A Historical Perspective on Museums" (Jordanova 1989), and "the Reticent Object" (Vergo 1989). These deconstructions of the social origins and impact of museums followed close on the heels of Tony Bennett's influential 1988 essay "The Exhibitionary Complex," in which Bennett traced the role of museum exhibits in rendering heterogenous populations into homogenous democratic citizenries (Gable 2008).

The 1990s would see the continuation of the new museological critique in the form of Michael Ames's *Cannibal Tours and Glass Boxes* (1992). Published by the University of British Columbia, Ames's work honed in on the representation of Native North American and First Nations groups in institutions typically run and patronized by a white middle class. Like Vergo and his contributors, Ames called for museological discussions to become less focused on exhibitionary methods and more attuned to analyzing the implications and meaning of those methods. In particular, Ames's argued that exhibiting cultures through their objects— enshrined on pedestals behind the ubiquitous "do not touch!" signs— placed those cultures in glass boxes, rendering them untouchable and stripping them of their vitality. This new understanding marked a radical departure from earlier decades of museum practice, signalling a shift from object-oriented to people-focused museology.

In the same year that saw the publication of *Cannibal Tours*, John H. Falk and Lynn D. Dierking lauded these theoretical developments in their *The Museum Experience*. As they considered how visitors' personal, sociocultural, and physical contexts influenced how they learned from museum exhibits and programming, Falk and

Dierking engaged with the idea that museums could not simply "build it, and they would come." Building off of psychologist Howard Gardner's (1983) theory of multiple intelligences, curators and educators must instead recognize the unique skills and interests of individuals, understanding their visitors as comprising audience*s*, rather than a monolithic public. Falk and Dierking would continue their explorations of museum-based informal learning; 2000's *Learning from Museums* and 2012's *The Museum Experience Revisited* consider how Falk and Dierking's original work had been implemented in the two decades since the birth of the new museology.

Published in 2006, Janet Marstine's edited volume *New Museum Theory and Practice: an Introduction* also traced the progress of the new museological project through diverse case studies. Contributions to the publication reflect the penetration of new museum theory into all aspects of museum operations, from building architecture (Giebelhausen 2006), virtual or online museum experiences (McTavish 2006), and integrating technology (Bruce 2006) to exhibit critique (Gable 2006; Lindaeur 2006), indigenous curation (Simpson 2006), and conservation (Barker and Smithen 2006). Marstine's book also touches on feminist curation in art museums (Deepwell 2006); similar themes would be revisited in 2011, through Amy Levin's much-needed *Gender and Sexuality in Museums*. By exploring how women and LGBT people continue to be underrepresented even in "new" museums, the volume's contributors illustrate both the social impact of museums and the nature of the new museology as an ongoing process. Drawn from diverse institutions, these invaluable case studies clearly demonstrate the impact and potential of new museum theory at all types of museums.

The New Museum

Writing in the early 1990s, Ames (1992) predicted that the museum of the 21st century would be very different from the institutions of the 20th century. His premonition would prove to be correct: museums of the new millennium are incorporating new technology and didactic methods inconceivable just a few decades earlier. This shift has necessitated a corresponding revision of the theoretical definition of the museum itself. Institutions of the 19th and 20th centuries largely relied on their collections of objects— archaeological, ethnographic, historical, artistic, paleontological, and so on— for the edification of a largely elite audience. These objects were thought to be powerful enough to speak for themselves, and any accompanying text was usually authored by an anonymous curatorial authority (Vergo 1989). Visitors were regarded as serious and passive observers and were held to strict behavioral standards when visiting the museum, giving birth to the metaphor of museums as elitist temples (Falk and Dierking 1992; Bruce 2006).

In contrast, museums in the 21st century are increasingly placing visitors at the center of their operations. While objects remain vital to many institutions, others focus on presenting ideas or narratives independent of physical collections. Seattle's Museum of Pop Culture (MoPOP), formerly the Experience Music Project (EMP), is one such institution that highlights intangible concepts— in this case, music and creativity— over its objects (Bruce 2006). Science museums, technology centers, children's museums, and planetariums across the country have made similar moves. In recognition of the changing

nature and emphases of museums, the International Council of Museums (ICOM) offers

the following revised definition:

> A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates, and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study, and enjoyment (ICOM 2007).

Under this definition, museums are encouraged to pursue innovative and entertaining

strategies to engage new audiences; Bruce (2006) and Hooper-Greenhill (2000) identify

this emerging philosophy as characteristic of the "post-museum."

As they expand and diversify their definition of the "society" they serve, "new" or

"post-museums" are growing more conscious of the need to revise their representations

of marginalized cultures and identities. Powered in part by postmodernism, new

museology acknowledges the socially-constructed nature of cultural meaning, as well as

the role of institutions like museums in legitimizing particular interpretations of events,

objects, and human cultures (Hooper-Greenhill 2000; Marstine and King 2006). Much

attention has been paid to the presentation of racial and ethnic minorities, traditionally

exhibited as exotic "Others" in Western and Western-style institutions (Ames 1992). In

order to decolonize their narratives, museums have turned increasingly towards curatorial

and exhibitionary methodologies that seek to involve community members in the

production of museum content about those communities (Fienup-Riordan 1999;

McKenna-Cress and Kamien 2013; Blankenberg 2014). This community involvement

can take different forms, which may be ranked according to the level to which control of

the museum narrative is relinquished by curators and museum staff to community

members (Kahn 2000). At one end of the spectrum stands traditional nonparticipation, in which museums produced content about, rather than by or for, other cultures. The next stage, "participation" or "tokenism," sees museums reaching out to communities for their input but not allowing those communities narrative control; through processes like consultations, community members are often asked simply to rubber-stamp curatorial decisions that have already been made without them.

New museology seeks to guide museums towards a higher level of community involvement: collaboration (Onciul 2013). While "participation" can imply passive involvement in projects and initiatives under another party's control, "collaboration" requires the active "intersection of thoughts and ideas from varying points of view to create multifaceted narratives and diverse experiences for a public audience" (McKenna-Cress and Kamien 2013:2). In doing so, "new" or "post-" museums seek to elevate the narratives and perspectives of socially-marginalized groups, encouraging multivocality where, previously, an omnipotent and omnipresent curatorial voice had echoed (May 2014).

This focus on collaboration has especially encouraged the overhaul of exhibitions and programming at anthropology museums; Fienup-Riordan (1999) and Kahn (2000) report how co-curating anthropological exhibits with members of source communities greatly impacted both the form of those exhibits and their ability to engage diverse publics. Science centers and art, history, and natural history museums have also joined in this aspect of the new museological project. Rather than focusing exclusively on hegemonic scientific narratives, the Science Museum of Minnesota included folkloric and

other cultural perspectives in its exhibition *Wolves and Humans: Coexistence, Competition, and Conflict* (Science Museum of Minnesota 2017). The American Museum of Natural History, meanwhile, acknowledges the spiritual importance of the Willamette Meteorite to the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, where formerly the museum had focused on the meteorite's scientific significance (AMNH). In the United Kingdom, the Victorian and Albert Museum sought to transform itself into a venue for the artistic and personal expression of South Asian immigrant women through a massive textile-production project (Akhbar 1994). As it encourages the elevation of the voices of the racialized "Other" in place of established curatorial narratives, the new museology paves the way for the inclusion of diverse socioeconomic and gendered stories in the anthropology museum and beyond.

Objects, Exhibits, and Collections under the New Museology

As museum professionals turn an increasingly critical eye to their representations of and relationships with their communities, the objects produced by those communities and displayed in museums have also been the subject of analysis. Museums originated in the collection and display of spectacular or unusual things, and visitors today continue to be drawn to museums for the chance to encounter the rare and the real (Lord 2014). In anthropology and (natural) history museums, the appeal of "authentic" objects lies in their ability to make the past tangible, personal, and three-dimensional (Falk and Dierking 1992; Molineux 2014). As objects writ large, historic houses and other structures can literally envelope visitors in the past, providing a multisensory understanding of particular time periods (Reid 2002; Taylor and Neill 2008).

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Museum objects are also valuable for their materiality: forms, materials, use-wear, and modifications can all tell stories about the object, the culture that created it, and its makers or users. A great deal of what has been termed object biography (Moreland 1999; Joy 2009) focuses on the idea that objects contain their own histories and social lives. In addition, theories of agency stress the invisible ability of material objects to shape human experiences: due to the ubiquity of material culture, the framing power of objects is often naturalized past the point of detection (Miller 2010). Object agency can also be harnessed and strategically employed by individuals exercising their own agency. In the context of colonial America, Loren (2001) explores how specific items of clothing were used to communicate aspects of the wearer's ethnic and socioeconomic identities, a theme echoed by Summers (2002) in reference to corseting.

Current museological theories of material culture draw on the concept of objects actively constructing cultural life even as they themselves are constructed by cultural actors. This recent development in object theory stands in contrast to the thinking of early anthropologists, among them Franz Boas, who saw objects as passive reflections of culture (Kahn 2000). The first public museums operated under a similar epistemology: since objects represented culture, they could be displayed with minimal interpretation for maximum impact. A similar thought process underlies the aesthetic approach to exhibit design often found in art museums (Molineaux 2014). Other institutions, especially anthropology, history, and natural history museums, came to see objects as mute bearers of culture that required human intervention to unlock their stories (Hooper-Greenhill 2000). This theory of object interpretation gave rise to the contextual approach to object

exhibition (Lord 2014), which was often achieved through dioramas. Context was also provided through text labels or given in person by docents, tour guides, and curators. The authors of these written, verbal, or visual texts intended them to be objective and authoritative accounts of objects' cultural meaning (Marstine and King 2008).

Under the influence of the new museology, museums are becoming increasingly cognizant of the role of personal and institutional positionality and bias in shaping the manner in which their objects are displayed and interpreted (Lindauer 2008). The process of collecting and exhibiting objects, particularly those from cultural "Others," is now understood as a series of political acts. The juxtaposition of particular objects in exhibits, or the decision to collect and exhibit some objects and not others, takes on a new significance in the context of the exhibitionary complex (Bennett 1988). By acknowledging their ability to legitimize concepts and interpretations of events, objects, and other cultures, museums recognize their role in building national culture through their exhibits and collections.

Museum Learning and the New Museology

By seeking out community collaboration and acknowledging the subjective and political nature of object interpretation, museums have found themselves better able to relate to the complex and diverse needs of their audiences. Borrowing from psychology, museum professionals have found the theory of multiple intelligences useful to tailoring their exhibits and programs to simultaneously engage several different learning styles (Gardner 1985). Some individuals have high linguistic intelligence, and learn best from text labels; others concentrate best while listening to music. Logical or mathematical

people enjoy solving puzzles, looking for patterns, and finding their own answers, while the spatially-intelligent learn visually through displays, images, and maps (Falk and Dierking 1992). Bodily or kinesthetic intelligence is characterized by skill at moving one's body through space, and an enjoyment of movement and physical activity. Interpersonal people thrive off of social interaction and group activities, while the intrapersonal are introspective and learn best when concepts are related directly to their own experiences (McLean 1993).

Text and objects have been the traditional mainstays of museum-based teaching; while these formats appeal to the linguistically- or spatially-intelligent, they do not easily engage visitors with other intelligences. Similarly, group guided tours can appeal to visitors with interpersonal intelligence, but standing still in a "hands-off" environment can be torture for the kinesthetically-intelligent. Putting the theory of multiple intelligences into practice can result in lively and creative programming and exhibit designs. While the *Prehistoric Journey* paleontological exhibit at the Denver Museum of Nature and Science does feature traditional text and mounted objects, touch-screens, background noise, and staffed touch-carts engage more visitors than label-based displays. Life-sized wall paintings of favorite dinosaurs even allow visitors to compare their heights to that of *Diplodocus* and *Compsognathus*, providing an exhilarating sense of scale for the spatially-, kinesthetically-, naturally-, and intrapersonally -intelligent. Because each individual in a group of visitors has their own type of intelligence, mixed displays ensure that no member of the group leaves the exhibit bored or alienated. In addition, individuals themselves can possess multiple types of intelligences

simultaneously; an exhibit that engages more senses that the visual will leave a much deeper impression on an individual visitor than text and glass boxes alone.

Beyond individual learning styles, additional factors influence visitors' ability to learn in the museum. The temperature of an exhibit space, the compatibility of members of a visitor group, or even whether or not a visitor had a decent breakfast before arriving at the museum can all make or break even the most well-designed museum learning experience. Falk and Dierking theorize these factors through their Interactive Experience Model (1992), later called the Contextual Model of Learning (2000), in which visitors' physical, sociocultural, and personal contexts overlap to produce an individual's museum experience (McLean 1993). Some aspects of these contexts are under the museum's direct control. Temperature, humidity, lighting, noise levels, and accessibility can all greatly impact how a visitor physically experiences a museum space, and these factors can fortunately be adjusted by the museum itself. Other factors are more unpredictable. A visitor's sociocultural context includes who they visit the museum with, who else is visiting the museum that day, and the visitor's race and socioeconomic class (Falk and Dierking 2012). Aspects of personal context impacting how visitors learn in museums include visitors' prior knowledge of, feelings towards, and interest in exhibit content.

Although these contexts interact in different ways for each visitor, museums are learning to anticipate a variety of needs in order to maximize their potential as informal learning sites (Falk and Dierking 1992; Tseliou 2013). Exhibition text can be written accessibly and factually, to accommodate visitors whose personal contexts include novice or expert-level understanding of the content. Translating exhibit and programming

content into multiple languages and avoiding racist, sexist, and classist wording will also respect visitors' diverse sociocultural contexts. Rather than building formal one-size-fits-all exhibits to suit institutional objectives, new museums are embracing their status as ideal sites of informal learning, acknowledging that visitors' human needs must be met before visitors can be expected to learn.

Theories of multiple intelligences and visitor contexts have revitalized exhibits and object-based learning. Museums still rightfully acknowledge the material power of authentic objects to inspire visitor learning, with the added realization that all visitors learn differently from the same object (Falk and Dierking 1992; Hooper-Greenhill 2000). Along with broader new museology, these theories have also breathed new life into that old warhorse of museum interpretation: the guided tour. For some institutions, tours are offered irregularly, as special events, or by appointment only; for others, such as historic houses, they are the primary device through which the museum narrative is imparted. In their traditional incarnation, tours are not usually known for their entertainment value. At their worst, they can devolve into lifeless lectures, in which visitors feel required to speak in hushed voices and raise their hands rather than fully and actively experience the museum space (Carson 2008).

In order to break down the barriers between institution and community, some museums are transforming their guided tours by integrating elements of storytelling and performance. For living history museums like Colonial Williamsburg or Old World Wisconsin, this can mean literally staging small plays or scripted street encounters (Kidd 2007; Carson 2008) that draw visitors into the action. In other institutions, guides,

interpreters, and docents use tone, gesture, costumes, photographs, touchable objects, and question-and-answer techniques to turn academic narratives into amicable conversations (Taylor and Neill 2008). In this light, museum objects can act as mnemonic devices, prompting guides to tell particular stories or visitors to ask specific questions (Falk and Dierking 1992; Basso 1996; Rohan 2004). Historic house museums especially are seeking to transform their spaces and objects from backdrops into stages and props. As Vagnone and Ryan (2016) suggest in their revolutionary *Anarchist's Guide to Historic House Museums*, this process of dramatizing the historic house can involve such radical steps as removing "do not touch" signs, unhooking velvet ropes, rumpling bedclothes, upsetting laundry baskets, propping open books, and otherwise creating the sense that the house's owner had just stepped out of the room when visitors arrived.

While storytelling does run the risk of elevating particular institutional interpretations of objects, events, or concepts, museum performance at its best suggests that the narrative being presented is only one of many possible interpretations. Visitors are therefore encouraged to take the information offered by the museum and use it to develop their own stories, personalizing otherwise abstract concepts. Some types of interactive performance might also be alienating to some visitors, who do not feel comfortable stepping into the spotlight to participate in street scenes or dialog with first-person interpreters. Performance must therefore be regarded as just one of the many tools museums wield to engage visitors with different learning preferences and styles. Although traditionally associated with children, storytelling and performance can work

alongside other museum techniques to transform, enliven, and personalize the museum experience for visitors of all ages and backgrounds (Deniston-Trochta 1998; Kidd 2007).

In addition to designing their exhibits and programming to engage visitors' needs and interests, new museums are growing increasingly responsive to visitor feedback in the form of evaluation (Falk and Dierking 2012). While comment boxes still provide an unobtrusive method of gauging visitors' responses to museum programming, whiteboards and comment walls provide visitors with a more public way to commend or critique their museum experience. Techniques borrowed from cultural anthropology and marketing, including informal interviews, participant observation, and focus groups, also provide insight into the didactic effectiveness of an exhibit or program (Tseliou 2013). This emphasis on reflexivity has fueled a growing understanding of museums as human, and therefore fallible, institutions that need to be in constant communication with their communities in order to adequately serve those communities (May 2014). In addition to racial, ethnic, and class groups, women and other communities based around shared minority gender and sexuality are beginning to make their voices heard in the museum. Given the close relationship between academic and museums anthropology (Kahn 2000), it is unsurprising that this elevation of women's voices and experiences in museums has in many ways been powered by developments in feminist anthropology and gender theory. Tracing the evolution of these lines of scholarly thinking is therefore critical to understanding the changing perspectives on women being presented publicly by museums today.

Conclusion

Theory is one of the many reasons that academic anthropology and the museums associated with it are accused of elitism. Endless discourse about constructivism, performativity, exhibitionary complexes, and reflexivity may seem entirely divorced from the daily experiences of real people. And yet, at the end of the day, theory is the Shakespeare of anthropology. What seems at first glance to be a Gordian knot of flowing phrases, stuffy sentences, and archaic aphorisms actually provides a tear-jerking, side-splitting, encore-earning glimpse into the human condition in all its drama (pun intended). By studying anthropological and museological theory, I learned how others had tried to delve into this human drama, and the sorts of questions that had guided those researchers as they waded into the unknown. Theory also helped me see where those questions had fallen short, and gave me the tools to travel further. As action-oriented critical bodies of work, new museology, feminist anthropology, and gender theory provide a clear methodology for linking the theoretical to the practical and back again. By giving me the language to ask useful questions about how women are represented in museums, theory helped determine the way I would research real human beings in a real institution; by giving me language to describe the results of my research, theory will hopefully bring about change that will enable everyday women to see themselves in the museum as a valid part of human history.

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODS

Introduction

I am an inveterate introvert. At 18, sitting in my very first Intro to Anthro class, I was reminded that many types of anthropological research require talking to living human people, and had a prompt but silent panic attack at my desk in the corner of the room. Years later, standing in the courtyard of the Molly Brown House Museum, I wondered if I had adequately recovered from that particular crisis. Today was the first day of my master's thesis fieldwork, and I was nervous. I had planned to gather a dozen surveys, shadow a tour, and then hide in the safety of the nearest coffee shop to write up some field notes.

The first few visitors came up to the museum door, and I pulled a few surveys out of my folder, mentally shaking myself. I wanted to be an anthropologist, right? I cared about women in museums, correct? Then there was only one thing to do—what Margaret Brown would do. Striding over to a family chatting on a shady park bench, I feigned confidence and asked if they would like to help me out with some thesis work I was doing. One woman's eyes brightened—she'd done social science research herself, and it was the least she could do to pay it forward. She and her family handed back their surveys, and as I turned back to the museum, another smiling couple approached to ask for surveys. A few hours later, I had more than met my quota for the day. I thought about the staff

interviews I had set up for later in the month, and discovered to my delight that my

twinges of anxiety from this morning were gone. Maybe I could start identifying as a

recovering introvert.

In contrast to earliest anthropologists, who focused their efforts on studying ancient or exotic "Others," anthropologists today can be found anywhere there are people, studying anything people do or have done. The breadth and scope of anthropological research has led anthropologists to employ a vast array of quantitative and qualitative methods in pursuing their research questions. I chose to employ this mixed-method approach in exploring how the MBHM interprets femininity for its visitors. Doing so allowed me to see how interviews with visitors and museum staff could bring numerical survey responses back to life, even as statistical survey data helped me visualize the conversations making up the qualitative portion of my research. While my choice of methods was guided in part by my simple desire to get the most complete answers to my research question as possible, I was also guided by feminist and new museological methodologies, which formed the link between my research theory and research practice.

Methodology

Since the 1990s, new museology has provided anthropologists with a methodology for challenging traditional narratives and authorities in all types of museums, including historic houses. While much of the focus of the new museological project is rightly on the deconstruction of hegemonic notions of race and ethnicity, the

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presentation of gender and sexuality in museums has also come under scrutiny. Tseliou (2013) puts a critical methodology into play in her analysis of the presentation of homosexuality at two art museums in the United Kingdom; Adair (2011) also considers how American historic house museums "closet" their former gay male residents, even in their most intimate spaces. Additional work has been devoted to uncovering women's stories at museums and historic sites (e.g. Dubrow and Goodman 2003), but as Porter (2004) observed, women's representation in museums remains in need of critical attention.

The following research design was intended to extend the critical museum methodology used in these earlier studies. My use of the word "deconstruction" in my primary research question was deliberate. Because I follow the constructivist stance that gender is actively and socially assembled through everyday behavior (Butler 1988), separating out and critically analyzing the interpretive techniques used by the MBHM allowed me to dismantle the specific process of gender construction at the museum. In doing so, I aligned myself with the new museological mission of interrogating museums' established didactic tools for evidence of narrative biases or silences (Trouillot 1995). Furthermore, new museology emphasizes community collaboration, where museums had earlier assumed the authority to speak for the people represented in their collections. To this end, I sought to involve museum staff and volunteers at every stage of the research planning process, altering my research design where necessary to better suit the museum as a community. The results of my research were provided to the community for use in their ongoing self-evaluations.

In addition to being mainstays of new museology, deconstruction and collaboration as methodologies also form the core of feminist research (Wickramasinghe 2010); Porter (2004) combined the two schools of thought in her critical feminist study of women in museums. In its most basic sense, a feminist methodology begins with placing women's experiences at the center of research, with an emphasis on (de)(re)constructing the category of "woman" itself. This emphasis on studying the differences among women grew out of third-wave feminism and aligns with anthropology's foundational focus on making sense of human cultural diversity (Moore 1988). Butler's (1999) emphasis on the performative or constructivist nature of gender, which explores how variations in individual daily actions diversify gender expression, also forms the basis of a feminist methodology.

As part of analyzing diverse experiences of womanhood, feminist researchers make use of both qualitative and quantitative data; the former is often seen as more robust in the arena of public policy, while the latter is intended to capture individual stories. Feminist research methodology is also multidisciplinary, and literary and media studies are considered valid sources of feminist knowledge alongside anthropology, sociology, and other social sciences (Wickramasinghe 2010). Reflexivity is also vital to feminism; since true objectivity does not exist, acknowledging the influence of one's positionality on the design and interpretation of research is an established way to approach a 'strong objectivity' (Brooks and Hesse-Biber 2007). Finally, "gender mainstreaming" (Wickramasinghe 2010:107) constitutes a sort of endpoint methodology in which the adoption of reflexive attitude towards women's stories and experiences leads

to actual changes in institutional structure. As feminist research is inherently political and policy-oriented (Brooks 2007; Leavy 2007), the application of feminist methodologies to museums is intended to effect change in the way those institutions represent women through exhibits and other interpretive programming.

Following Porter (2004), I combine a gynocentric feminist approach with a new museological methodology to more fully consider the presentation of diverse experiences of femininity at the MBHM. Bringing these two methodologies together has the potential to strengthen each line of inquiry: using a museum as the subject of feminist inquiry broadens the scope of feminist media analysis. Placing the general subject of feminism— women— at the center of a new museology, meanwhile, focuses that methodology and provides a starting point from which broader museological questions can be explored. The interrogative aspects of these twin methodologies shaped my research from the beginning, prompting me to question museological representations of women in the first place. The shared deconstructive methodology led me to look at the museum's multiple interpretive methods, considering what each communicated independently and as part of a larger system. My methodological emphasis on collaboration, meanwhile, prompted me to form my research questions and methods in partnership with the MBHM community. This collaboration, along with the political or activist emphasis of a critical feminist museological methodology, guided the decision to make my research freely available to the museum and other community members in order to facilitate "gender-mainstreaming" of the museum field— a process that the MBHM has already begun by virtue of its existence.

An important caveat, however, needs to be added to my use of these methodologies. As Mascia-Lees and Sharpe (2000) point out in their discussion of "postfeminism," some feminist anthropologists rely on postmodernism to justify the interrogation and dismantling of established cultural narratives. The postmodern emphasis on the socially-constructed aspects of meaning-making is rightfully shifting the center of cultural authority away from traditionally white, male, elite, heterosexual institutions, including museums. This decentering runs the risk of suggesting that no interpretations of reality can be authoritative— undercutting the power of subaltern voices to speak for their own experiences at the precise moment that they gained the ability to speak up in the first place. To mitigate this intellectual anarchy, I offer the feminist stance that individuals are the experts of their own experiences, and that scholarly explorations of those experiences are merely intended to build up textual evidence that may be (re)searched for broad cultural patterns. Synonymous to Geertz's (1973) "thick description," the compilation of diverse experiences is not new to anthropology; in this sense, the postmodern project does not emphasize the total absence of authority, but rather the presence of multiple, co-equal authorities.

Research Design

The following research design was intended to address two major theoretical concepts: "femininity" and gender as performance. The data collected for the investigation was drawn together to evaluate how the MBHM performs femininity for its visitors, and how that performance can alter visitor perceptions of late Victorian femininity. The research was undertaken in three phases. The first phase included

background research: scholarly works on the anthropology of gender, feminist anthropology, new museology, object and embodiment theory, historic house museums, and the life story of Mrs. Brown were all consulted.

The second phase focused on gathering data through fieldwork at MBHM. Semi-structured interviews with museum staff and long-term volunteers were used to gain insight into the museum's goals and perspectives regarding the interpretation of late Victorian femininity at the MBHM. I also observed guided tours and administered visitor surveys to assess how the museum's interpretations interacted with visitors' pre-existing impressions and assumptions about femininity.

The final phase of research involved the transcription and coding of interviews and field notes, and the analysis of survey data. Using narrative and discourse analysis to identify common themes across interview, tour, and survey data, I drew conclusions about how the museum's emphasis on gender deconstruction impacts visitor understandings of femininity. These conclusions were shared with museum staff to assist in their ongoing self-evaluation efforts.

Variables and Dimensions

The main independent variable in this study was the attitudes of permanent staff members towards interpreting past femininity. This multidimensional variable was influenced by the gender of the staff member and the staff members' educational background, political leanings, and career history. When research began, the museum employed five permanent staff members, whose real names I use throughout the thesis

with their permission. Andrea Malcomb supervised all museum staff, facilities, and operations as Museum Director, and was also responsible for building connections with the museum's board and the wider community. When I interviewed her in August 2016, she had served as the museum director for eight years, but had originally been hired as the visitor services coordinator in 1999. Jamie Melissa Wilms, the Director of Education, has worked with the museum since 2013, and manages school tours, off-site school programs, and evaluations. Kimberly Popetz had worked as the Volunteer and Event Coordinator for four months by the time I interviewed her in June 2016, but had already familiarized herself with the museum's volunteer corp. Stephanie McGuire was the museum's newest staff member, having taken up her duties as Curator of Collections in April 2016. Finally, Aileen Waski is the museum's current Visitor Services Coordinator, responsible for overseeing the gift shop and daily tour operations. These five permanent staff members are joined by a group of about 45 volunteers of varying ages and backgrounds who assist at events, perform off-site school programs, and lead tours. Recently, the museum has added a few paid docents to their rotation, although most tours continue to be provided by volunteers.

The independent variable "attitudes of permanent staff members" influenced two dependent variables: the objects exhibited in each room of the museum and the content of the guided tours. These dependent variables in turn functioned as independent variables influencing visitors' perceptions of Mrs. Brown and contemporary women. As an independent variable, "objects exhibited in the museum" has several dimensions: the visibility of each object, the attention given to each object during tours, the condition of

the object, and curatorial decisions that might impact whether or not an object is displayed on a given day. The variable "content of the guided tours" was affected by the docents' experience; the demographic of the tour group; the questions asked by visitors; and visitors' prior knowledge of the subject.

Data Collection

In order to understand the extent to which the MBHM deconstructs generalizations about late Victorian women, I first had to determine the potential range of generalizations. Historical studies regarding the status and idealized roles of American women at the turn of the 20th century were useful, and biographies of Mrs. Brown provided excellent information specifically related to women in Denver. Docent training materials also provided insight into the MBHM's own master narrative about women, which is then disseminated to the public through tours and special events.

Samples for interviewing and surveying were derived through a combination of random and nonrandom sampling. Andrea, Jamie, Stephanie, and Kim— the four permanent staff members with the most direct input into the interpretation of women at MBHM— were interviewed at the museum offices. My questions were directed by an interview guide (Appendix A), but the semi-structured format gave my participants more control over the conversation and allowed us both to follow interesting trains of thought as they arose. The pre-set interview questions focused on the history of the museum, changes that have been made at the museum during the participant's employment, the participant's feelings about the interpretation of women at the museum, and the

participant's opinions about the role of the museum in the community. The interviews were recorded with the participants' permission.

In addition to interviewing, the fieldwork portion of the research included the observation of the museum's guided tours. To ensure that these sample tours were as representative of the museum's visitor patterns as possible, one week was selected at random during each of the four months allotted for research. Because visitor patterns tend to differ on the weekends and on weekdays (Andrea Malcomb, personal communication, 2/22/2016), one weekend day and one weekday out of each selected week were chosen at random for observation. Well before beginning fieldwork, museum staff notified docents and volunteers that I would be observing tours. Tours are only held if visitors are present at the scheduled departure time. I therefore began each day's observations at the museum's opening time to ensure that I would have time to observe enough tours and collect the targeted number of surveys.

Prior to each observation period, I introduced myself to the docents and asked for their written permission to shadow their tour(s) and take notes for my research. After obtaining the docents' permission, I discretely approached groups of visitors and asked them for their voluntary completion of my survey (Figure 9), asking them to also complete the follow-up survey after the tour. In accordance with the University of Denver Institutional Review Board guidelines, I asked young adults if they were over 18 before offering them a survey, and did not administer surveys to minors. The surveys were designed to gauge visitors' pre-existing knowledge or assumptions about late Victorian women by asking visitors to choose, from a pre-determined list of adjectives, words that

they felt best described late Victorian women. An "other" option at the end of the list

allowed visitors to supply additional words or comments. For each observation day, I set

a goal of gathering about 13 before-and-after pairs of surveys. If 13 surveys were not

collected during a selected tour, I observed additional tours until I had obtained the target

number. Collecting 13 surveys on each of the 8 days selected for observation generated a

sample of approximately 100 surveys, constituting a representative sample of 5% of the

annual average of approximately 2,000 visitors per month.

Figure 9.
Visitor survey (for
complete form, see
Appendix B).

Since I am concerned with the application of performance theory to the

representation of gender in museums, I chose to treat the MBHM's guided tours as

interactive performances. For each tour, I recorded each of the docents' gestures, tone,

and other "theatrical" mannerisms. These tours are often influenced by audience

questions and interests, and I also noted details of the interactions among visitors and

between visitors and tour guides. Any museum objects highlighted by docents were recorded in order to understand the role played by objects in representing or constructing gender at the museum. Finally, I jotted down the main talking points of each tour to compare the docents' narratives to the museum's interpretive goals and the visitors' survey responses.

Data Analysis

I began the analysis portion of my research by organizing my survey data: the very basic demographic information at the beginning of my survey was used to match pairs of before-and-after surveys without asking for visitors' names. Each response was then entered into a spreadsheet, allowing me to compare how each "before" survey differed from the "after" response. Tallying the total number of times each term was selected before and after a tour enabled me to discern whether the museum was changing visitors' perceptions of past women (see "Analysis"). Visitor comments in the "other" section longer than a single word were considered editorial statements, and are described more fully in the analysis section of this thesis.

Following the analysis of survey data, I transcribed my interview recordings and tour notes (Appendix C) and then manually coded each transcription; my coding was partially guided by the adjectives listed in the survey and partially by the themes that emerged as I transcribed each item. In addition, feminist researchers often call attention to the power structures encoded in the language used in these narratives (Butler 1990; Cranny-Francis *et al.* 2003). I therefore employed the critical lens of discourse analysis in

order to scrutinize the specific words used by docents and staff to refer to Mrs. Brown and contemporary women. Coding both interviews and tour notes according to common themes highlighted moments where the staff's interpretive goals were directly translated into the narrative presented to the public by the docents (Bernard and Ryan 2010:56, 58). In the Analysis section of this thesis, I have employed the following shorthand to cite specific interviews:

<div align="center">

Andrea Malcomb = M[pg]

Jamie Melissa Wilms = W[pg]

Kimberly Popetz = P[pg]

Stephanie McGuire = Mc[pg]

</div>

Irregularities, such as one docent mentioning topics or interpretations not mentioned by any other guide, may be interpreted as resulting from individual docents' interests or specific questions asked by visitors. However, irregularities between tours and staff interviews may also reflect a disconnect between what staff members believe their museum is saying and what it is actually saying through its tours. Finally, I juxtaposed the common themes that emerged from my narrative analysis to my survey data in order to determine whether changes in visitor responses corresponded to the institutional goals of the staff and interpretive statements of the docents. I then compared the results of my analyses with studies previously conducted by researchers at other American and British house museums (e.g. Adair 2011) in order to understand how the MBHM's interpretive emphases and techniques fit into the wider museological discussion about representing gender in museums.

The role played by physical house and its objects in the museum's interpretation of femininity required additional analysis. Much of the information available about the ideal home of a genteel lady is preserved in the prolific etiquette manuals of the day, among them the famous *Godey's Lady's Book*. While Mrs. Brown and her contemporaries did not necessarily follow these guides to the letter, etiquette books did lay out the standard of decor and decorum to which genteel women were held by their peers. More than a hundred years later, the manuals also provide museum staff with guidelines for recreating period furnishings. Following Low's (2000) use of multidisciplinary media in building up a dynamic sense of spatial historical context, I therefore consulted the home decor sections of the 1880, 1890, and 1898 editions of *Godey's Lady's Book*. I also referenced articles from additional manuals that were published during the Browns' time in the house.

Since I cannot directly observe how Mrs. Brown used her home on a daily basis, I turned to the next closest thing: how staff of the MBHM have reconstructed the home based on Mrs. Brown's photographs and writings. After listing the behaviors and objects thought proper to each room as described by etiquette manuals, I then noted which objects and aspects of Mrs. Brown's life story were actually "located" in each space by museum staff. Differences between how rooms were supposed to be decorated and used and how the museum currently furnishes and interprets them could be understood as deliberate attempts to highlight the aspects of Mrs. Brown's femininity that were not in line with the genteel norm. In this way, I sought to understand whether the museum uses

its objects alongside its other interpretive strategies to emphasize the agency and individuality of Victorian women.

Limitations of Research Design

While I made every attempt to follow my initial research design, my desire to "do no harm" to the community I was studying meant that I had to be flexible in carrying out portions of my research as the museum's needs and preferences became more apparent. My research design was impacted in five major ways. For example, my initial survey design would have asked visitors to freelist adjectives that described Victorian women—they would be invited to list every word they could think of that applied to Victorian women in a given amount of time. Through freelisting, I hoped to gain access to visitors' preexisting knowledge and assumptions without influencing those opinions myself. Freelisting was soon judged by museum staff to be too time-consuming and potentially disruptive to their tour schedule. Jamie therefore suggested providing lists of words, since similar surveys had worked well for the museum in the past. However, creating my own list of words could introduce my own bias into the survey: I might unconsciously choose words that made sense to someone with a background in Victorian and feminist studies, but not to most visitors. On the other hand, the word list could also be too simplistic, polarizing, or leading, in which case the results would only end up affirming my own predetermined conclusions. Ultimately, I chose to draw my word lists from Iversen's (1999) biography of Mrs. Brown, from academic writing about stereotypes of Western

Victorian women, and from informal conversations with individuals unfamiliar with the topic.

The revised survey met with few issues and seemed to cause no disruption to the tour schedule. Visitors did occasionally ask me to clarify if they were supposed to circle words that applied to all Victorian women, or just Mrs. Brown; I encouraged them to interpret the question in the way that made most sense to them, and to write a note about their confusion on the survey. I purposefully designed the question to be ambiguous, as the museum's interpretation itself fluctuates between focusing on Mrs. Brown and on women in general. In addition, asking for responses on Mrs. Brown specifically might not have uncovered the breadth of visitors' knowledge about historical femininity. Allowing visitors to interpret the question freely did lead to several interesting written comments, in which visitors emphasized the distinction between Mrs. Brown's experience and that of other contemporary women.

A second limitation of my survey design resulted from my concerns for respondents' anonymity. Since I wished to compare visitors' knowledge before and after their tour, I issued paired surveys and initially intended to have each visitor keep the survey with them during the tour to fill out the final portion at the end. Museum staff, however, cautioned me that this technique would result in fewer surveys back in my hands and more surveys littered throughout the house. Visitors would have to hand their first survey back to me, and then return after their tour for an identical but separate follow-up survey, which I would then match to the original. Since I intended to collect multiple surveys during the confusion of starting and ending a tour, it was impossible for

me to remember which "before" survey paired with which "after" survey. Asking visitors to write their names on the survey would have compromised the survey's anonymity, and I wanted visitors to feel comfortable expressing their thoughts honestly without fear of a statement or opinion being traced back to them, with possible consequences. Jamie suggested asking visitors for their gender and age, which should allow me to match "before" and "after" responses at the end of each day of observations. This technique worked well, except in rare cases where two visitors with the same gender and age took the same tour. In those instances, I attempted to compare handwriting to match the surveys. In addition, I sometimes found that I had ended up with an uneven number of "before" and "after" surveys; sometimes I had failed to approach every visitor I had already surveyed for their "after" survey, or a visitor had left before taking the second survey. "Extra" surveys, or those that could not be reliably matched, were excluded from further analysis.

A third limitation arose from my method of recording tour data. It was determined that digitally recording tours might adversely affect docents' performance to a greater extent than my presence alone. Furthermore, visitors might not have been comfortable asking questions or making comments knowing that they were being recorded. Ethical concerns also prevented me from secretly recording tours. I therefore took very detailed notes throughout each tour with each docent's permission. I also summarized informal conversations with docents and visitors where possible without including their names. While recording tours verbatim would have allowed me to make a detailed comparison

and discourse analysis of interview and tour data, I was able to gather considerable data through manual note-taking while respecting docents' and visitors' privacy and comfort.

Ethical considerations further impacted my research design as I determined to whom I would administer surveys. The University of Denver Institutional Review Board (IRB) requires specific provisions be made when conducting research involving children, adults with mental disabilities, minorities, and other vulnerable populations. Providing a special permission form for the parents or guardians of children or disabled adults would have taken additional time out of the already limited time I had to administer surveys before each tour. In order to avoid lengthy interruptions of visitors' museum experience, I therefore decided to administer my survey to non-disabled adults only. I did survey minority adults, although I did not specifically target those visitors or ask them to provide their race or ethnicity on the survey. While I therefore could not explore the experience of every visitor that toured the museum during my observation period, the ways in which children and disabled adults understand and learn about gender and femininity in museums is certainly worthy of attention and might form the basis of future research.

Finally, the breadth and scope of my research was also hindered by logistical limitations. Because of academic and personal constraints, my research period was limited to four months during the summer of 2016. Although I made every effort to ensure that I surveyed a representative portion of the museum's visitors, I was therefore unable to directly study visitors who come to the museum outside of the summer months. As an individual researcher, I was also unable to observe tours during each day of the observation period, choosing to select representative dates to observe instead. My

observations and analysis must then be understood as restricted to a very particular

period; additional long-term research would be necessary to gain a more complete

perspective on visitor experiences at the museum.

CHAPTER FIVE: ANALYSIS

Introduction

It's just after noon, and I stand off to the side of the newly-renovated front porch. The blasting heat of July has finally given way to a mild August, and the sky today gently threatens rain. This is one of my last days of field observations, and I've been doing the rounds of the assembling tour group, making small talk as I hand out surveys. I duck in between two older women sitting on top of the streetside retaining wall, apologizing for interrupting as I hand each lady a sheet and a pen. They're both about 70 and amicable; they've been sharing a pastry as they gulp their coffee from the shop down the street. I try not to distract them from the survey, since the tour will be starting in only a few moments.

But they take it in turns to talk to me, and I learn a little about them: both retired teachers, they've been making the rounds of women's history sites. We're all waxing poetic about our shared love for Laura Ingalls Wilder homesites when the woman on my left says something that makes me mentally scramble for a notebook and pencil: "so much of women's history is in stuff like quilts, songs, stuff we wouldn't think of as 'real' history." The woman on the right agrees: "it's so good to see women's history coming out as we get older." The docent calls for everybody's attention, and all of a sudden half a dozen completed surveys and pens are waving in my face. The two older ladies hastily finish their communal pastry and hide their unfinished coffee in a bannister nook without

needing to hear the ritual warning— no food or drink in the house! They weren't kidding

when they said they were expert museum visitors.

Like these two women, many of the visitors I met while observing tours were

seasoned museum-goers; some were making the rounds of historic sites around the

country, and others were themselves employees at other institutions. But an equal number

of visitors did not seem to be "regulars." Many of these sheepishly confided that they had

lived in Denver for decades— one woman, a few blocks away— and were just now

paying a visit to Mrs. Brown. Like all museum visitors, the groups touring the MBHM

during the summer of 2016 were immersed in their own physical, social, and personal

contexts (Falk and Dierking 1992), all of which impacted what knowledge they brought

with them on their visit to the museum. Over the course of a 45-minute tour, museum

staff were tasked with receiving and assessing this knowledge, offering their own

interpretations, and selecting and then deploying the tools and techniques best suited to

bridge the gap between the two.

In the following analysis, I combine data from staff interviews, tour participant

observation, and visitor surveys in order to answer four basic questions: "are they

deconstructing," "what are they deconstructing," "how are they deconstructing," and

"how effective is the deconstruction." In doing so, I hope to provide a comprehensive

answer to my original research question: how does the museum deconstruct femininity

for its visitors? I also wish to illustrate how the combined efforts of a small but passionate

staff, a modest army of dedicated volunteers, and one old house can powerfully alter

visitors' understanding of women in the past.

Are They Deconstructing?

During my first unofficial visit to the museum, our docent was careful to note the disparities between Mrs. Brown's actual lived experience and the rumors that surrounded her throughout her life (and death). Struck by this emphasis on "mythbusting" (M8), I wondered to what extent the rest of the museum staff explicitly shared that deconstructive commitment— and this thesis was born. Each of my conversations with permanent staff members affirmed mythbusting as an essential objective for the museum's tours, exhibits, and events. Jamie hopes that visitors take away the "true spirit of Margaret Brown, not just the Hollywood myth" (W1); Stephanie uses the phrase "breaking down myths" when describing the main message of the museum (Mc8). As Kim continues, "we always try to make sure that people know [that] the stories you've heard about her are probably not true" (P7). Having spent the last 20 years actively combating the misconceptions propagated by the media and the museum itself, permanent museum staff are now able to focus on presenting Mrs. Brown's story without directly referencing the rumors and tall tales. However, Andrea stresses that the museum's work may never be completely done: "I think we've done such a good job [, but] mythbusting is still always going to be a part of what we do" (M8). By emphasizing a more accurate version of Mrs. Brown's experiences as a Victorian woman, museum staff are still engaged in the deconstructive process of normalizing underrepresented female stories— a technique that Tseliou (2013) finds most effective for bringing about lasting change in museum narratives.

While the permanent staff— the people responsible for strategic planning and for deciding the museum's interpretive direction— have set their sights beyond deliberate

mythbusting, the docents on the museum's front lines seem to have a slightly different experience. Of the 16 tours I observed, only one (6/25/2016) did not explicitly correct a rumor or misconception about Mrs. Brown or contemporary women. That tour instead provided detailed information about Mrs. Brown's education and activism, which still served to emphasize how Mrs. Brown may have been considered unusual for a woman of her day. During the other tours, docents used deconstructive metaphors to describe the intended impact of their narrative:

- "*Throw out* the Unsinkable Molly Brown myth!" (7/11/2016 12:30PM)

- "No, you're thinking of the Unsinkable Molly Brown— fun musical, but let's *throw out* 99% of that" (8/5/2016 10:00AM)

- "Debbie Reynolds *set* 'Molly' in *stone*" (8/5/2016 10:00AM)

- "Has anyone seen the Unsinkable Molly Brown? You're gonna hate me— about 5% of that information is accurate, and it's kind of my job to *fix* that" (8/6/2016 10:00AM)

- "*Get that part out* of your head right now. She wasn't even called Molly!" (9/25/2016 12:30PM)

- "I hoped I helped *dispel* the myths about Margaret Brown" (9/27/2016 1:30PM).

Additional docent statements inadvertently strengthen the metaphor of "myth-as-construction" and "tour-as-deconstruction." On three occasions, docents emphasize that the museum owes its existence to the fame resulting from the Hollywood portrayals of Mrs. Brown:

- "Would anyone come to visit the Margaret Tobin Brown House?"
  [visitors: "No!"] "They'd come to the Molly Brown House" (9/25/2016
  12:30PM)
- "How come we call it the Molly Brown? No one would come to the
  Margaret Tobin Brown Museum" (9/25/2016 1:30PM)
- "The museum owes its existence to the Molly myth" (9/27/2016 1:30PM)

In a sense, the myths that built up around Mrs. Brown built the museum. Debunking

those myths through tours is akin to "deconstructing" the museum as it was originally

envisioned. Docents are then tasked with "reconstructing" Mrs. Brown and her home

through tour narratives. While Kim stressed the importance of allowing docents to shape

their own tours according to their interests and those of their visitors, docent training

materials also emphasize docents' deconstructive role:

- "The museum's primary mission is to broaden the public's understanding of
  Margaret 'Molly' Brown and the social, economic, and political aspects of
  Victorian life in Denver." ("Welcome")
- "Despite the legend, she was not and had never been ostracized by society
  nor rejected by her family. The myth of 'Molly' Brown…[and] even James
  Cameron's *Titanic* has very little to do with the real story of Margaret
  Tobin Brown" ("The Browns: Margaret Tobin Brown [Background]")
- "As you craft your tour, keep in mind the several different themes the
  Museum likes to introduce to our guests: Margaret Tobin Brown vs. the
  mythical 'Unsinkable' Molly Brown; the social and economic changes

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taking place during her time; Margaret's social, political, and philanthropic aspirations; the evolving role of women; the *Titanic* and Margaret's part in the tragedy." ("Organizing Your Tour":1)

- "Docents are encouraged to use anecdotes to add interest to their tours, but not at the expense of truth or good taste! Before repeating a 'story' you've heard, try to verify its accuracy. While legends often cling to a historical site, please don't feed into this mythology at the expense of the truth." ("Organizing Your Tour":2)

In addition, the list of Community Outreach Programs offered offsite for students features topics as diverse as mining, women's fashion, and the *Titanic*. This variety of options suggests that the museum wishes for its docents to present a multifaceted image of Mrs. Brown, expanding participants' understanding of the possibilities of womanhood during her lifetime. The suggested outline for the museum's special annual *Titanic* tour also guides docents towards deconstructive topics: "Was Margaret accepted into Denver society?...Margaret's accomplishments in Denver and abroad included [list]..." ("*Titanic* Tour Outline":2). While permanent staff find themselves looking beyond deconstruction, docent statements and training materials hint that the museum is not yet out of the proverbial woods. And perhaps that is not necessarily a bad thing: the hyperbolic myths about Mrs. Brown and the one-dimensional stereotypes about contemporary women provide a foil for more nuanced discussions of femininity. As long as the myths persist, docents and permanent staff can cheerfully and rightfully boast that "the real story is so much more impressive" (P7).

What (Exactly) Are They Deconstructing?

Having established deconstruction as a central component of the museum's

mission, I sought support for the next portion of my research question: does the museum

deconstruct *femininity*? The museum's very name made an engagement with womanhood

seem unavoidable, and my interview and tour data confirmed that staff do devote

considerable energy to exploring the concept— at two different levels of abstraction. As

demonstrated in the staff statements about deconstructing myths, the museum is primarily

concerned with providing more factual accounts in place of the highly fictionalized

versions of Mrs. Brown's life. The entertainment value of these tall tales lies in the

contrast between the Victorian "private" feminine ideal and the allegedly deviant

"public" behavior of Molly Brown. Furthermore, the myths are class-specific in their

mockery of Molly's supposed ignorance. The ideal working-class wife and mother was

still required to diligently keep house and to manage their family's finances, an

expectation highlighted by the fact that Molly's misuse of both stove and money is

presented as humorous. At the other end of both the class spectrum and Molly's life

story, the supposed rejection of the new-money, Irish American Molly by the established

Denver social elite further reflects the ethnic and class prejudices of the day. In addition,

the myths locate acceptable femininity in exhibiting normative genteel clothing and

behavior.

Much like the didactic cautionary tales provided by *Godey's Lady's Book* and

other etiquette manuals, the rumors circulating in Mrs. Brown's own lifetime provide a

wealth of idealized information about acceptable and unacceptable feminine behavior.

The stories developed after her death— including *The Unsinkable Molly Brown* and *Titanic* (1997)— hint at mid- to late-20th century perceptions of 19th-century femininity. During tours, docents do recount many of these myths, potentially allowing visitors to reflect on the impact of the tropes and stereotypes presented in the fictional Molly's life story. The primary purpose of presenting myths in the house is, however, to discount them. Visitors learn quickly that Mrs. Brown was never called "Molly" in her lifetime; that her working-class immigrant parents instilled in her a lifelong love of learning; that, famously high-spirited, she was a renowned fundraiser and by no means socially ostracized; and that her sense of style, far from being decried as garish, actually set the trends in the most fashionable East Coast and European communities. Rather than shying away from the supposed contradictions in Mrs. Brown's story for the sake of narrative cohesion, the museum embraces the complexity of Mrs. Brown's experience as a woman at a time when that category was undergoing especially rapid change (P8). Thus, Mrs. Brown is presented as both working-class and a millionaire; a fashionista and a candidate for the state senate; the loving wife of a mining executive, whose advocacy for miners' rights ended her marriage. The overall effect is a firm emphasis on Mrs. Brown's agency as a woman, as emphasized by permanent staff members and docents:

- "She was so regal and important, but she had that kind of background, of being lower-class, and having come up from hardship, that it wasn't really beneath her to fight for miner's rights, and to fight for women's suffrage, and for children's rights, and things like that" (Mc12)

- "Maybe some of the other women at that time, that were more willing to sit back and let their husbands take care of things. Margaret was not at all like that" (Mc14)

- "I think we felt that fashion was important because Margaret felt that fashion was important...so Margaret used dresses and hats and accessories to say, this is me being the type of woman that I want to be, this is me defining my own femininity" (Mc15)

- "She definitely pushed the envelope...by not necessarily letting JJ do all the work and she would just sit quietly— which is what some...women did at that time, but I don't think she was just completely not a proper woman at the time, I think she was very much a proper woman at the time, definitely not your typical woman" (Mc16)

- "When she set a goal for herself, she just went out and did it...she was really fearless and brave in her own way, for her time, to do some of the things she did...she's just an impressive person" (P7)

- "They went from the Victorian Era to...when she died, it was flappers...when her story started, women didn't have the right to vote in Colorado or nationally, when she died, they had both, and she'd helped in both of those movements...women's lives just changed so dramatically during that period, that's what you get from Margaret's story, is that she was on the forefront of that change" (P8)

- "I think the most important thing is... that Margaret was able to make a

difference...it didn't matter whether or not she would have had money, because even before she was wealthy, she had that drive and ambition to make a change because that was the environment she was raised in by her parents...she was raised on that ethic, and she took it and made it into something amazing as an adult" (M10)

- "Margaret was always pushing the social boundaries of domesticity" (7/11/2016 1:30PM)

- "She's not a very traditional Edwardian or Victorian woman...she really wanted to insert this femininity into politics, where it was seen as a cure [to corruption]" (8/5/2016 10:00AM)

- "Victorian women were seen and not heard, so she was about 50 to 60 years ahead of her time. A man could do those things, but not a woman. Her husband was actually embarrassed by her" (8/5/2016 11:30AM)

- "Another thing Margaret did that wasn't very becoming of a prim and proper Victorian lady was practicing her yodelling...she wasn't a [proper] Victorian. She was very ladylike, but she was also involved in [social causes] that cost her her reputation. She would've been considered a bad wife, a bad mother" (8/6/2016 10:00AM)

"Change" is clearly a theme of staff and docents' discussions of Mrs. Brown: she was shaped by social developments during her lifetime, but also seized the agency to shape those developments in return ("pushed the envelope," "pushing the boundaries," "on the forefront"). In addition to highlighting the contradictory and complex aspects of Mrs.

Brown's personality as a woman ("regal" but "lower-class," "proper" but not "typical"), the museum does not shy away from explaining the negative repercussions of her actions ("cost her her reputation," "embarrassed by her"). In doing so, staff engage Bourdieu's (1977) discussion of the potential consequences of failing to adhere to a normative social *habitus*. As Butler (1988:522) puts it in the context of performativity, "gender is a project which has cultural survival as its end." By discussing unfavorable responses to Mrs. Brown's particular performance of femininity in addition to celebrating her positive achievements, the museum also avoids falling in line with the tired trope of the sanitized, one-dimensional "Great Man" historic house museum (Smith 2002).

Having built up an image of Mrs. Brown as a three-dimensional, complex woman, the museum then approaches the second level of abstraction through which it deconstructs femininity: the experiences of Mrs. Brown's female contemporaries. While staff and docents do describe Mrs. Brown as exceptional, atypical, or nontraditional, they also emphasize the ability of other women to embody similar characteristics:

- "I think Margaret is definitely not your average, typical woman for the time, but there was a whole cadre of her peers who were very socially conscious and active...who were certainly women of means, [but] not all of them were. If you look at Mother Jones or Alice Paul, they were women who were in the trenches, who were the ones working in the orphanages, working in the settlement houses like Jane Addams Hull, so from every strata of social class, there was this whole cadre of amazing women who [thought], I don't have to stay at home, I don't have to raise children, I

don't have to be the spiritual guide for my family. I can make a difference

in the world, and I can travel independently, I can have my own money, I

can fire a gun, I can ride a horse, I can drive a car! The 'I can do this',

versus being a 'we', or a part of a family, that shift, there was definitely a

group of women who went against those social conventions, and Victorian

conscriptions for womanhood. Margaret was *one* of them, but we like to

use her as a good example." (M9)

- "*Was* Margaret any different from other women? Well, yes, different than

  some, maybe not different than others" (Mc16)

- "We're showing that you don't have to be a typical woman...you don't

  have to follow societal norms...don't let the fear that you're a girl hold you

  back" (W)

- "The West offered women a lot of freedom that the rest of the country

  wouldn't get til 1919" (7/11/2016 12:30PM)

- "We have a saying here at the museum: 'well-behaved women never make

  history'" (8/5/2016 11:30AM)

As with Mrs. Brown, staff and docents appear to emphasize the agency of Victorian

women to act beyond the boundaries of private femininity, pursuing their own interests

independent of husbands, children, or fathers ("don't have to follow norms," "I" versus

"we"). And again, the museum does not balk at describing Victorian society's attempts to

constrain female bodies and agency, as docents' frequent references to corsets illustrate.

Docents are also careful to contextualize these statements about complex past femininities. Specifying that the West offered women greater opportunities than the rest of the country localizes the museum's discussion of femininity in an effort to avoid the over-generalization of women's experiences (Field Notes 7/11/2016 12:30 PM). The agency of working-class women is also discussed, using Mrs. Brown's class background as a jumping-off point: "I would like to impart that it doesn't need to be your class, your background, it doesn't matter your economic status, you can make a difference!...and those social strata, they exist, and to ignore them is not providing a full picture of the story" (M10). As Stephanie explains, emphasizing the stories of the individual women who worked at the home is key to making meaningful statements about working-class femininities: "It would be nice to focus on how these servants were different, because [otherwise] you could just insert it anywhere, in any historic house. So we've been trying to do some research on Margaret's servants, specifically, to try to tell their specific part of the story" (Mc10). The museum's planned interpretation of servants' living spaces will therefore further broaden their exploration of femininity.

At present, the museum does not discuss racialized femininity beyond mentioning that the Irish American Mrs. Brown always hired Irish American serving women, or linking Mrs. Brown's immigrant family and labor activism to current, racialized debates on immigration and labor. Adding some interpretation of non-white femininities would further diversify the museum's otherwise nuanced discussion of womanhood. Fortunately, the museum's established willingness to make Mrs. Brown's story relevant to society today and their refusal to shy away from controversial sociopolitical topics

suggests that a discussion of racialized femininity would never be beyond the realm of possibility.

How Are They Deconstructing It?

This desire for relevance and dialog forms the basis for the third target of the museum's deconstructive efforts (W1). In addition to unpacking femininity at two levels, staff at the MBHM are committed to de(re)constructing the historic house museum as an institution. Squeezed in between modern apartment and office buildings, the museum does not have room to physically expand at its present site. Staff interviews, however, reveal how simple modifications to Mrs. Brown's home can counter visitors' expectations for a historic home while protecting the structure's historical integrity:

- "For me personally, I want them to take away the idea that going to see a historic house museum or learning about your history is interesting, and exciting, and can be fun. I don't, personally, really care how much they remember from the tour as long as they walk away with a good feeling from the tour...I try very much to attend to the needs of the guests...I have always stuck with the philosophy that we treat them as guests in our home, as we would treat guests in our home. So, if you notice that someone is getting really tired, you make sure you point out for them specifically, oh, there's a chair" (P6)
- "So one of those things that'll really affect me daily is [that] we're going to redo the windows of the house to do storm windows that are UV

protectant, so we can actually lift up more of the blinds and have more light coming into the house, cuz it can be really dark in there...it'll just make it livelier somehow, or make it feel more like when they lived in the house...hopefully it'll bring it more to life a little bit, so it doesn't feel like a dark museum, so I think it'll be huge, when we do that…[we're] kind of trying to rethink the way the historic house museum interprets history, which is a huuuuge topic" (Mc4-5)

- "We're totally gutting out the basement and re-doing that space, and we're gonna make it permanent exhibits, and kind of classroom space, and bathrooms...I know we're going to put a *Titanic* exhibit somewhere down there and a mining exhibit, so I think those exhibits will be a good way to incorporate some of the other things that we're not really saying on the tours." (Mc8)

- "We're also working on becoming physically acceptable to those in wheelchairs and other apparatus...all of those are huge game-changers, especially for a historic house museum. So new tours, new spaces, new interpretations." (M2)

- "[One of our goals is] elevating the museum in the community, and showcasing us as a community resource, and for me personally that means stepping outside of my comfort zone, and being more active in the community, and more vocal in the community." (M4)

- "[We're learning] how to apply those emerging trends to us here, especially as a historic house museum...we face challenges unlike other museums, [so it's] a lot of working with historic house museum peers and making connections through organizations like AASLH, [and] really just making sure we're staying true to Margaret's story but evolving and being relevant for our guests." (M11)

By exploring the possibilities of their existing spaces, the MBHM works against the persistent image of house museums as dusty and dreary; the open curtains especially will help create "lived-in" feel currently favored by museum professionals (Levy 2002). Referencing controversial current events through tours, exhibits, and special events— the museum's "Queer in the Age of Queen Victoria" event in June 2016 is merely one among many routinely unusual offerings— allows the MBHM to obviate the frequent criticism that historic house museums are out-of-date and irrelevant. Andrea's desire for community connections often sees her away from her desk, building relationships with potential audiences, stakeholders, and local business partners to facilitate special events and programs. Kim's commitment to treating visitors like guests by meeting their needs for simultaneous comfort, education, and entertainment is further evidence of the museum's desire to move beyond the velvet ropes of the traditional historic house museum.

As it deconstructs the category of 'historic house museum," the MBHM relies on a series of interpretive strategies in its deconstruction of the category of femininity. While these strategies are themselves traditional among all types of museums, the juxtaposition

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of guided tour content with the objects on display in the house allows the MBHM to craft complicated but clear statements on Victorian femininity.

The Tour: Acting and Atmosphere

Like most historic house museums, the MBHM interprets the life, home, and belongings of its famous namesake through regularly-scheduled guided group tours. The docents who lead these tours are 16 or older; although many are past retirement age, several of the tours I observed were led by men and women between 20 and 30 years old. Teenagers and children younger than 16 may still become involved in the museum as pages, assisting docents during tours. No formal qualifications are necessary to become a docent, although the museum does emphasize professionalism, courtesy, good public speaking skills, and an enthusiasm for history ("Docent Qualifications"). Kim cites this enthusiasm as a key reason that individuals apply or volunteer to become docents: "I think so many of them just truly love this house, and really want to honor Margaret Brown's story"; "Our Titanic guy...is so happy to be able to come into a place that will allow him...to share that story with other people" (P4). Other docents are interested in suffrage and women's rights, while still others came to love the house after volunteering there as children with their (now-deceased) parents.

The process of training these docents to lead tours relies on developing these personal interests into unique and conversational narratives, through which docents' genuine passion for different aspects of Mrs. Brown's life is allowed to shine. During an orientation meeting, volunteers and new paid docents are introduced to the museum's basic narrative by permanent staff. The volunteer website contains additional background

materials, covering subjects as diverse as "Victorian Holidays," "the Victorian Eating Experience," and "What is the symphonium?" (The Molly Brown House Museum n.d.). Completely absent from these training materials, however, is a set tour script for docents to memorize by rote: "they all have their own little niche that they gravitate towards, and we just kind of let them go with it" (P4). The "Crafting Your Tour" section of the volunteer website elaborates:

> All guides should make the same basic points but each in his / her own way. Variety can be gained by the use of different anecdotes to enliven the talks, by different organization, and unique choice of words...worry about telling stories, not about remembering dates...have fun! If you're enjoying yourself, our guests will too (The Molly Brown House Museum n.d.).

By encouraging docents to take a few foundational facts about Mrs. Brown's life and then develop their own narratives, permanent staff further reflect their commitment to deconstructing the usual system through which museums produce knowledge. Rather than a top-down process by which scholars create a standardized tour narrative, then require docents to regurgitate information exactly as the institution intends, the MBHM employs a bottom-up strategy in which docents, so recently lay members of the museum's audiences, direct the narratives. Docents-in-training do shadow tours given by their more-established peers, and have their tours periodically shadowed in turn by permanent staff members to ensure that the basic aspects of Mrs. Brown's life are being covered. The overall emphasis, however, remains on ceding docents the agency to interpret information in the way they find most compelling. Furthermore, encouraging variation between and within docent narratives allows the museum to explore the complexity of Mrs. Brown's personality as a woman without overloading visitors. These

visitors may also be more likely to return to the museum if each tour offers different

information and, in turn, a unique experience (P5).

In my own experience as a tour guide, costumed interpreter, and manager of

interpreters at 19th-century house museums, this training philosophy has been highly

effective. Rather than feeling pressured to memorize an hour's worth of specific

information only to recite it mechanically, I read through the history of each site enough

to internalize it, my imagination naturally seizing on topics aligned with my personal

interests. Recounting that information to visitors felt much more like retelling a story a

friend had told me to a group of new friends than lecturing strangers. On one rainy day in

an 1870s mansion, I discovered that the couple to whom I was giving the only tour of the

day shared my secret love for antique clocks, and we became so absorbed in relating

changing clock morphology to changes in society that we ran long over the allotted tour

time.

Throughout my observations at the MBHM, docents applied that storytelling

mentality to great effect. Their narratives were natural and free-flowing; never once did a

visitor's question leave a docent struggling to regain their train of thought, a difficulty

that might be expected had all docents memorized a tour monolog. On the contrary, those

questions often sent the docent and the tour in a whole new narrative direction tailored to

visitors' interests. This interactivity was key to creating an informal and comfortable

atmosphere that visitors of all ages seemed to enjoy. Interspersed throughout my field

notes is the phrase "group laughs" (and, on one occasion, "group gasps"), and the

question "knowing Margaret, do you think she listened when the quartermaster told her to

sit down [in the *Titanic*'s lifeboat]?" always elicited an enthusiastic "No!!". Each docent

also made unique and effective use of gesture, props, and other dramatic techniques in

enlivening their narratives (Ellis 2002). One young female docent slipped into an

exaggerated country accent as she described the misconceptions of Mrs. Brown as

uneducated, gently poking fun at the idea that Mrs. Brown needed a man to teach her how

to "raed 'n' raht" (8/6/2016 10:00 AM). An older female docent explained the

narrowness of the servants' staircase by pretending to hold a laden tray or laundry basket,

deftly demonstrating how carrying a heavy load actually made navigating the treacherous

steps easier. "Group gasps," meanwhile, was the response to a docent holding aloft an 18-

inch embroidery hoop to show the ideal waist size for a Victorian woman. The docent

had produced the hoop from a nearby "touch box"; others are located throughout the

house, containing copies of photographs and other small objects that the docents pass

around during their tour. While none of the docents I observed were costumed, donning

period-appropriate clothing is not out of the question (The Molly Brown House Museum

n.d.), and costumes are regularly incorporated into some special tours and events.

An interpretive mainstay of museums of all types, these elements of performance

help bring the past to life, encouraging visitors' curiosity and empathy and illuminating

hidden stories (West 2003). In addition to the replica objects and costumes used as props,

docents are also provided with one of the most powerful storytelling resources in a

museum's repertoire: the period objects populating the period rooms that comprise the

museum (Donnelly 2002; Kidd 2007). Training information suggests that docents

highlight a historical object in each room to aid in the telling of Mrs. Brown's story;

throughout my observations, docents consistently linked their interpretation to the contents of each room. During my first unofficial tour, I found the way in which they did so to be so intriguing that I was inspired to begin this thesis project. While historic house museums in the past viewed objects as simple narrative backdrops, the MBHM uses objects and spaces actively to contrast genteel or "private" femininity with the "public" actions of Mrs. Brown and some of her contemporaries (Donnelly 2002; Mayo 2003). In doing so, they highlight the complexity of being a woman during Mrs. Brown's lifetime, the agency of those women to shape their own experiences through objects, and the power of objects to shape those experiences in return (Garman and Russo 1999; Fitts 2001; Reid 2002).

The positions of prominent objects are indicated by letter on the floor plan below:
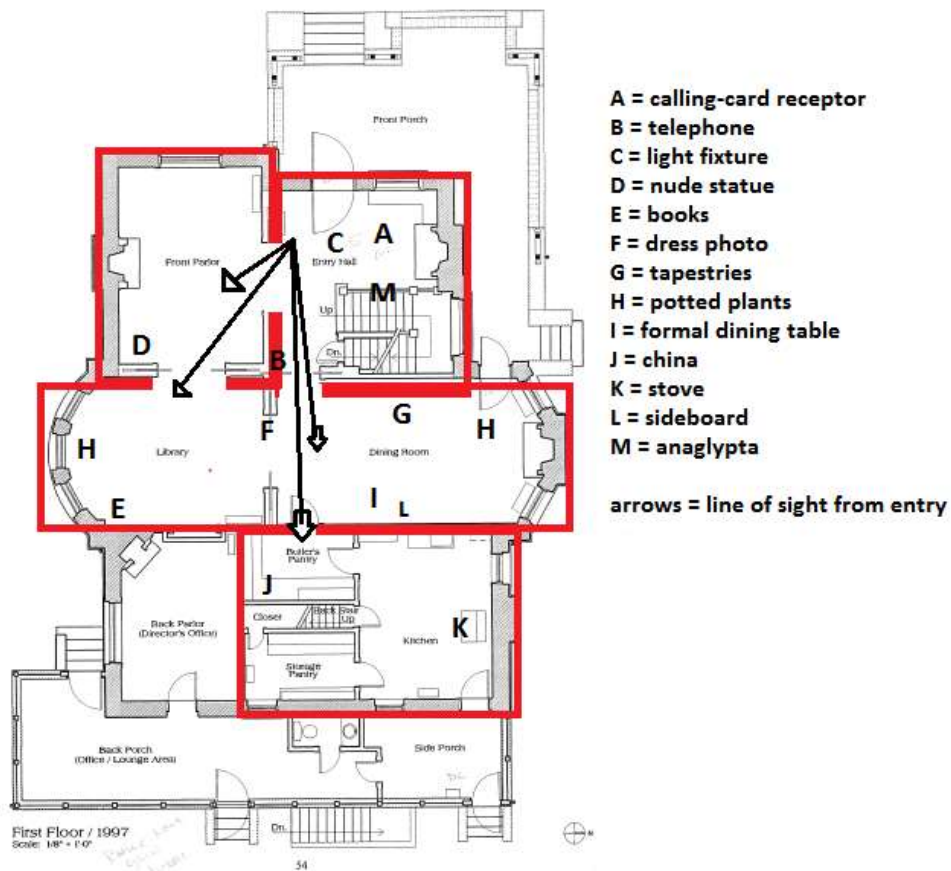
Figure 10: First Floor, Molly Brown House Museum. Image from Molly Brown House Museum (personal communication).

A full understanding of how docents, objects, and femininity interact at the MBHM requires a detailed examination of each room and the portions of the museum narrative associated with those spaces. I will therefore move through the house in the order in which most tour groups explore the home, noting essential objects, how they are interpreted, and the statements made by objects and interpretation together about femininity in the late 19th century.

Front Porch

The 1880 edition of *Godey's Lady's Book* includes several architectural firm advertisements featuring images of sample homes and floorplans "in good style" (Shields 1880:281); all of the homes advertised featured a prominent front porch. For genteel white Yankee families, front porches acted as important liminal spaces mediating between the rough outside world and the domestic sanctuary of the home. The porches in the 1880s *Godey's* floorplans all open out directly to the street or walkways; the Browns' home had originally featured a similar access point. After purchasing the home, however, Mrs. Browns redesigned the front steps to zigzag down to the sidewalk from the wraparound porch. The house is therefore distanced from the busy street below; strangers or acquaintances now needed to think twice before making the climb up to the front door. In this sense, Mrs. Brown seems to have been shoring up the defenses around her domestic domain, following the dictates of True Womanhood and Domesticity (Fitts 2001). But the end of the steps reveals a different aspect of her personality: a pair of stone lions guard the bannisters, clearly visible from the street below. According to a museum docent, the carvings were unusual to the point of eccentricity, but would eventually grow beloved enough to earn the home the neighborhood nickname "House of Lions" (Iversen 1999). Before even entering the home, visitors receive conflicting images about the home and its occupants: the lady of the house is properly aloof, distancing her family from the corrupting outside world. At the same time, she projects a bit of her personality into that world.

Entry Hall

As a liminal space between the home and outside world, front halls were nominally the domain of men, who were themselves negotiators between the public sphere of work and the private family (Kinchin 1996). Like other contemporary homes, the Browns' featured a small reception area with an appropriately "masculine" feel: the wood, carpet, and fireplace are all dark, and the walls gleam with gold anaglypta wallpaper (Figure 10M). Several objects highlighted during tours underscore this masculine air of power, progress, and wealth (Sewell 2003): an original gas light fixture (Figure 10C) hangs from the ceiling, and a telephone (Figure 10B) is attached to a wall. According to convention, this masculine space was regularly transgressed by women. Female domestic servants were responsible for answering doors and receiving visitors, and the widespread practice of leaving calling-cards was overseen exclusively by women (Ames 1978; Roper 1996). While stopped in the Browns' entrance hall, tour docents pay special attention to the small "Blackamoor" statue (Figure 10A) purchased by Mrs. Brown to receive the cards. Other objects in the hall also reflect Mrs. Brown's travels and tastes, including a leopard pelt and the Italian marble fireplace. As indicated by the lines of sight on Figure 10, a visitor standing the entryway might catch a glimpse of the dining room, parlors, and pantry beyond the hall, unless the sliding doors were shut. By choosing which doors to leave open or closed, servants could control how deeply a guest could visually and/or bodily enter into the Browns' home and, therefore, their intimate private life (Roper 1996; Praetzellis and Praetzellis 2001). These objects and behaviors seem perfectly genteel; the prominent role played by women in a "male" space, however,

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suggests that formal, gendered divisions of space were not as rigid as they appear (Pooley 2009).

Front Parlor

Of all the rooms making up the Victorian home, the parlor is perhaps the most deified and vilified (Burns 2012; Logan 2001; Shields 1880). Many houses featured more than one: a very formal front room, for receiving important or unfamiliar guests, and a back parlor for more intimate friends and family. The Browns' front parlor can be accessed directly off the entrance hall, while the back parlor— converted into a library by Mrs. Brown— can only be reached by passing through either the front parlor or the dining room. Guests who were only allowed into the front parlor were therefore constrained to the "shallowest" room in the house besides the entry hall, reflecting their low degree of intimacy with the family. Guests firmly embedded in the Browns' family or social life, meanwhile, penetrated much deeper into the home.

Also referred to as the drawing room or salon (Gray 1880), formal parlors were largely considered a female space to which the lady of the house and her female guests might retire after dinner while their husbands smoked and drank in the study or billiards room (Kinchin 1996). As such, etiquette guides advised their female readers to decorate their domain with all the trappings of genteel womanhood: heavy curtains, thick carpets, pianos and other expensive musical instruments, ceramic shepherdesses and other bric-a-brac, and artfully mismatched furniture (Logan 2001). Travel souvenirs and examples of the mistress's fine needlework were also welcome (Gray 1880). What was not welcome

in the parlor, however, was lingering. Conversation was to remain polite, steering clear of controversial topics. Custom dictated that front-parlor guests stay long enough only to finish a cup of tea; furniture was designed to be deliberately uncomfortable lest anyone think of asking for a refill. Children were also unwelcome for fear that they might spoil the room's valuable and delicate furnishings (Field Notes 8/5/2016, 8/6/2016). Women who could not afford to hire help to watch their children while they went out visiting were therefore precluded from accessing genteel female spaces.

Museum docents draw upon these themes of gendered class and social display as museum visitors, still crowded in the entry hall, lean around the parlor door. Tellingly, the room is cordoned off with velvet ropes. Objects showing off Mrs. Brown's patronage of the arts and love of travel are highlighted, as are the myriad social rules controlling which women could access the room. But as in the entrance hall, docents joyfully point out the ways in which Mrs. Brown knowingly deviated from "private" feminine norms. On the piano stands a very proper-looking— but nude— ceramic statue (Figure 10D) of a woman brought back by Mrs. Brown from Paris. Mrs. Brown's guests objected so strenuously to the indecent display that she agreed make clothes for the statue to preserve its modesty (Field Notes 9/27/2016). The parlor also provides docents with a stage to discuss the social debut of 14-year-old Helen Brown. Most society mothers would have staged an elaborate party in their parlor to announce that their daughters were ready for courting and socializing as adults (Kinchin 1996). Mrs. Brown instead sent Helen to Europe for further schooling with a bit of advice: "when a man can hold a conversation with you, then he can ask for your hand" (Field Notes 7/11/2016). Mrs. Brown seems to

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have used a space that was otherwise the picture of private femininity to express her own values and personality.

Back Parlor (Library)

Docents expand their discussion of Mrs. Brown's unique values in her library; like the front parlor, this space combines genteel decor with some of Mrs. Brown's own touches. Stylish potted plants (Figure 10H) evoked the Garden of Eden and the very Victorian fascination with taming nature; a pair of Japanese trays perched on a piano indicate their owner's travels (Church 1879; Kinchin 1996). The walls, however, are packed floor to ceiling with books (Figure 10E), including Mrs. Brown's own encyclopedia set. Over the course of her life, Mrs. Brown would learn five languages, send her son, Larry, to join Helen in school in Europe, and invite her maids to sit in on her private lessons (Field Notes 6/25/2016). She was also a passionate philanthropist and activist, supporting causes as diverse as juvenile court reform, the Denver Dumb Friends' League, women's suffrage, and miner's rights— even when those causes gained her a very public profile, much to her husband's disapproval. To J.J., women should appear in the newspaper only at birth, marriage, and death, and Mrs. Brown's defiance of this typical Victorian attitude would be partially responsible for their separation (Field Notes 9/27/2016). In the more intimate library, museum visitors are therefore privy to the intimate stories of gender transgressions that were taboo in the front parlor: Mrs. Brown's personal dedication to education and activism, and the intimate and sometimes painful impact those values had on her life.

Dining Room

Having been allowed to freely explore the comfortable library, museum visitors then turn to a more restricted space: the dining room, also roped off in velvet. As places for public entertaining, dining rooms were nominally coded male (Kinchin 1996), but as in the rest of the house, their supervision and decor fell under the mistress's purview. Victorian formal dinners were notorious even in their own time for their length and the complex etiquette involved in serving, eating, and conversation (Elliott 1876). The elaborate affairs were supported by a dizzying array of material culture, and laying one's table (Figure 10I) with fashionable porcelain, cut glass, and silverware was of utmost importance to impressing one's guests (O'Brien and Majewski 1989). Etiquette books advise decorating the room itself in light, warm colors, and open fireplaces were better than stoves. Windows should not be heavily draped, nor should they be open to undesirable neighborhood views; tapestries (Figure 10G) made the best wall coverings, and sideboards (Figure 10L) were indispensably genteel (Church 1879; Riordan and Cook 1884). Potted plants (Figure 10H) and pictures of fruit were in, but pictures of dead game were most certainly out (Church 1879; Fitts 2001). Most of all, business and other heavy topics were to be avoided, lest they upset digestion (Riordan and Cook 1884).

Much of the room's current decor fits with these genteel recommendations, with several key exceptions. A fashionable turn-of-the century dress stands in the middle of the room. Docents reference the gown when discussing a picture (Figure 10F) on the dining room wall of Mrs. Brown wearing an obscenely expensive dinner dress. Both gowns are stylish, speaking to Mrs. Brown's skill in donning socially-acceptable "skins"

(Loren 2001). The fact that the pictured dress could be and was only worn once also demonstrates her ability to visually "speak" in a language that other elites would have understood and approved of. It is at this point that docents hold up the replica corset and 18-inch embroidery hoop to the gasps of the tour group, showing how normative upper-class femininity was inscribed very physically into female bodies (Summers 2001). And yet, Mrs. Brown did not quite fit these standards. Always a tall woman, she grew thick-set in her old age (Field Notes 7/14/2016). Mrs. Brown could strategically deploy typically-genteel feminine dress to establish her respectability, which she then used as a foundation for pushing the boundaries of tasteful feminine appearance and behavior—rebelliously wearing diamonds during the day and importing Parisian fashions before other Denver ladies (Iversen 1999; Rohan 2004). She also violated gendered dining-room behavioral norms, leaving her butler's pantry open to show off her stylish china (Figure 10J). She further transgressed the etiquette books' admonishments against business discussions at the table, using elegant dinners as opportunities to press-gang guests into supporting her philanthropic work (Field Notes 7/11/2016, 9/27/2016). And the rule against images of dead game seems to have been ignored as well: the east wall of the room features several mounted animal heads. Although displaying game trophies in genteel homes allegedly came into vogue during Theodore Roosevelt's presidency, docents are also certain to mention that several of the animals were shot by Mrs. Brown along with Larry (Field Notes 9/25/2016 12:00 PM). The heads might have remained a somewhat unusual talking point in Mrs. Brown's day, as they are today. The mixed messages about dead game reflect a social tension that seems to have preoccupied both

Victorian decorators and their elite readers: the dining room was a site of contestation between the very natural act of eating and the very social act of dining, where feeding the body was a goal second only to disguising that body. By discussing the strategic "weaponized femininity" of Mrs. Brown's clothing and body in the public, male-coded dining room rather than in a private bedroom, docents create a subtle link between the two. The Victorian female body could be consumed by men via public displays of socially-sanctioned femininity, but any transgression beyond gendered norms— idiosyncratic dress and behavior, references to the physicality and natural unruliness of the body— was met with profound unease (Summers 2001; Rohan 2004).

J.J.'s Study

Adjacent to the library, a rectangular space at the back of the home was first assumed to be another back parlor and later served as the museum director's office (Figure 10). Family documents later revealed that the room had actually been J.J.'s personal study; the masculine room on the second floor that curators had assumed was a study was actually Larry's bedroom (Mc3). Studies were typically masculine rooms (Kinchin 1996), and J.J. probably spent his time in the small room— which connects to the back porch and the outside world— conducting business and other public male affairs. Currently, however, the room serves as a walkway for museum tours; docents usually comment on the room only to identify it as a study, and no aspect of J.J.'s life or work is discussed. The study is correspondingly bare of objects. An empty fireplace and undecorated mantle stand in one corner; a large secretary desk in the other. The chair

standing before the desk is the only object ever discussed by docents, and then only for the fact that it once belonged to Edwin Stanton, Lincoln's Secretary of War during the Civil War (Field Notes 9/27/2017 2:30 PM). Besides J.J. and Larry's bedrooms on the second floor, the study is the only space in the home that was exclusively occupied and associated with men. The limited interpretation of the room and its objects sends a correspondingly limited, twofold message about genteel Victorian masculinity. A man's proper place was in the public sphere, as represented by the business objects and the room's physical connections to the outside world. Furthermore, men were still encouraged to cultivate traditionally male attributes such as assertiveness, athleticism, and hawkishness, as epitomized by Stanton's chair. By choosing to represent J.J.'s public persona only with little attention paid to his personality or private life, docents replicate the genteel Victorian ideology of the separate spheres. Their static and one-dimensional interpretation of masculinity acts as a foil to the docents' nuanced and dynamic interpretation of femininity communicated elsewhere in the house through the story of Mrs. Brown. The radically different tones of these interpretations seems to fly in the face of many house museums' current emphasis on bringing all of a family's stories to life (Donnelly 2002). However, in light of the traditional focus on white male stories in historic houses and sites that were occupied by both men and women, the privileging of femininity at the MBHM is in line with feminist approaches that advocate for the elevation of female stories at mixed-gender institutions. Indeed, in a discipline that has been accused of androcentricity (Ellis 2002), any focus on femininity in an attempt to "level the playing field" in museums might be seen as minimizing male stories rather

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than diversifying human stories. As in J.J.'s and Larry's upstairs bedrooms, visitors' ability to ask docents questions about male spaces in the home that are not as actively interpreted ensures that Victorian masculinity does not go completely uninterpreted— but neither do men's experiences take center-stage.

Sunroom and Family Bedrooms

From the dining room, museum tours regroup in the second-floor sunroom, Mrs. Brown's favorite space (Field Notes 7/14/2016 2:00 PM). Decorated with family photographs and a 1930s phonograph, the private room provides a setting for the only prolonged discussion of the Brown children. That conversation, however, is largely overshadowed by tales of the acting lessons Mrs. Brown took at the end of her life, or her habit of yodelling and hosting bands for suffragette marches on the sunroom balcony. Closed off to all but the most intimate friends and family during Mrs. Brown's lifetime, the cozy nook is an appropriate backdrop for discussing personal family life and offbeat hobbies. Mrs. Brown's bedroom was likewise intended by curators to reflect her personality. The emerald green walls are more in line with the etiquette books' recommendations for men's rooms, and one museum visitor even guessed out loud that the room belonged to Larry Brown (Field Notes 6/22/2016 11:00 AM). The bed, crucifix, and prayer kneeler are also in more masculine dark woods. Mrs. Brown's room stands in clear contrast to Helen's room, filled with very feminine and stylish light walls, bright woods, and slender furniture (Mc16; Roper 1996).

Across the hall are J.J. and Larry Brown's rooms, also filled with masculine, heavy, dark wooden furniture. Visitors are surprised by the Mr. and Mrs. Browns' separate bedrooms, often relating the arrangement to the Browns' marital strife or a form of birth control (Field Notes 9/25/2016 12:30 PM). Docents explain that the two rooms were intended to accommodate the demands of women's fashion. Since genteel women were expected to have an outfit for every occasion, they changed often, and genteel husbands did not want to see their wives undressed. Separate bedrooms were therefore a sign of masculine and feminine gentility, physically inscribing the social system into the house. The inclusion of individualized decorations within Mrs. Brown's room at least suggests personal deviation within an apparently rigid system, which is in fact analogous to the Browns' Catholic marriage: their separation could never be finalized by divorce, and both Browns went on to lead individual and unattached lives despite their formal union.

The relative lack of interpretation of Helen and Larry Brown's bedrooms raises interesting questions about Mrs. Brown's engagement with a crucial aspect of True Womanhood: her role as a mother and a nurturer. Mrs. Brown's two biological children are referenced only occasionally throughout the tour, usually in conjunction with Mrs. Brown's educational or marital goals for them. Several docents describe the acrimony that developed after J.J.'s death, when Helen and Larry fought their mother over the division of J.J.'s assets (6/25/2016 11:00 AM). Very little information about Helen or Larry's personal lives is offered, and no mention is made of the three nieces that Mrs. Brown adopted, unless a visitor notices their photographs on the wall and directly asks

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who the girls were. The overall effect is to minimize the presence of these children's lives in the home. One visitor was prompted to ask what sort of mother Mrs. Brown was (Field Notes 6/22/2016 11:00 AM). Hints about Mrs. Brown's experience as a mother and nurturer are offered throughout the tour: Mrs. Brown was active in juvenile court reform, and it was news of her grandson's sudden illness that led her to book immediate passage back home on the *Titanic*. Gesturing to a photograph on the sunroom wall of the young Brown family, docents emphasize how Mrs. Brown always considered her time in Leadville, when her children were young and money harder to come by, as the best years of her life (Field Notes 7/14/2016 1:00 PM). Mrs. Brown, then, seems to have aligned with the "private" ideal of the loving mother, although that rosy picture was often complicated by the struggles of real-world motherhood. The museum's discussion of the sometimes difficult relationship between Mrs. Brown and her children presents this aspect of her femininity as dynamic and personal. The comparative minimization of her children's stories further underscores the point: Mrs. Brown was a wife and mother, but she— and her contemporary women— were always more than that (Herr 1995).

At the rear of the second floor, a fifth small bedroom is filled with light, simple furniture, similar to Helen's but less grand. Docents explain that this room was the site at which Mrs. Brown realized her lifelong dream of bringing her elderly immigrant parents to live with her in Denver. Working-class in an era in which the Irish met with intense discrimination from native-born Anglo Americans, the Tobins were active in abolitionism and labor reform, and ensured that all of their children, including Margaret and her sisters, received an unusual level of education for the day. However, very little of

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this information is mentioned in connection with the Tobins' bedroom; Mrs. Brown's own dedication to activism and education is presented throughout the house as having sprung like Athena from her own determination. John Tobin's experiences as a working-class immigrant man and Joanna Tobin's as a working-class immigrant woman, both with notably progressive values, is therefore minimized in the museum's current interpretation. The Tobins' bedroom furnishings bear little trace of their personalities. The room's nondescript femininity does, however, reflect the general role of genteel women as mistresses of the private sphere, responsible for decorating spaces intended for mixed-gender use in addition to the exclusively feminine.

In the only other mention of the Tobins' time in the home, docents recount Mrs. Tobin's covert pipe-smoking despite her daughter's rule against tobacco in the house (Field Notes 7/11/2016 12:30 PM). Perhaps tellingly, this story of a working-class woman's transgression of private feminine norms occurs in the kitchen, to which Mrs. Tobin had escaped to indulge her habit. The staging of the Tobins' stories only in their tiny bedroom and in the kitchen— both located discreetly in the back of the home— allows the house to accomplish one of its darker original purposes: to minimize the presence of working-class occupants.

Servants' Spaces

The significance of this class erasure to the museum's interpretation of femininity grows when docents consider the experience of the Browns' female servants. Like the dining room, the Victorian kitchen posed a dilemma: as the site of production and

preparation, kitchens did not exude the air of tidy, polished finality demanded by gentility. Furthermore, they were a zone of class contact and contestation in which two femininities collided, sometimes uncomfortably. Genteel women, despite being stereotyped as ladies of leisure, often participated in household labor; on a daily basis, however, the kitchen workspace was largely inhabited by female servants. Most kitchens were bare of decoration but stuffed to the gills with the myriad appliances and servingware beloved of the middle class, all arranged around a vast cast-iron cookstove (Figure 10K). The lack of decoration did more than reduce unnecessary clutter in a utilitarian space: mistresses were cautioned to ensure that their female servants kept their living and working spaces spartan and neat (Perkins 1987), since tidiness was thought to reflect good character. In addition to seeing to their moral well-being, genteel employers ideally kept kitchens light and airy with large windows for their servants' physical comfort— even if servants' quarters were left drafty and unheated (Roper 1996). The kitchen could provide for female servants' social needs as well. On a rare afternoon off, a servant could invite a (female) friend to sit at the kitchen table, since the mistress's parlors were often off-limits except for work, and the servant's own room was probably too small for visitors (Roper 1996). According to docent training materials, the Browns may have provided a more private social space for their servants on the third floor. If this deduction is correct, the space speaks to the Browns' concern for their servants' well-being. In any case, that space is among those unavailable for interpretation; fittingly, it has been remodeled into a modern kitchen.

Currently, the Browns' restored first-floor kitchen is the only space where the daily lives of female servants are discussed during museum tours. The tour narrative stresses work routines, highlighting the stove and the "annunciator" hung on the wall to summon servants to particular rooms. This emphasis, combined with the staging of the discussion in a work-space, foregrounds female servants' usefulness as workers rather than their experiences and personalities as working-class, often immigrant, women (Diethorn and Bacon 2011). This arrangement is much as upper-class Victorians would have wanted it; genteel "private" womanhood was constructed through the meals cooked and decor maintained by the invisible hands of servant women (West 2003). Museum staff do have plans to open up the third-floor female servants' quarters, and take care to mention how Mrs. Brown saw to the education of her Irish Catholic serving women. But those reconstructed rooms will likely include a sewing machine (Mc11)— once again linking servants to their work, even in their personal spaces. Despite the museum's emphasis on relating Mrs. Brown's own working-class immigrant background to wider stories of labor and immigration, the house's design— intended to disguise the lives and labor of working-class women (Perkins 1987)— complicates that interpretation.

Carriage House/Gift Shop

The spatial and symbolic link between servants and their work originally extended to the Browns' carriage house, located behind the house across a small courtyard. The first level of the small building sheltered the carriages and horses; the original floor was scored with urine troughs (Malcomb n.d.). Just above the animals—

with all their accompanying smells and noises— were housed the Browns' male servants. Like the female servants, male servants passed even their private time in close proximity to their work, with little space to socialize. Perhaps tellingly, these men spent much of their time in a building in which was stored the equipment used by the family to venture forth from private, female, domestic world into the male public sphere (West 2003). During the Browns' occupancy, the carriage house's status as a liminal space reflected the "intermediate" masculinity of its residents (Roper 1996; Pooley 2009). As men, they were technically socially permitted to navigate the public sphere; as servants, ethnic and class-based prejudices often prohibited them from moving as freely in the public world as their genteel masters.

As with the female servants' quarters, the modern-day use of the carriage house replicates— probably unintentionally— the Victorian relationship between gender, class, and material culture. The upper floor has been converted into staff offices, bathrooms, and a meeting room; the male servants' only private area therefore remains a private space, but for the creation of public programming and the building of community ties. The lower floor, originally dedicated to the animals and vehicles of the private/public transition, is now the public gift shop and tour admissions desk.

Although gift stores are a ubiquitous part of today's museum experience, their role as providers and presenters of commercialized objects in institutions that curate decommodified material culture is understudied. In addition to providing the museum with an important stream of revenue, gift stores provide visitors with lasting physical reminders of their time in the museum, which can prompt future visits or conversations

with non-visitors about their museum experience (Falk and Dierking 1992). Merchandise should therefore be unique and evocative of the time, place, or topic addressed by the museum:

- "I think it really is just finding the things that relate to the experience that they just had in the museum, whether it's a near direct replica of something they just saw, or whether it just evokes the same time period or same feeling that they got while in the house, and something that just helps them connect back with the story and remember their time here, and I think that's what's most important for a takeaway, rather than something they can get at any other store." (M11)

As in many museums focusing on 19th-century life, the MBHM does stock the ubiquitous stick candy, fans, and pocket watches. Other items, however, are more museum-specific. Mrs. Brown's personality is visually represented by the clothing offered for sale immediately in front of the admissions desk. Large Edwardian feathered hats, a case of jewelry, booklets of paper dolls, and fashion prints all evoke Mrs. Brown's love of fine clothes and role as a millionaire socialite. The *Titanic*-related objects looming behind the clothing display, meanwhile, ties her story firmly to that of the disaster. Several biographies and other publications about Mrs. Brown's life are available, but are largely overshadowed by the flashier and more instantly-recognized fashion and *Titanic* merchandise. The prominence of these goods reflects the museum's knowledge of its audience. Many of their visitors are more familiar with the *Titanic* than with Mrs. Brown, some visiting specifically because of the *Titanic* connection.

Furthermore, the fashion and *Titanic* elements of Mrs. Brown's story are the easiest to monetize: philanthropy and social justice were of great importance in Mrs. Brown's life, but would be difficult to translate into flashy souvenirs beyond the books currently available in the shop.

In order to avoid the implication that these two entities— fashion and the *Titanic*— are the most significant aspects of Mrs. Brown's story, the museum has employed supplementary exhibit techniques. Visitors browsing the *Titanic* books pass directly in front of banners describing Mrs. Brown's activism; in the corner, a small screen in front of a row of benches plays a documentary about Mrs. Brown's life on loop. Visitors are, however, under no compulsion to view this material. Prior to taking a tour, those who are familiar only with the myth of Mrs. Brown as a gussied-up bumpkin thrust into the limelight by disaster may feel those myths reinforced by the *Titanic* captain's hats and feathered bonnets. The inclusion of traditionally-feminine clothing in the shop, however, seems to serve the same purpose as the genteel objects in the house itself. As Mrs. Brown unabashedly cajoled guests into joining her charity work over perfectly polite china and silverware, the museum skillfully draws visitors in with feminine-familiar merchandise, presenting more unusual options once visitors are "hooked" (Rohan 2004).

Other Exhibits

While the MBHM has always relied on immersive displays of period objects, more traditional exhibits have not always been part of the museum's interpretive plans.

During the beginning of my fieldwork, the back porch of the house featured glass cases containing *Titanic* memorabilia alongside vinyl banners displaying facts about the disaster. At that point, tours entered the museum through the back porch, allowing visitors to peruse the information as their docent provided introductory information. After the reconstruction of the front porch was completed, however, tours resumed their usual schedule through the front entryway, bypassing the back porch completely. At present, the only written interpretive labels in the museum are those near the documentary viewing station in the gift shop.

In addition to opening new interpretive spaces in the house, museum staff plan on creating space for more traditional, permanent exhibits in the near future. Andrea mentioned a particularly intriguing option: the house's basement could be converted to a permanent exhibit focused on mining and labor rights. While Mrs. Brown's involvement with mining is discussed during house tours, the only material allusions to that portion of her life is the mining table in the sunroom, J.J.'s home office, the silver punchbowl in the dining room, and the gold Anaglypta wallpaper in the front entry. As J.J. and his career are also largely absent from the home, this new exhibit could provide the museum with an opportunity to discuss J.J.'s role in Colorado society without distracting from Mrs. Brown's story in the rest of the house. As a stage for conversations about miner's rights, the exhibit could add additional visual representations of Mrs. Brown's activism and independence, further elevating the museum's emphasis on deconstructing her identity as an uneducated miner's wife.

In writing about the gendered subdivision of the Berber household, Bourdieu (1970) uncovered nested layers of gendered meaning, in which the female space of the household contained male spaces, which themselves contained or represented meaning for women. The Victorian household, designed to control and construct the behavior of wealthy white men and women, contains similar layers of significance. By using her home to stage some behaviors in line with the "private" feminine ideal, Mrs. Brown was able to strategically construct and maintain her position as a member of Denver's genteel elite. In some ways, however, she used her rooms and their decor to express values and aspirations that were uniquely her own. Ironically, this manifestation of individuality fits a piece of advice embedded in a didactic story in the 1890 *Godey's Lady's Book.* The young heroine admonishes her eager friends to "put yourself in your room" (Gray 1890:73). Genteel women were to ensure that their personalities and good taste shone through their decor and decorum— but not too much (Kinchin 1996). Even deviation from the norm, then, was constrained by gentility— individuals could modify their performance of gender through material culture, but ultimately could never completely escape the confines of culturally-constructed gender expectations.

In the same way, museum staff manipulated objects and spaces within the home in order to create an immersive atmosphere of gentility for their visitors. Against the backdrop of fine china, potted plants, dinner gowns, and the other accoutrements of the Victorian feminine familiar, docents stress the objects and behaviors that set Mrs. Brown apart from that "private" feminine ideal (Herr 1995). The process of breaking down myths at the MBHM therefore echoes the process by which Mrs. Brown represented

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herself to her contemporaries. The museum's plans to interpret new areas of the house and to create new permanent exhibition space will further enhance its ability to represent diverse femininities through object-based storytelling.

Through performative storytelling in an immersive period environment, docents weave an engaging narrative that entertains as it informs, bringing Mrs. Brown's complicated experiences as a woman effortlessly to life. One final interpretive tool was emphasized firmly by permanent staff and was much in evidence during my tour observation: relatability. Contrary to the old accusation that historic house museums lack relevance to the lives of present-day visitors, "we can use different aspects of [Mrs. Brown's] life story as jumping-off points for really bringing her story into today" (P8). Staff point to Mrs. Brown's involvement in women's and miner's rights and her parents' status as immigrants as aspects of her story that can be made especially relevant to current events. The objects in the home also allow visitors to form immediate and personal connections to the past:

- "They have a bed in their house, and they have clothes, and they have dressers, but theirs are different, and how are they different, and why have we changed over time? Why don't we all have those funny little fainting couches in our bedrooms, and why don't we have that weird gadget in our kitchen anymore and instead we have a microwave? How did Mrs. Brown use these things, or how did the rest of the people in the house use them?... And you can have all of those same things in your house and still make those differences [like Mrs. Brown]" (M12)

Andrea refers to this technique as "pulling a thread" (M7)— unravelling Mrs. Brown's story to reveal its component themes, and then weaving those threads back together in patterns that the museum's audiences will recognize. She further recounts that the museum's thread-pulling allows Mrs. Brown's story to connect especially well with a certain portion of their audience:

- "We definitely have a demographic that is attracted to the museum, and it's typically the 45-55 year old white female. And I think that's really because that's when Margaret was seemingly her most powerful, and I think they are inspired by her and drawn by her as a fellow female role model and a source of empowerment. And it just resonates easier with someone like that" (M5).

In addition, docent training information lays out specific guidelines for making Mrs. Brown's story accessible and relevant for visitors of all backgrounds. Most of these tips focus on using clear, descriptive language and subtly accommodating visitors' needs so as not to make them feel unwelcome or out of place. While I did not observe any tour guides interacting with visitors in a non-English language, the museum does provide written guides in multiple languages should visitors need them. Chairs are available for visitors with impaired mobility, and the museum will be making the first floor of the home accessible to wheelchair-bound visitors in the near future. As many of the museum's visitors are new to Denver, docents also carefully remind their groups about altitude sickness, and respond discreetly and compassionately whenever a visitor takes ill. The volunteer guide also contains suggestions for making tours interesting and

informative for hearing and/or visually-impaired visitors ("Adapting a Tour"). Some of these guidelines can also be applied to groups containing or made up of young children; by ensuring that their tour language is direct and accessible without being patronizing, docents stand to engage adults' attention longer as well. Docents might even deputize a child by asking them to help pass out photographs or to lead the way up the stairs ("Museum and Tour Rules"). In seeking to make Mrs. Brown's story available to all visitors, the museum is not only following the critical museological dictates of universal accessibility. It is also following in the footsteps of Mrs. Brown herself, who through her activism sought to make even the most disadvantaged groups feel welcome in Denver.

How Effective is the Deconstruction?

As staff members hinted in their descriptions of the museum's deconstructive mission, the MBHM's efforts to dispel myths and diversify public notions of historical femininity appears to have met with some success. As Andrea explains: "I think now it's just celebrating her story and how we can relate to her story, and the important lessons embedded in her story...I think we're coming out of our mythbusting days." Andrea also acknowledges how a changing audience has influenced the museum's deconstructive goals: "we're just finding the audiences who grew up with the myths, and the [*Unsinkable*] musical, and the [1997 *Titanic*] movie, they're mainly [decreasing]...we have whole new generations [who] don't have that in their cultural consciousness." My tour observations seemed to back up Andrea's assessment; although docents on nearly

every tour asked visitors if they were familiar with media representations of Mrs. Brown, few said that they were.

Even if visitors were not arriving at the museum with preconceptions about Mrs. Brown specifically, they may still have been familiar with any of the various stereotypes about contemporary Western women. Tour groups' reactions to docents' general statements about women suggested at least a passing knowledge of these tropes: knowing chuckles were elicited by a sarcastic "these were Victorian times— women couldn't row!", while the discussion of corseting met with unsurprised grimaces. More difficult to gauge, however, was whether these visitors believed that these and other feminine tropes had a basis in historical reality. The surveys I handed out to visitors were intended to capture these beliefs. Over 12 tours, I collected 96 matched pairs of surveys, slightly less than my target goal of 100 matched surveys. Additional surveys were collected, but could not be matched in "before-and-after" pairs and were therefore not included in this analysis.

Each word listed in the survey, together with the number of times each word was selected on the "before" surveys, is given in Table 1. Table 2 records the number of times each adjective was selected on the "after" surveys. In both tables, the frequency of each adjective selection is given in parentheses as a percentage of the total sample of matched surveys ($n = 96$). Figure 1 compares the adjective selections given in Tables 1 and 2, while Figure 11 represents the differences between the number of times each adjective was selected before and after touring.

Table 1: Adjective Selection and Frequency, "Before" Surveys (all tours)

Independent: 30 (31.3%)	Religious: 40 (41.7%)	Flamboyant: 5 (5.2%)	Courageous: 46 (47.9%)	Moral: 47 (49%)	Refined: 27 (28.1%)
Vain: 4 (4.17%)	Adventurous: 29 (30.2%)	Prim: 26 (27%)	Obedient: 26 (27.08%)	Leisurely: 11 (11.6%)	Resourceful: 62 (64.6%)
Tough: 58 (60.4%)	Timid: 14 (14.6%)	Nurturing: 33 (34.4%)	Uneducated: 13 (13.5%)	Serious: 26 (27.1%)	Trailblazing: 27 (28.1%)
Immoral: 0 (0.0%)	Hardworking: 68 (70.8%)	Homebound: 32 (33.3%)	Outspoken: 14 (14.6%)	Rough: 7 (7.29%)	Stern: 16 (16.7%)
Heroic: 24 (25%)	Docile: 13 (13.5%)	Bawdy: 2 (2.08%)	Repressed: 27 (28.1%)	Fragile: 7 (7.29%)	High-Spirited: 19 (19.8%)

Table 2: Adjective Selection and Frequency, "After" Surveys (all tours)

|					
Independent: 53 (55.2%)	Religious: 47 (49%)	Flamboyant: 16 (16.7%)	Courageous: 64 (66.7%)	Moral: 43 (44.8%)	Refined: 30 (31.25%)
Vain: 9 (9.38%)	Adventurous: 51 (53.1%)	Prim: 22 (22.9%)	Obedient: 18 (18.8%)	Leisurely: 4 (4.17%)	Resourceful: 58 (60.4%)
Tough: 59 (61.5%)	Timid: 10 (10.4%)	Nurturing: 30 (31.3%)	Uneducated: 10 (10.4%)	Serious: 29 (30.2%)	Trailblazing: 41 (42.7%)
Immoral: 1 (1.04%)	Hardworking: 64 (66.7%)	Homebound: 15 (15.6%)	Outspoken: 40 (41.7%)	Rough: 6 (6.25%)	Stern: 12 (12.5%)
Heroic: 44 (45.8%)	Docile: 12 (12.5%)	Bawdy: 4 (4.17%)	Repressed: 20 (20.8%)	Fragile: 8 (8.33%)	High-Spirited: 35 (36.5%)
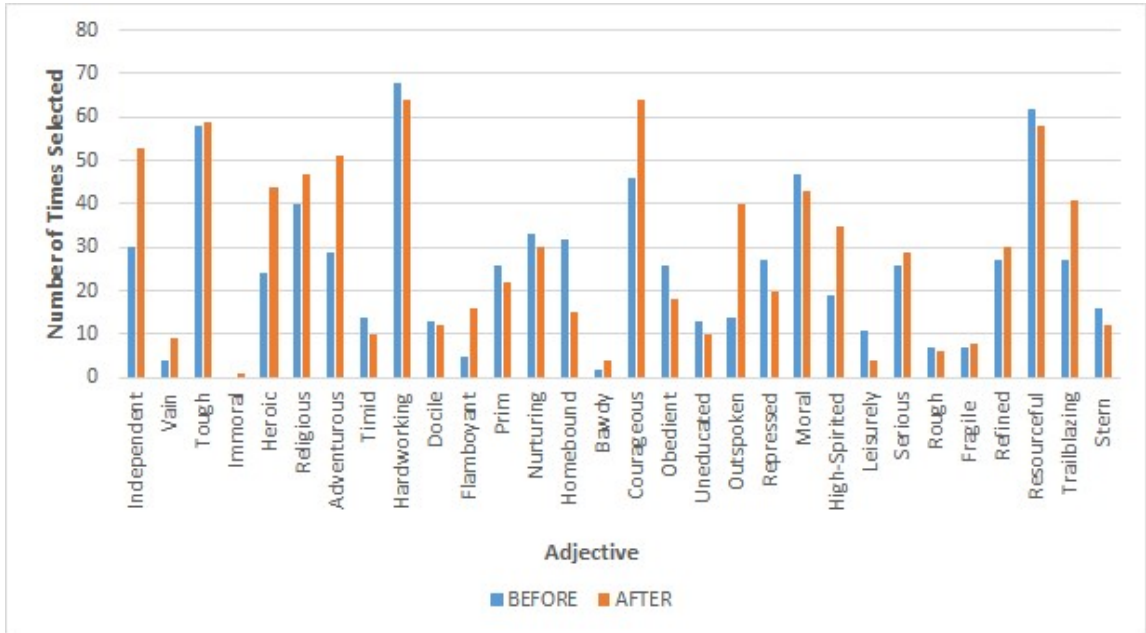
Figure 11: Aggregate Changes in Survey Responses Before and After Tour

Figure 12: Percent Change in Adjective Selection After Tour

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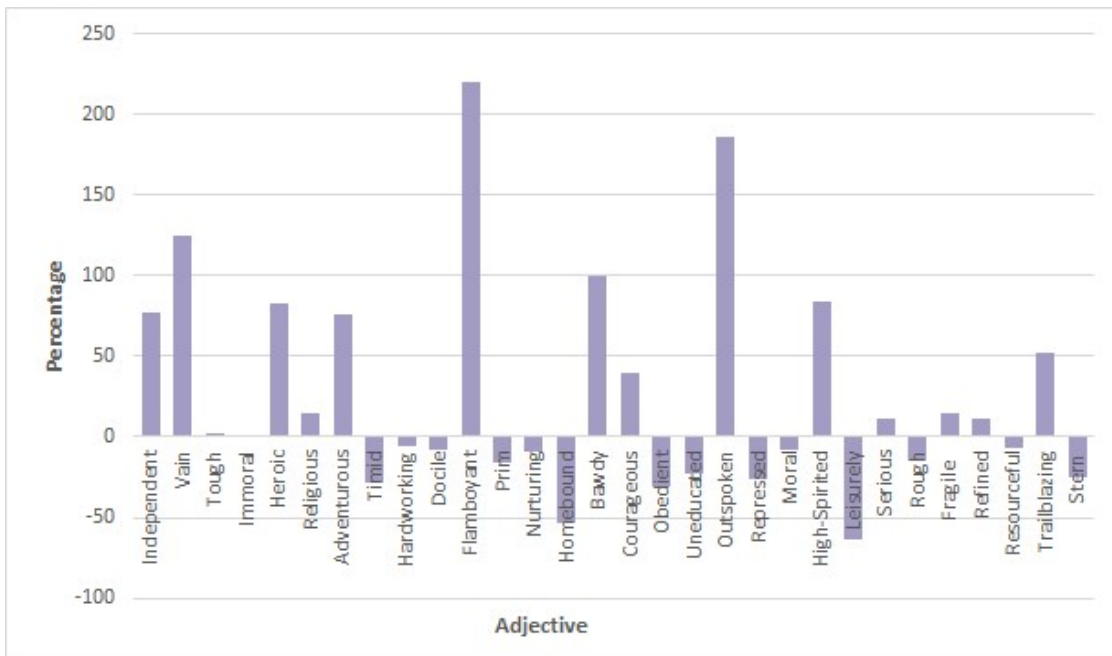
The tables and figures shown above reflect several interesting patterns in the types of responses elicited from surveys taken before and after the tours. Among the "before" surveys, only three words were selected by a clear majority of respondents: "hardworking" (70.8%), "resourceful" (64.6%), and "tough" (60.4%). "Moral" (49%) and "courageous" (47.9%) were also popular choices. After taking a tour, however, the number of words selected by more than half of visitors doubled: "courageous" (66.7%), "hardworking" (66.7%), "resourceful" (60.4%), "tough" (61.5%), "adventurous" (53.1%), and "independent" (55.2%) all achieved a majority. Close behind were "religious" (49%), "heroic" (45.8%), "moral" (44.8%), "trailblazing" (42.7%), and "outspoken" (41.7%). A greater number of adjectives were being selected by a greater number of visitors after their tours than had been the case prior to touring the home. As shown by Figure 2, these words were not the only options whose selection frequency changed after taking a tour. The greatest positive changes (i.e., increases in frequency selection) were seen in "flamboyant" (220% increase, from 5 to 16 selections), "outspoken" (186% increase, from 14 to 40), and "bawdy" (100%, from 2 to 4). The greatest negative changes (i.e., decreases in frequency selection), meanwhile, were "leisurely" (-64.6%, from 11 to 4) and "homebound" (-53.1%, from 32 to 15). The complete distribution of positive and negative change is:

Positive:

Independent Vain Tough Heroic Religious Adventurous Flamboyant Bawdy Courageous Outspoken High-Spirited Serious Fragile Refined Trailblazing Immoral

Total: 16

Negative:

Timid Hardworking Docile Prim Nurturing Homebound Obedient

Uneducated Repressed Moral Leisurely Rough Resourceful Stern

Total: 14

Of the 30 words provided on the survey, slightly more than half were selected more frequently after taking a tour than they had been before. Of these, nine are those which I included in the survey to allow visitors to express the idea that women of the late Victorian and Edwardian periods had agency and free will: "independent," "tough," "heroic," "adventurous," "flamboyant," "courageous," "outspoken," "high-spirited," and "trailblazing." The remainder were included to capture several archetypes and stereotypes applied to Western women from that time period: "vain," "religious," "bawdy," "serious," "fragile," "refined," and "immoral." An almost equal number of words, however, were selected less frequently following a tour. Interestingly, all but two of these ("hardworking" and "resourceful") were words describing what might be considered "private" women's roles. The percent decreases of "hardworking" and "resourceful", at -5.88% and -6.45% respectively, were relatively small.

The changes in the selection of each term before and after taking a house tour suggest some alteration in visitors' thinking about historical women. The greater number of words with a positive percent change appear to reflect a diversified view of past femininity; the fact that seemingly contradictory terms were apparently selected by the same individuals after the same tours indicates that visitors' understanding of femininity

accommodates complexity. With the exception of "fragile" and, possibly, "serious," all of the words that were selected more frequently after tours are those connoting individuality and vibrant personality. "Religious," which I had included as an example of ideal or "private" Victorian femininity, may have increased in frequency due to docents' emphasis on Mrs. Brown's personal devotion to Catholicism, and might therefore be seen as representative of individual choice. The decrease in the frequency of several terms that minimize female agency (e.g., "timid," "obedient," "repressed," and "homebound"), meanwhile, may reflect an increased visitor awareness of the ability of historical women to express their individualized femininity despite normalizing social pressure.

In several instances, written visitor comments reflected a pre-existing understanding of historical femininity as complex, and specific to the ethnic, economic, religious, social, and physical identities of individual women. Several visitors added their own words to the list I had provided: "loyal," 'LIMITED!", and "depressed" were added to three "before" surveys, while "visionary," "compassionate," "tireless," "self-educated," "challenged," "constrained," "conforming," and— my personal favorite— "badass" were all supplied on "after" surveys. This increase in the number of self-supplied words suggest a more complicated understanding of femininity. The visitor who offered "depressed" on their "before" survey was the same individual who later supplied "badass;" for this individual, Mrs. Brown's story appears to have highlighted the ability of women to act beyond their "depressing" prescribed social roles. Other visitors further elaborated on their survey responses:

- "My thoughts have changed since going through the tour based on Margret

Brown"

- "Most women in the East were not as outspoken as those of the West" "Refined only when necessary" (before); "this 'after' survey describes my impression of Maggie Brown not what I have learned from museums in general" (after)

- "M. Brown was exceptional, not the norm. Opportunities and social acceptability change over time— but people/women are the same"

- "you need to look at class distinctions to make a lot of assessments"

- "amazing to endure what we complain about given modern conveniences"

- "If your name was M. Brown"

- "It depended on the women where they went West or stayed East. What was the income" (before); "once again it depends on how you were raised" (after)

- "I feel unable to characterize all women, as socioeconomic ethnic and cultural factors were varies and determined so much of women's roles"

On their "after" survey, this last visitor circled all of the words and wrote "all" at the bottom for good measure. Other alternative responses included the visitor who wrote "in general" next to "homebound" on their "before" survey, and another individual who circled words that applied to "typical Victorian women" and placed an "x" next to "suffragettes," with the caveat "question is somewhat difficult because two divergent pathways for women were emerging at that time." That same visitor filled out their "after" survey with "x = 'modern' 1800's + 1900's women, o = Victorians." A few of these

visitors had approached me soon after scanning their "before" survey, protesting that they were unable to reduced women to just a few words; I refused to provide them with clarifying information, asking them instead to write their complaint on the survey. One of these individuals mentioned to me that they were employed at a museum that interpreted women; while the others gave no indication of their occupation, their comments bely a pre-existing familiarity with women's history. Like several of the museum's staff members, these visitors explicitly acknowledged that Mrs. Brown's experience of femininity may be exceptional, and that the ways in which women performed femininity in the past were contingent on their circumstances. The overall emphasis of these visitors' comments is firmly on complexity: rather than making generalizations about what femininity meant in the past, the focus should be placed on femininit*ies*— the stories of individual women and the meaning of femininity to each of them.

As I compiled my survey words and then analyzed visitors' responses, I have found it difficult not to characterize certain concepts as "positive" or "negative" views on women and femininity based on my personal biases. Cultivating a reflexive, feminist approach to my research, however, required me to avoid sorting words into strictly "positive" or "negative" piles. My surveys were intended to capture only how visitors felt women in the past could be described— not whether they felt that those descriptors were positive or negative. In interpreting visitors' responses, I therefore cannot attempt to judge whether visitors who had taken a tour had a more "positive" or "negative" understanding of femininity than they had had prior to their museum experience. In any case, to do so would fall outside the purview of my original research question, which

asked only if the museum was deconstructing femininity for its visitors. Based on survey responses and visitor commentary, the answer to that research question appears to be yes: the selection frequency of every single survey word changed following a house tour. Even "immoral," which was not selected by any visitors before a tour, was selected by a single visitor following their visit. The total number of responses per tour also increased slightly following the tours: 753 words (8 words/survey on average) were circled across all "before" surveys, and 855 (9 words/survey on average) across all "after" surveys. This increase (13.5%) further suggests that visitors had developed a more complex or diverse understanding of femininity following their experience in the museum. The museum seems to be accomplishing its deconstructive goals: most visitors are leaving with an image of historical womanhood that is at least somewhat different from the conceptions they had before crossing Mrs. Brown's threshold.

Conclusion

As an inherently interdisciplinary undertaking, adopting a feminist methodology encourages the incorporation of multiple lines of evidence into museological research. My first informal tour at the MBHM provided me with questions that I directed to museum staff during interviews; while formally observing tours, I could compare docents' statements to those of permanent staff members. Visitor surveys, meanwhile, allowed me to understand whether the statements made and questions asked by individuals during tours reflected broader patterns in visitor perceptions. This mix of both qualitative and quantitative data revealed several interpretive goals and themes shared by

both permanent staff and docents; these objectives were then translated into changes in visitors' knowledge about Mrs. Brown and other women in the past. Staff and docents are, first and foremost, committed to using a range of interpretive techniques to enrich their visitors' museum experience— in my field notes, I tagged statements pertaining to this shared commitment with the phrase "not your ordinary museum." In interviews, staff emphasized the storytelling aspects of their tours, and their goal of making Mrs. Brown and her home accessible to all visitors; through dramatic gestures, historical "props," and friendly attentiveness to visitors' needs and questions, docents concurred. The tours' interpretive content echoed a second theme consistently raised in staff interviews: that the museum exists to bring Mrs. Brown's true personality to life, and that while Mrs. Brown may be exceptional, all women could maintain their individual agency despite social constraints. Staff and docent statements further reveal a shared desire to dispel myths about Mrs. Brown. The survey results and attached comments suggest that this deconstructive goal is trickling all the way down to the museum's visitors. The consistency of statements made across both staff levels points to the close-knit community fostered at the museum: the objectives formed by permanent staff are fluidly communicated to docents, who share the staff's passion for history and commitment to telling Mrs. Brown's story. It is this seamless cooperation that allows the museum to efficiently, firmly, and kindly deconstruct visitors' preconceptions about their institution's namesake and her contemporaries. In doing so, they deconstruct visitors' expectations for the institution itself, expanding the traditional boundaries of the historic house museum.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

"A woman of this day, '96, [is] accustomed to such freedom as Grandma would have been scandalized to have hoped for...The lady of 1830 was meek, ignorant, and lovely to look at, if you can forget her relaxed shoulders and wee mouth. The lady-woman of 1850 has started out to get an education. The pretty ways of 1830 are becoming memories...a little learning ever has been a hazardous quantity. Our sister of 1850 is our sister of 1830 undone— the end-of-the-century woman in rudiment." (Drew 1897:14, 179)

In its 1897 edition, *Godey's Lady's Book* paused in the midst of offering decorating advice and lauding the achievements of female professionals to take a moment for itself. For nearly 70 years, the magazine had documented the rise and fall of women's fashions and female ideologies. As the 19th century drew to a close, *Godey's* sheepishly admitted to having once advocated for both false hair and submissiveness to one's husband, for highlighting crinolines as it suggested that "queens and poetesses" were the only women of note (Drew 1897:13). The ways women presented themselves to the world through clothing, hairstyles, and accessories had clearly changed over the decades since *Godey's* had first appeared on American parlor tables. The ways women moved through the world had changed too: definitions of femininity were changing, and the range of acceptable women's roles was diversifying to include occupations and interests that would have been inconceivable just two generations earlier. And yet, women at the turn of the century were not satisfied. Like thousands of her contemporaries, Mrs. Brown continued to push for women's suffrage, demonstrating through her own life women's

ability to run for political office in fashionable skirts, to be the mothers of doting families and leaders of diverse communities, should they so choose.

The museum field is in the midst of a similar change, although it does not necessarily have the benefit of full-color fashion plates to help it in its retrospection. In recognition of their long history of ignoring or underplaying women's experiences, museums are increasingly seeking to foreground diverse female voices, enriching their narratives and more deeply engaging their audiences. This museological project, informed by feminist anthropology and critical museology, often necessitates the development of entirely new methods for educating and entertaining visitors. In other cases, dulled and worn museum tools can be re-sharpened by focusing institutional narratives on the subaltern. At the MBHM, the tried-and-true guided tours that form the interpretational foundation of most historic house museums becomes an engaging vehicle for exploring women's lives intimately. The dedication of staff members to telling women's stories promises to power future innovations, with new exhibitions and events helping to connect Mrs. Brown's story with themes both historical and modern. Emphasizing these connections— "pulling a thread," as Andrea puts it— differentiates the MBHM from the "Great Man" museums of the past. Although the museum's namesake was white, elite, and exceptional like almost all "Great Men," the fact that that namesake is a woman already sets the MBHM apart. Rather than deifying Mrs. Brown, the museum works to break down her mythology. As indicated by survey data, visitors are leaving with a sense of Mrs. Brown and her contemporaries as complete and complex human women, whose lives contained both triumph and struggle, agency and oppression.

The revamping of museum tours to include the servants' area and the addition of a mining exhibit will further distance the MBHM from the "Great Man" legacy that almost all historic house museums have inherited.

Suggestions and Possibilities for Future Research

The MBHM is also notable for its continuous efforts at self-evaluation, and for its ongoing enthusiasm for pushing the boundaries of the "traditional" historic house museum. In the museum's spirit of innovation and in line with the activist goals of feminist anthropology, I offer a few interpretive suggestions based on questions that arose during my research. I do so with the knowledge that my fieldwork was only a brief snapshot of the museum's broader interpretive and social life; I cannot pretend to grasp the full scope of the museum's current operations and future plans. I also acknowledge my position as a relative newcomer to the field. While I have experience designing and implementing museum programming, the MBHM is a unique institution, and the lessons I have learned at other historic house museums may not be applicable, feasible, or helpful in Denver. As *Godey's* admonished more than a hundred years ago, "a little learning ever has been a hazardous quantity" (Drew 1897:179)— but perhaps my "fresh eyes" will prove useful.

- The current emphasis on immigrant and working-class women sheds much-needed light on underinterpreted groups, and offers excellent connections to current events relevant to many different sectors of the museum's audience. Plans to open the servants' quarters will make this aspect of the museum's narrative

even more vibrant. As staff interviews suggest, representing servants' personal lives through tours will be difficult, because of a general lack of documentation of individual servants' experiences or identities. Where possible, the personalities and personal lives of servant women and other members of the working class should be emphasized to communicate the idea that these women were more than workers, despite demanding work schedules and attempts by genteel employers to control their servants' lives and behavior.

- Docents are careful to mention that Mrs. Brown, her family, and her servants were Irish American Catholics. Expanding on the persecution faced by the Irish in 19th-century America might pave the way for a conversation about broader racial and ethnic issues in history, with the potential to relate those historical issues to current events. In particular, the experiences of people of color could be highlighted; even though no people of color as defined today seem to have lived in the house, they were almost certainly involved at some point in its construction or in the production of its furnishings (Ellis 2002). At the very least, Mrs. Brown interacted with people of color both in Denver and during her travels abroad. The "blackamoor" statue in the entry hall could be used as a jumping-off point for a discussion about race in the Victorian era. While such a discussion could not be very in-depth because of tour time constraints, Victorian people of color could be the subject of a museum special event or off-site school programming.
- The MBHM is working diligently to make its facilities accessible according to Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) guidelines, but some portions of the

house will unavoidably remain inaccessible to some visitors. The second floor is physically off-limits for those with impaired mobility; these visitors could be offered a tablet, with which they could view a video tour of the second floor or servants' quarters. These videos could be muted but subtitled, so hearing-impaired visitors could follow along with docents' interpretation throughout the house. This service could also be useful for visitors who do not speak English, to supplement the museum's current bilingual guides.

As I complete my fieldwork and analysis, I have noted research opportunities that I could not pursue, due to limitations of time and resources. Because feminist anthropological research is a process, future work might expand upon my analysis or develop a different reading of my findings based on the following suggestions.

- I developed my research by referencing case studies from and about other historic house museums, which allowed me to situate my conclusions within the wider context of current museology. Conducting my own in-depth comparison of the MBHM to another historic house museum in Denver, such as the Byers-Evans House, would have given me greater localized insight into how the MBHM's interpretation might differ from that of institutions that do not focus so explicitly on women. Alternatively, the MBHM might be compared to another woman-focused historic house museum, such as Chicago's Jane Addams-Hull House.

- Anonymous surveys conducted before and after tours allowed me to sample how visitors' understanding of historical femininity might have changed as a result of their museum experience, but these surveys were brief and necessarily

reductionist. Asking interested visitors to participate in a focus group or follow-up interview would help clarify visitor attitudes, as well as providing a deeper understanding of the visitors' pre-existing knowledge, personal, social, and physical contexts, and whether or not they have previously visited the museum.

- Feminist research welcomes interdisciplinary perspectives, and media analysis can provide important insight regarding contemporary attitudes towards women and definitions of femininity. A more fine-tuned content analysis of *The Unsinkable Molly Brown* or *Titanic* would facilitate an expanded consideration of how Mrs. Brown is portrayed in popular media, which in turn offers additional context for visitors' survey responses. An entirely new thesis could be based on comparing 19th- and early 20th-century media about Mrs. Brown to these later representations; all of these media portrayals could then be linked to changing social perceptions of femininity as represented in the museum.

- Choosing to focus on guided tours gave me crucial insight into a central aspect of the museum's interpretation. These tours are not the museum's only interpretive programming; special events and school outreach programs also allow the museum to connect Mrs. Brown's story to broader themes for a variety of audiences. The role of special events, outreach, and other programs could be considered as part of the broader trend of historic house museums moving beyond their walls and into the community in creative ways.

- The before-and-after survey model was intended to gauge immediate changes in visitors' definitions of historical femininity, but could not assess whether those

short-term results would later be reflected in long-term attitudinal change. For a more longitudinal study, a small focus group of visitors could take the survey immediately before and after their tour, then be contacted again weeks or months later for additional comparative data (Falk and Dierking 2000).

- Finally, my study focused on the experiences of adult visitors as they learned about Mrs. Brown and her contemporaries during the museum's guided tours. A separate study could focus on the experiences of children and other populations not deliberately singled out through my research. Studying children specifically would require revised surveys or methods other than those that I employed, such as focus groups or informal interviews.

Pulling the Thread

These additional research paths could further enrich anthropological understanding of the MBHM's operations and impact on its audiences. My current study has begun this anthropological analysis, both situating the MBHM in the museological landscape and exploring the ways in which it is unique. Through its guided tours, the museum does more than focus on women's experiences— which would already set it apart from most historic houses in the United States. Rather, the museum works to deconstruct the concept of femininity for its visitors, using Mrs. Brown's life story to break down the entrenched myth of separate "public" and "private" spheres. As it emphasizes the ability of women to incorporate both public and private femininities into their identities, the MBHM also renounces any trivialization of private womanhood,

which tends to follow close behind any discussion of public femininity. Public and private femininity are presented as a spectrum of actions from which women chose on a daily basis, rather than as a rigid dichotomy (Jameson 1984; Butler 1988). Like Mrs. Brown, some women adopted the outward signs of private femininity in order to further their public goals; suffragettes, for example, realized that dressing in a "respectably" feminine manner would lead men to take them more seriously in their quest for the vote (Corbett 1992). Other women, especially immigrants and members of the working class, ventured into the "public" world of work in order to pursue a "private" feminine lifestyle. While the museum is careful to highlight women's agency and the constructivist nature of femininity, docents also do not shy away from the realities of women's oppression in the 19th century. As Butler (1988:178) stresses, "gender is a project which has cultural survival as its end," and the museum emphasizes the opposition Mrs. Brown and her contemporaries faced as they blended public and private femininities.

This opposition gave rise to many of the stereotypes and generalizations plaguing Victorian women from all backgrounds and walks of life. Such misconceptions were damaging not only for women living during the late 19th and early 20th centuries; many have survived to the present day, continuing to limit the ability of women to express their own femininities. As it engages with these myths, the MBHM illuminates the complex reality of historical women's lives for a wide variety of visitors. By "pulling the threads" of these historical experiences, the museum uses its institutional authority to call attention to and legitimize diverse female experiences in the present day. Although it leaves a lasting impression on visitors through its established guided tours, the museum's

schedule of events, outreach programs, exhibits, and renovations promises to further push

the boundaries of the historic house museum. Already well past its 40th birthday, the

Molly Brown House Museum— like its owner, and the millions of women like her who

sought their own way to be a woman— shows no sign of growing mildewed.

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Guide for Semi-Structured Interviews

I. Personal Background
      1. Name
      2. Age
      3. Gender
      4. Position

II. Museum Background
      1. How long have you been in this position at the MBHM?
      2. What led you to seek out this position?
      3. What are your main responsibilities in this position?
          a. What do you think is the most important aspect of your position?
      4. What is it like working here?
          a. Most rewarding aspect of job?
          b. Most challenging aspect of job?
          c. Anything you would change about the MBHM?
      5. How has the MBHM changed since you began working here?
      6. What changes do you think the MBHM will experience in the future?
          a. Near future?
          b. Long term?
      7. What types of visitors typically come to the MBHM?
      8. What are the most important things visitors should take away from their visit to the MBHM?

III. Women and the Museum
      1. How would you describe Margaret Brown?
          a. What is the most important part of her story?
          b. Why is it important that we learn about her story?
      2. How would you describe women around the turn of the 20th century?
      3. How do you think most of your visitors would describe women around the turn of the 20th century?
      4. Is there anything in particular you want visitors to learn about Margaret Brown and other women from her time?
      5. How does the MBHM teach visitors about women?
      6. Has the MBHM's interpretations about what it was like to be a woman at the turn of the century changed? If so, how?

IV. Follow-up
      1. Is there anyone else who works for or with the museum that you think I should contact to learn more about women in museums?

MOLLY BROWN HOUSE MUSEUM
Visitor Survey
Summer 2016

Thank you for helping me out with my research project! I'm an anthropology graduate student at the University of Denver, and I'm interested in studying how museums teach their visitors about women in the past. Please answer the following questions. When you're done, please turn your survey in to me. Thanks again!—Emily

Age:
Gender: Male   Female   My gender is:

Which of the following words do you think best describe women who lived in the late 1800s and early 1900s? Circle as many words as you want!

independent	vain	tough	immoral	heroic
religious	adventurous	timid	hardworking	docile
flamboyant	prim	nurturing	homebound	bawdy
courageous	obedient	uneducated	outspoken	repressed
moral	high-spirited	leisurely	serious	rough
fragile	refined	resourceful	trailblazing	stern

other:

Interviewer: Emily Starck
Interviewee: Kim Popetz
Date: 6/30/2016
Duration: 30:22

E: Ok, if you could please state your name and today's date again, please?

K: Sure! Kim Popetz, June 30th, 19— 2016.

E: Yeah, awesome! And I'm Emily Starck, from the University of Denver, and um, Kim, could you tell me what your position is here at the Molly Brown House Museum?

K: Sure, I'm the Volunteer and Events Coordinator.

E: Awesome! And how long have you had this position?

K: Four months?

E: Yay! How's it going so far?

K: It's going pretty well so far.

E: Awesome! Good to hear. And what led you to seek out this position?

K: Ummmm, I moved here from southern Maryland? With my family two years ago, and while there I was the director of education at a medium-sized museum, taking care of volunteers and events was a very small part of my job, so this was an opportunity to sort of not be a manager of people, of actual staff, and really focus on just one aspect of my previous job and do it really well, as opposed to having to divide myself among five different tasks and trying to do them all well, which was very difficult, so.

E: Yeah, I'd imagine. A lot of different balls to keep up in the air, I guess. Um, so, here at the Molly Brown House, what are your main responsibilities as the volunteer coordinator?

K: Um, well I do volunteer and events, so, as a volunteer coordinator my main responsibilities are recruitment, training, and scheduling of volunteers, and for events, it's kind of the same, because I do all of the recruitment, training, and scheduling of event volunteers, then I also help to run those events.

E: Gotcha! And what...like, what does your typical volunteer look like? Like, on average?

K: Ooo...that's a pretty varied group, it tend to be more women than men, I only have a handful of men, the rest of my volunteers are women, they do skew a little older, but the last volunteer training I had last month, most of the folks that came were probably in their late 20s, early 30s, so, yeah! Which was great. And I mean, there were still folks that were 50, 60, maybe even 70, but um, overall, it's a really wide variety, so.

E: What do you think causes that kind of shift? That you had a lot of volunteers at the last training who were younger at the last training session?

K: My best guess— and I'm just guessing, I've read a lot about this, and it seems like everybody's guessing, it seems that the hardest group to capture is people my own age, who might have young kids and who might be working, and there might just not be time, like you're getting people who are either older or younger, because either they're older, they're retired, they're kids are older and out of the house, giving them more free time, or they're younger and they haven't quite reached that stage in their life, and they're looking for something meaningful to do that involves a topic or a subject matter than they enjoy.

E: Ok. And is that one of the main reasons that they give to volunteer? Is that the big reason—

K: The main reason people give is that they *love* history.

E: Awesome.

K: Across the board regardless of age, that tends to be the main reason that they give.

E: Is there any particular part of history that most people think? Like, oh, I was really into *this* thing, and—

K: Ummm, I feel like when people, and I would have to actually go back and really analyze, and like, dig in to data, but I feel like when people cite a specific aspect of history, they either talk about Colorado history, or women's history as it pertains to Margaret Brown, you know, how Margaret Brown would fit into their interest in women's history.

E: Ok. And is it, is there any particular demographic of volunteer that tends to be more into the women's history side of things?

K: I don't think so...I mean, by and large I would say I don't think any men put that on their applications, but all of the men I have currently volunteering for me started volunteering before I got here, so I've never seen their applications, they don't exist anymore. So.

E: Mmhmm. Do you get a lot of Titanic buffs?

K: I have a couple, I have a couple! But not as many as you might think. I have an older gentleman, and I have a 10 year old.

E: Oh my gosh! Oh wow. They must make a good team.

K: Uh, they haven't actually met yet, but I can't wait to get those two together.

E: Um, so I know you've been here a couple of months now, but what changes do you think, now that you're coming into this new position, what changes are you making here in, um, in terms of, you know, what your volunteers do here, how they interact with visitors…

K: Ummm...most of the changes that I've been concentrating on have been more on the administrative side of things, um....largely because we have a lot of volunteers who have been here a looooong time, and they have a much better grasp of the history of the house, and what's gone on here in the past, than I could possibly grasp at this point. So, the challenges that we face with volunteers aren't so much on the delivery side, what they're giving to the guests, but on the administration side. So that's probably where I've been focusing.

E: Gotcha. Ok. And what goals do you have, in the short term first and then in the long term for your work here at the museum?

K: Hmm. In the short term I just want to bring our volunteer program into the, make it a little more up-to-date, things like, I have an intern right now who's helping me streamline our volunteer manual, and then we're going to put it all up online, instead of giving people a printed out version with costs a fortune. That way everyone, whether they're an old volunteer or a new volunteer, can just go online and have access to all that information, that way we can update it more easily without having to give out paper updates. So things like that, we've switched into doing all of our scheduling and hours recording through an online program as opposed to people writing it down on paper and then me having to stick it into a spreadsheet, all that fun stuff. So, um, I don't know, I think, we're just working really hard on, my goals are to get us sort of caught up to where we should be given that it's 2016. And once we've got that in place, then we can take a really hard look at the model that we're using for how we make the best use of our volunteer's time and our talents.

E: And do you have any big long-term goals? Like, if money was no object, what are the kinds of things you'd most like to see happen through this position?

K: Oh gosh. Through MY position?

E: Yeah! I know it's all teamwork and stuff around here, but….

K: Oh god! That's a great question. It's, it's not a money-based department, you know what I mean? It doesn't take, you know, other than supplies and my salary, it's not like, you know, collections, with this pie in the sky, where it's like oh, I would love to move this portion of our collections into, like, special storage, redo all the housing, which, you know, takes a ton of money, so right now we're doing the best we can do, it's not like that. So….honestly, it's a hard question because the face of volunteering is really changing right now. All museums are really struggling, and they don't have the same types of volunteer corp that they saw, say, in the 80s...it's just trying to figure out what a volunteer program is going to look like in the next 10 or 20 years. And I'm right there with everybody else. But it *is* true, that it is harder, we used to have, there was a point in the Molly Brown House Museum history that we had upwards of 200 volunteers, and we're just a little house museum. You know, we don't have a lot— now we have about 45, and it's just— we're just going to have to take a really hard look at how our model for moving people through the house interacts with our model for recruiting and retaining volunteers, if there's incompatibilities there that we need to work out, figure out, how we need to mesh those two things together to our best advantage but also to the folks who really want to be involved.

E: Gotcha. So you've got a good corps of volunteers that's been here for— -

K: A long time. A looooooong time.

E: Have they been— as you've sort of gotten into this position, have they been sort of helping you out, like, learning the lay of things around here?

K: They've been wonderful. They've been really wonderful. The only resistance I've faced at all— I mean, I've heard horror stories from volunteer coordinators around the country, talking about how they want to implement changes in how their tours were given, or in how volunteers work with school groups, or how their volunteers did this, that, or the other thing, and the changes that I did so far, I would say 99% of the volunteers are onboard with, and they've just really had no issues with at all, and I've had one or two holdouts, and those holdouts are people who like, aren't comfortable using online programs, so they don't want to do their scheduling online, um, but, for the most part, everybody's come right along, it's been nice, they've been great.

E: Oh my gosh. Um, why do you think those long-term volunteers have been here, why do you think they've been volunteering for so long?

K: Ummm….I think it's a, I think it's a combination of things, I think so many of them just truly love this house, and really want to honor Margaret Brown's story and who she was and what she did in Denver, Colorado, and I think for others, one volunteer in particular, I don't know if you've met her, her name is Pam, her mom was one of the

original founders of Historic Denver, and she started doing tours at the Molly Brown House Museum when she was 11. So she's now in her late 50s, so she's not very old, but she's been doing this for forever. Her mom died of breast cancer when she was 18, and so for her, coming back here every day is an opportunity to share with the world something her mother loved, so for her, it's extremely personal. For other people, our Titanic guy, he loves the story of the Titanic, and he is so happy to be able to come into a place that will allow him to— celebrate may not be the right word, but to share that story with other people and appreciate what was involved in both the building of that ship but to better understand the tragedy that was involved in it. He just really loves— So they all have their own little niche that they gravitate towards, and we just kind of, you know, let them go with it. If they love, I have a volunteer who's really into women's suffrage, who studied it in college, who did her thesis on women's suffrage and women's rights in Colorado, and that's sort of, she doesn't talk about it her whole tour, certainly, but she brings it up a lot more than someone who loves the Titanic, or someone who loves the fact that Margaret spoke five languages and traveled extensively, the pick up on the part that they love.

E: Gotcha. So, they kind of, in giving tours, have free reign to kind of, stick to the story, but kind of, add in things—

K: They can personalize the tour. Because if *they're* not interested in what they're saying, then our guests aren't going to be interested in what they're saying. And, and it also makes it so that if our guests were to come back and have another tour, they're not going to have the exact same tour, and I think that's an advantage, you know, if you get the exact same thing every time, why would you come back more than once?

E: Yeah. It sounds like you have such a good community here of volunteers, and the staff...do you have strong ties with the neighborhood community over here?

K: I don't….you know, I've been here such a short time, I don't know if I can answer that correctly, but I do know that Andrea, the director, wants to make stronger ties with the community. I feel like we do have good ties with the community through Historic Denver, since they're still out parent agency, and they work very much in and about the community, but I don't know if folks who work for Historic Denver identify with it in their minds as being the same as the Molly Brown House Museum. So I know she's definitely looking at ways where we can work more with the community, in ways that, um, are still addressing our core mission, without scattering ourselves too much.

E: Definitely, yeah. Do you find that most of your volunteers come from the local community around here?

K: They...we have people who can walk here from their homes to do their tours or to do their events, and we have people who drive from as far away as Longmont. Um, and Fort Collins. There's one person up in Fort Collins. It's a big mix. It just depends.

E: Well, kind of shifting from volunteers over to the visitor side of things, since you've been here, have you noticed any trends in terms of the types of visitors you've been seeing a lot of?

K: Oh, you'd really have to ask Aileen about that and the folks down in the store, since they're the front line in terms of guests coming in. Because I'm, up in my office so much, doing scheduling, working on training materials, etc., I often don't see the guests at all, so I am the wrong person to be asking that question.

E: Hey, I didn't know if you were looking down from the windows or something, going, hmmmmm….

K: Well, I do give tours, because we don't have as deep as a pool of volunteers to draw from, I do end up giving tours pretty much every week to guests, but I don't see near as many, I don't have the same overview as someone downstairs would have.

E: Sure, definitely. Maybe I'll have a little time to talk to them at some point and get the ground view.

K: And they take data. They ask every single guest that comes in if they're from one of the SCFD counties, which one— -do you know what SCFD is?

E: I've heard the—

K: Scientific and Cultural Facilities District. One penny of every $10 you spend, if you're in this community, goes to this scientific and cultural facilities that are in a seven-county district, so for that reason, we track very closely where everyone is from. So we, there's definitely data out there available, at least to the county level, or if they're out-of-state. I think they also track out of country, I'm not sure.

E: Yeah. I was shadowing a tour last weekend and there was a family from Milwaukee, where I'm from, and I got a little excited, like, yeah! Go Packers! And they were like yay, woo! Yeah, so, on the tours you've been participating in and things, what do you think are the most important things you want visitors to take away from their visit here?

K: For me personally, I want them to take away the idea that going to see a historic house museum or learning about your history is interesting, and exciting, and can be fun. I don't, personally, really care how much they remember from the tour as long as they walk away with a good feeling from the tour. And that's not to say I don't strive to be as accurate as I can when I give my tours, and I don't ask they same of my volunteers. But if you're super accurate, and you're boring the tears out of your guests, they're not going to come back, and they're not going to recommend the museum to other people. So be as

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accurate as possible, and be as engaging as possible, make sure that people are, you know, having the best time they can have in the context of a house museum.

E: And what do you think goes into that? What's your technique personally for making sure they leave happy?

K: Um….I try very much to attend to the needs of the guests. I've been training docents, volunteers for a long time, and I have always stuck with the philosophy that we treat them as guests in our home, as we would treat guests in our home. So, if you notice that someone is getting really tired, you make sure you point out for them specifically, oh, there's a chair over there, you can sit down. If you, if somebody, if you know, or I always ask, how many folks are in-state, how many are out-of-state, then you can sort of tailor your tour a little bit. If somebody's really interested in architectural details, maybe in each room you go in, you throw in some architectural details so there's a little something for them. It's just a matter of attending to your guests, and trying to give them what they want, and also, not that people have to be clowns or anything, but trying to be a little more entertaining, um, so that it's not, it's not a lecture. I'd rather it be conversation, as much as possible, which is hard to do, but some of our docents are really excellent at making sure our guests are engaged with them and answering questions, and there's back-and-forth, which I think is ideal.

E: Definitely. I've, uh, gone on two tours that Gwen-Ellen gave, and it was really cool to see everybody kind of like, shuffle up like, they were unsure where they wanted to stand in the museum, and then by the end of it, everybody was just laughing, and having a great time, and pointing out different things to strangers in the group that they'd just been standing next to, and it was really cool to watch her create that feeling in the group. And it was a big group too. A lot of people. And uh, switching gears a little bit from the day-to-day experience you have in this position, more towards, kind of the, themes of the museum, I guess. Um, how would you describe Margaret Brown?

K: Oh my gosh. Um, the Energizer Bunny? I mean, you hear about what she accomplished in her lifetime, all of the different things she worked on, all of the different things she did, I mean, that woman learned, knew 5 European languages on top of English, and when she died she was learning Greek. I just, I don't have the energy to do that! I just think it's amazing, that on top of everything else she did, when you start listing out the things she did, it's just, it's overwhelming, cuz you're like, what have I been doing with my time? She was really an amazing person.

E: What do you think is the most important part of her story?

K: Um….that's a good question. I think the most important part of her story is...that...when she set a goal for herself, she just went out and did it. She really, she was really fearless and brave in her own way, for her time, to do some of the things she did, and um, I don't know, she's just impressive, she's just an impressive person, and we

always try to make sure that people, that people know, you know, the stories you've heard about her are probably not true, that the real story is so much more impressive, so.

E: Yeah, I was reading the biography, here, that Andrea lent me, and I didn't know any of those things about her. It's one of those things where like, the true story is even better. Definitely. So, why do you think it's important that we learn that true story?

K: I think...whoooh....I feel like Margaret Brown, the causes that she believed in left lasting imprints on Denver, and on Colorado, and on some degree, to the nation, and people don't necessarily know about her work? And, I mean, people are always surprised when I tell them about her support of...the Dumb Friends League, yknow, it's the first humane-society type organization in Denver, she supported it for its entire first year of operation, and it still exists today. That's a fantastic legacy. Like, she wanted us to take care of the animals, and we're still doing it, we're still doing it today! And there's so many— the juvenile justice system in Denver, that happened because of her, and that's really important, and that's a really important thing in our society. So I feel like she has so many of those things, that, that's what is the most important, I don't know.

E: Do you...drawing on the fact that she was involved in so many things, and did so much, was the energizer bunny of Denver at that point, um, do you find yourself, or, does the museum find itself using her story to jump off and explore those other topics?

K: That's what we *try* to do, that's what they've done in the past, I haven't been here that long, I mean, right not we have so many renovations going on, so right now, most of our focus and energy has been going into those, keeping everything going while things are happening, and keeping our guests happy, keeping our volunteers happy, and still doing events, even though they're going to be digging up this or chopping down that, so...that's where a lot of our energies have gone, but we've certainly talked about how we can use different aspects of her life story as jumping off points for really bringing her story into today. We were talking about how Peabody Coal Company, which is the 9th largest coal company in the *world*, went bankrupt, and Peabody Coal Company started in the 1880s, in Chicago, so it was in existence when Margaret and JJ were miners, you know, and it was like, can we tie something about the history of Peabody Coal Company with what we do with Margaret's story and mining in Leadville to show that things that she was talking about then are still relevant today. You know? Women's suffrage. How are voting rights from then, how are they relevant today? She was the daughter of Irish immigrants. How can we talk about immigration in a way that's relevant today and that ties into Irish immigrants back then? So, and there's lots of those. It's not a hard leap to make.

E: It must really...that's such a good tool to have here, a good opportunity to have. Cuz you can have, you know, a family of four come in, and everybody's interested in different things, but it sounds like there's all these different facets of Margaret that they can sort of latch onto. Kind of broadening out my earlier question about describing Margaret, how would you describe women in general? Kind of, during her lifetime in Colorado?

K: Oo-y. I think the lives of women changed really dramatically during that period. And if you've ever watched Downton Abbey, she was alive during that period, and you know, those changes that were happening in Downton Abbey were happening for her as well, of course, it started with the sinking of the Titanic, her storyline. Um, you know, and they went from the Victorian Era to the Edwardian Era, all the way up to, when she died, it was flappers! The difference between a flapper and a woman who had to wear 25 pounds of clothing to sit down to an elegant dinner was HUGE! And, and, the difference, when her story started, women didn't have the right to vote in Colorado or nationally, when she died, they had both, and she'd helped in both of those movements. I don't know, women's lives just changed so dramatically during that period, that's what you get from Margaret's story, is that she was on the forefront of that change.

E: Yeah. Is that something that you try to communicate to the visitors?

K: Um, I do, I often do. I don't know that everybody does? One of the things with letting folks really tailor their tours to the things that interest them is that maybe women's history or women's advances in history *isn't* the number one thing for them. But, for some of them, it is. And no one, no one who works here, either as a staff member or volunteer, is unimpressed with Margaret and her story. Everyone is sort of overwhelmed with it and so impressed with it, so.

E: Understandably. So, you mentioned that part of position is overseeing events and things like that? So kind of, through events, through tours and things, how do you try to teach your visitors about women's history at this time?

K: Oof. Um, we really..let's see, in the short time I have been here, we have really focused on...let me think what events we've done...since I started..right when I started, I think the first events, the first real events were about the Titanic. And I always talk, when I talk about Margaret and the Titanic, I talk about, yknow, people call her "The Unsinkable Molly Brown", and all these stories were written about her in papers all over the world, why she's a hero of that tragedy for me is not for some of the reasons she's known for, it's for, things like using her international platform that she gained through that tragedy, she helped change maritime law, so that it no longer said women and children first, so that families wouldn't be forced to make that decision, which is why so many people didn't get on the lifeboats on the Titanic, because women didn't want to leave their husbands or their older sons behind, and I mean, who could blame them? It's an awful, awful decision to make, and she saw firsthand the effects of it. There's a story, and I don't recall the couple's name, they were a very wealthy older couple that was on the Titanic, and he wouldn't be allowed onto the lifeboat along with his wife, and so she decided to stay with him, and they just went back to their stateroom. So it's awful, it's really awful, so she worked on changing that. To me, that makes her the hero of the Titanic. Not getting into fights with the seaman in charge of their life raft, you know, because she wasn't, by her own accounting, all the women in the life raft were like noooo, you're, you're not doing this right. If we don't row, we're all going to die, so.

E: Yeah. Reading that part of her story, how she kind of railed against those women who had left their husbands behind? It was interesting to see how she kind of took them to task, saying, if you want equality, you gotta…

K: Yeah, and I don't think I would've gone quite that far? Because you can't second judge what somebody does in the moment of an emergency. It's really hard. But that being said, I think the change she effected was absolutely worthwhile, and she [unintelligible].

E: Yeah. And through your position, do you oversee the educational outreach and things like that?

K: Nope! That's Jamie.

E: Oh, ok, cool. Trying to take notes of who to talk to about what, trying to get it all straight.

K: Yep, nope! That's Jamie!

E: Yeah! Well, I think that those are all of the interrogation questions I had for you today, so, thank you so much for letting me pick your brain and stuff, I really appreciate it!

K: Yeah! Yeah, no problem!

Interviewer: Emily Starck
Interviewee: Jamie Wilms
7/14/2016
3:00 PM
Duration: Approx. 1 hr

Note: due to multiple equipment failure, interview could not be recorded. Took notes on responses and manually recorded statements verbatim where possible.

1. Director of Education since June 2013

II
1. 2013
2. Love ed, wanted to tell story of legendary woman, more creativity in smaller museums, more dialog
   a. Had worked at living history/outdoor museum
   b. OWW influenced what type of museum J wanted

      c. Didn't want to work in static museum— can "breathe" here, this is more immersive
  3. Deals with onsite/offsite school programs; creating, training; also does evaluations
.   Young adult programming, works with actors for Victorians
  4. A. basement renovations to house, will become education center
  A. Cabaret— performances in museums; have events educating about song lyrics
  A. Thirsty Thursdays— talk about events they don't normally talk about in museums— Queer in Queen, burlesque, Gatsby; attract mostly young professionals, a lot of repeat visitors

5. Increase kids' attendance; increase evaluation

a.   Help museum move away from stodgy HH stereotype, be an anchor for women's history, become community anchor (to be a beacon in the city, come to debate, be a go-to place)

b.   Wants there to always be something new

6. Lots of out of towners, lots of "referrals"

7. a. Take away true spirit of MB, not the Hollywood myth
  b. Be inspired by what she did to bring about change in their own communities
  C. doing small things
  d. "She was ahead of her time"
  e. Can't say what MB would be like today— have to take in context
  f. "She wasn't the normal Victorian woman"
  g. Typical Vict woman supposed to stay home, take care of kids, socialize w ladies, in newspaper 3 times, seen-but-not-heard, on husband's arm
    h. MB's parents made her who she was, showed strong family ties
    j. Reflect humble beginnings w strong family dynamic, empahsis on edu in programs
    k . "a woman of gumption"

8. No. They know about Titanic, musical

III
  1. [already done]
  2. Other ladies also had the gumption, but it was unusual; Alice Paul, other suffragette, stood up for what she believed in; stuck to her guns even in the most tough situations

4. Main focus is Margaret, "kind of an enigma of her time"; "we're showing that you don't have to be a typical woman"; you don't have to follow societal norms; "don't let the fear that you're a girl hold you back"
  — use her home to communicate it; explanations through outgoing guides
  — show radicalism thru programming, objects; always adding stuff to house
  — objects: suffragette stuff
  — in house right now: stuff is very fashionable
  — MB always wore latest fashions; some people say she's vain, but that's who she was

5. At first, emphasis on musical; truth discovered through research

— moved beyond Titanic story to WWI, Ludlow, suffrage
— Titanic was catalyst for other stories
— "she was more than the big"

Date: 8/19/2016
Interviewer: Emily Starck
Interviewee: Stephanie McGuire
Duration: 1:03:19

E: Today is August 19th, 2016, and my name is Emily Starck, and if you could say your name please—

S: My name is Stephanie McGuire, and I'm the curator of collections at the Molly Brown House Museum!

E: Woohoo! Aw man, you just, like, checked off the first like, 4 questions.

S: Sorry! I jumped ahead!

E: No, that's good, that's awesome! So, how long have you been here, Stephanie?

S: I have only been here about 4 months, soooooo— -

E: Oh! Well, congratulations on your position—

S: Let's preface the whole thing by, I may not know a *whole* lot compared to, like, Andrea.

E: It's all good! I just want to pick your brain a little bit. So, what lead you to seek out this position here?

S: Are you listening? [unknown person, off-mic: No!] This was pretty much my dream job— I was just finishing up, I was working 3 jobs, um, kind of trying to, I mean, I had a big collection background, I'd done lots of internships and volunteer opportunities, and um, like many part-time positions, all kind of in collections, and I'd also done a collections internship here, and loooooved it, loved, you know, I was helping out with the fashion collection, and that was kind of a nightmare, so I was feeling kind of like, passionate about, oh my gosh, I hope they can get a grant to fix this, this poor collection! Um, so, I really, I mean, I was really, it was just luck that this position popped up, and I was just so excited, it was my dream job for sure.

E: Nice! Congratulations on achieving the dream!

S: Thank you!

E: You're an inspiration to people in my position everywhere who're being like, one day! After all the internships, and all the part-time jobs, you too can achieve your dreams—

S: The sweat, and the blood, oh I know—
E: Sometimes literally like, sweat and blood, depending on what museum you work in—

S: Oh that's so true! That's so true.

E: Um, so, did you have, so this, that this is your dream job, did you have like a specific interest within history museums, or a specific interest, a specific angle of this museum that you really were interested in?

S: Of history or of collections?

E: Ummm...both.

S: Or of museums?

E: Whatever it means to you, any, all of those things…

S: Um, I, I mean I, I had always been really focused on collections, so I knew I really wanted to work with the collections and the house, kind of behind the scenes stuff, and the more hands-on, um, and then as far as history, you know I got my Masters in American West, so, and I actually did my thesis on, um, masculinity in the Colorado Gold Rush period—

E: Yooooo, oh my god! That's awesome!

S: Is that— so yeah, that was sort of, kind of the perfect opportunity that popped up. So let's see, as far as museums, collections, um, you know, I, I had worked in some larger museums and just kind of like, tested the waters through different departments and really found that I loved working within a smaller museum, um, cuz, you get to do more, you get to sort of wear different hats and like, go between different departments and help out, whereas in some of the larger museums you kind of sort of get, you sort of get honed in to your, you know, department, and you know, it's sort of, you're not really getting the big picture, so um, so I definitely knew that I wanted to do small museum work, so.

E: Gotcha. Yeah, you can have more of a, kind of a, be everywhere at once, if that's more what you want to do—

S: It's kind of exciting that way too, you feel like you have more of an impact.

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E: I think so, definitely. Yeah, instead of that more tunnel vision, like, oh, I have to go talk to so-and-so in Office 1375A—

S: Exactly. Yup!

E: So, kind of with the knowledge that you wear like 17 different hats around here, what are like, your main responsibilities?

S: Main….overall responsibilities...to make it really short and sweet, it's taking care of the house and everything in it, the collections. So, I'm not really in charge of hte people side, but the physical house, this physical structure and everything physically in it, when we give tours. Basically! So, you know, with that, really the only thing that's the same every day is the opening and closing of the house, getting that prepared. Constantly renovating, and doing restorations, and doing more collections projects...we're gonna start tex— a total textile rehousing project, inside the house we have a bunch of rolled— a similar situation to the fashion collection, before we went through and rehoused that whole collection. SO we have a textile collection with rolled textiles like quilts and bedding and tapestries, and things like that, that are just basically shoved in closets at this point, in really tight, not the best spaces, so we're going to start going through it, there's about 500 of them, we're going to go through every single one, and just basically unroll, condition the whole thing, make sure it's all, you know, labeled, and matches its Pastperfect condition, etc, and, and then we're going to go, we're gonna do some deaccessioning, and then we're going to go ahead and come up with some ideas for rehousing our collections within the house still. So, it's just lot of projects, um, random things like when we got a cool primary source from, it was from Helen's son, Helen was Margaret's daughter, and Helen basically drew a floor plan of the house, and that was really important primary sources that we used to sort of reinterpret the house, you know, there were a couple rooms in the 70s where they sort of guessed on the interpretation, they found the wallpaper in Larry's bedroom and said well, this looks similar to men's studies at the time, so they just made it a study, but when we got this primary source from Helen's son, the way she drew it was that the study was actually down on the first floor, so we reinterpreted it and basically switched things around so they'd be more, um, you know, accurate, and, so anyway, we want to get that framed and put in the house, cuz it's such a cool, cool source, and it's something that one of the Brown children actually drew out, and we want to hang it up in the house. And sometimes it's the sprinklers are, you know, going crazy and breaking, and you've gotta— it's a lot of facility maintenance, also dealing with the air conditioning when it decides to freeze— oh, you've just gotta be, you just gotta be like, willing to put aside whatever you're trying to get done, and just jump in and reprioritize. So.

E: Gotcha. Never a dull moment!

S: Yeah! Nev— er a dull moment, nev— er.

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E: So with all of those, like, the things that are sort of like yours on your plate, what are your goals for your work here?

S: Well, my main goal right now, and this is a huge goal, and it'll probably take multiple years to accomplish, maybe more than that— my main goal is to just get things more organized, like I'm coming in and I'm just seeing a bunch of things that are not necessarily, a lot of these things don't make sense where they are, and it just needs, the whole house collections, as well as the archives, they need a little bit more organizing. So that's like one of my main goals, especially the archives. I don't know if you can see from here, it's in my office, it's kind of scary—

E: Is that….the archives?

S: Uhhhhh huh! [scared voice]

E: Oooooh, I see!

S: Just like, why is this here? What is it doing? Why isn't it in its like, box or...so, of course the rehousing we can tackle, the textile project, there are a couple objects in the house that are just like, in drawers, and we would like to find a home for them, then of course we have this whole capital campaign, we've campaigned, we had a goal of $2 million and campaigned to get various grants, and we're almost at our goal, like, really, really, really close, and we could, kind of even say we've reached it, we're really close, so you know, with that, it's gonna be an ongoing, just constant restoration process. So one of those things that'll really affect me daily is gonna be, we're gonna redo the windows of the house to do storm windows that are UV protectant, so we can actually lift up more of the blinds and have more light coming into the house, cuz it can be really dark in there, and we're at some point going to allow photography, we're still kind of toying with it. But we will likely be able to allow photography, which, you know, having so much more light in the house will really be awesome, and people can take awesome pictures of the house, and I think it will really change it a lot. So, um, now I can't even remember the question, I don't know if that answered it at all—

E: Eh, just, goals and stuff— I think you got it—

S: Yeah, goals! My main goal is to just figure out, what all is here right now, and what can be housed better? And it may not be perfect, but at least if we can keep making things a little bit better and a little bit better, that's the goal.

E: That's like, the collections manager's mantra, just a little better!

S: A little better! Yeah. That's the goal.

E: Baby steps.

S: Yes, exactly!

E: And speaking of that project with the windows and things, how do you think, do you think that'll change the vibe in the house? Just as an aside, having that light in there?

S: I think it will, I mean, I think it….it'll just make it livelier somehow maybe, or make it feel more like, I mean, when they lived in the house, I'm sure they opened up all the curtains, and it will! Hopefully it'll bring it more to life a little bit, so it doesn't feel like a dark museum, so I think it'll be huge, when we do that. So it's in the plans for next year. So it WILL happen. Yeah. We just had a staff retreat where we talked about all of our goals for 2017. So we've got a ton of things planned. Lots of events and stuff. So, yeah!

E: Cool! That'll be kinda cool to see that come to fruition.

S: Oh I know! I'm excited. Especially for the textile project—

E: To get that— kinda goin—

S: Yes. I'm, I love getting organized! I just love getting organized. It'll feel amazing.

E: Just like a feng shui thing almost, it just feels better. It *looks* better.

S: And then it makes you *feel* better. It makes everybody happy. Everybody feels better when we get organized. [*whooshing noise*][unknown voice, off-mic: *it's never gonna happen*] Yes it will!! Don't step on my goals!

E: Yeah, we have goals here! Um, let's see...kind of, on that topic of the house, and kind of it, how it feels to be in that space and things...what do you...want people to get out of being in that space, if that makes sense? Like, they go into the house, want do you want them to leave with? From being in that physical space?

S: I mean, part of...I mean, really, I think, the physical space, you know, it can't really speak for itself, we want to interpret it, you know? So our tour guides really help us give the message that we want people to go away with, which is, you know, this isn't just about, everybody knows about the Unsinkable Molly Brown, and everybody knows that, and they love that, and that myth probably saved the house, well it DID save the house, and the point of the house is that Margaret Brown actually lived here in Denver, and she has this larger story. And so we want to show that she came from really humble beginnings, she was really poor, and she ended up, she wanted to marry rich but she married poor, and they got, got these, this wealth, and moved to Denver, and then the things that she did with that. And she did, she had so many charities that she felt were important and um, she did a lot for the community, and we kind of want to stress that. And it's great to show like, this is her house and this is where she did all these things, and you know she was also a fashionista, so we can show you this photograph or we can

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show you this dress, or whatever, um, you know, we use the house, the physical house, to kind of tell her story and the Browns' story. So, we like to have some level of interpretation going on.

E: Gotcha. And is that mostly done through the tour guides, or?

S: A lot it is through the tour guides, and we're talking about different, kind of trying to rethink the way the historic house museum interprets history, which is a huuuuge topic that we're kind of, you know, the tour guide is great, because we can sort of convey more with the tour guide, but we're also kind of deciding, the tour can be kind of confined, and one dimensional, and not everybody wants to go on a tour, some people are most just interested in the architecture of the house, um, some people are only interested in Titanic, so we've been considering possibly offering like an open house, either day, or if we do this a couple of times a year, or a couple time a month, where we, you know, have more of a, a guide that's sort of stationed, and someone can come up and ask them a question, or the guide can have a sort of spiel, so they can walk through more freely, and um, I mean, Jamie is great with her, you know, all her programs, even the touch baskets, where you can get a little bit more, you can see the pictures that Margaret had taken of the house in 1910, um, to kind of, you know, go along with the tour, and we've really, you know we've also been considering a menu of tours, kind of? Where it's like, you can choose a Titanic tour, or you can choose a servant's tour, or an art tour, an architecture tour. So we've been sort of playing with those ideas. And think it's really gonna just, take us to the next level.

E: That could be a lot of fun, yeah! We tried that out in a museum I worked in, and we found that people really did like it, because then they could go and kind of do that original tour, and then someone might say something like oh! I didn't know they had, like, gas lighting or something at this point, and then we could say oh, we also have a tour about technology in the, this house was 1870s, and that got people to come back and kind of see this from a new angle. And how do you think, so, going with this open house idea, how do you think this'll change people's experience of the space and of the objects? Having a guided tour versus being able to kind of wander?

S: I mean, it'll completely change it, in my opinion. It'll be more like, of a self-learning experience or something, as opposed to us sort of forcing them along this route? How— they could take different routes, they could stop and maybe they could feel they could really get the details more, maybe they could stop and, um, get lost in one of the objects, whereas maybe they couldn't really do that when they're on a tour and they're watching the tour guide, and they're moving them along, and it's sort of more confined, and it would be a totally different experience. Um, you know, and they would not necessarily come away with the exact points that the guides, that we have our guides say to everyone. They would not necessarily, and you know, that's the thing too, people only really remember about 10% of everything that you tell them. And so, maybe there'd be that 10% that's floating around in their brain with the guide that they asked the question to,

OR maybe they'd remember more, because they have more control, they'd be able to, I mean, this is a totally philosophical conversation, I mean, I have, I don't know, honestly we'd have to try it out, do surveys, um, but it could be that, that they would get more from it. Because everyone's different, everyone's coming at it from a different experience, you never know what kind of day they're having, what kind of background they have, and if they had more control over the route and the questions they ask, and, um, you know, the places that they stop and the objects that they stop to look at...they may get more out of it. That's just a guess.

E: It sounds good to me!

S: I think so. I mean, I think it would be awesome, but we would have to let go a little bit of that strict message we're trying to get across, that strict tour route that works well for US, it might be a little chaotic, I mean...we may have to give a little to make it work. But we're going to try it out, so.

E: Being brave.

S: Yeah! And I think it's time. I think it's time to do something a little bit different. Because everybody that goes through our historic house has to get on that tour. And I think it would be cool to do something a little different.

E: I even heard just today a group of people downstairs asking, do we need to talk a tour to see the house?

S: Exactly! And we get that every. Day. Yep.

E: I think that people...it seems that they want to be kind of...left in a space, sort of to digest it at their own pace, as they want to….well, that'll be a lot of fun, to see how that turns out. You should do that in the next year while I'm here, so I can…

S: Oh we will! We want to start like prototyping and see how it goes in 2017— yeah, 2017, so that'll be within the next year, yeah!

E: Cool, awesome! And you mentioned that, you know, if that happens, there'll be a kind of letting go of control as people move through the house? So what do you think, I guess, could you expand upon the dangers of either just, of having people kind of go through at their own leisure, at their own pace, instead of having them kind of follow this guided narrative? What's the danger of that?

S: I mean, I wouldn't necessarily call it a danger, we just wouldn't be able to, I mean, we have really specific things we want to get across, and we wouldn't necessarily be able to get all of the...oh...you know, maybe wouldn't be able to get all the spiel about….you know, the guides talk from 45 minutes to an hour, and that would be...it would change, it

would be different, but I don't necessarily think it would be a danger, because they would still get something from it, and we would have, we would have those, you know, maybe we would have to do some labelling, or maybe we would have some panels or something. We'd maybe have to rethink our interpretation if we're not having our tour that whole time. But I think, I mean we would still have guides, but they just wouldn't be, we'd just sort of have guides throughout the house. They just wouldn't be sort of taking you through, it's just a little more freedom for individuals. Which is, I think, a good thing. We would still absolutely have our message in there, it would just be different, and delivered differently. I personally think it would be awesome.

E: I think so too! Off the record, but I think so too!
S: Yeah!

E: What is the, like you mentioned the message will still be there, what is the message?

S: Just like, like I said, to tell more of the Browns' story beyond just the Unsinkable Molly Brown that everybody...you know, if you've ever seen the 1960s play or movie, they have just this kind of completely inaccurate portrayal of Margaret and JJ and...um..you know, everybody knows right now the Titanic movie, so there are just certain myths...I think part of it is just breaking down myths about Molly Brown, um, and then telling a little bit more about her backstory, and, you know, her life outside of Titanic, but also stress that she was an activist, and she was a philanthropist, and she did sooo much here in denver before and after the titanic, and she went out and help out during WWI and drove ambulances, that's just amazing, and nobody really knows about that. So I think that's the message we want to get across, and I think we could still DO that, it would just be less...talking, I think. But we'd have to think it through. And I think it'd be a long process. Like, it may not work at first. And we may do surveys of people that took the tour and people that did this other sort of route and find out what they got from it. And it may be completely different. It'll just be a lot of trial and error. So, we'll see, but I think we should give it a go.

E: Definitely! And how do you see at this point, definitely still planning things, but how do you think you would get that message across in this free-range sort of tour, as opposed to having a guided tour?

S: I mean, we would still have those tour guides basically, and they would probably give a little spiel as people came in, so of course they would be trained and they would deliver the message. Um, we would also maybe encourage people more to look at our, we've got these, what are they called, touch baskets! That have these pictures, and little pieces of wallpaper to feel what it feels like, we may put more reading materials in there, I mean if people are on their own, people might actually read, maybe we could put more materials that they could read, maybe they would read more. Um, and like I said, maybe we would label a couple things maybe, we are definitely, I'm in the process of getting labels for like, the family portraits. Because people don't know who's in each photo, you know, cuz

that's kind of, something that the tour guides don't always say. But no, this is a good question, and it's something that we're just gonna have to try it out and see how it works, and then get feedback. You know, from tour guides and from guests. And we'd just have to um, yeah, I mean I know, cuz we're totally gutting out the basement and re-doing that space, and we're gonna make it permanent exhibits, and kind of classroom space, and bathrooms, yay! So we may...I know we're going to put a Titanic exhibit somewhere down there and a mining exhibit, so I think those exhibits will be a good way to incorporate, sort of some of the other things that we're not really saying on the tours, and everybody knows about the Titanic, so we kind of try to talk about other things, but if we had an exhibit about the Titanic, it might be a way to get more information that maybe the guide didn't talk about, and then maybe mining is such a huge part of the Browns' story that we really wanted to make that interpretation in the basement. So um, we may just need to come up with new exhibit ideas, and we have that back porch space that right now it's sort of in limbo, we're not quite sure what to do with it, we've considered interpreting it as the back porch, but we've been using it as an exhibit space, so that would be a way...I kind of want to have a space where we can just, where we can do changing exhibits, to do, you know, changing interpretation. So there are all these things to consider. We're dealing with renovations, we're putting in like a lift, on the, what is that, north side of the building? To get people in wheelchairs to at least see the first floor. It's a historic building so we can't put an elevator in it, unfortunately. That lift would be awesome but we can't put an elevator in it, unfortunately, so that lift would be awesome, but it would also hinder that space? So we're in the process of doing this renovation, we kinda wing it a little bit, we're kinda, we'll see what happens with that, so...it's a lot of up in the air.

E: I do like the idea of having the mining exhibit in the basement, though, it's really atmospheric kind of, like, subterranean sort of space, yeah. That'll work out well. Nice. So, stuff's changing. So, you mentioned before, um, maybe doing like a servant's tour, maybe?

S: Yes, we are. We are doing that.

E: Ok. Do you think that like, right now, that aspect of the house's life is sort of like, underinterpreted? Or the things you'd change about how...I guess, what do you think about how that aspect of the house's story is interpreted?

S: Yeah, I mean it...right now we, our third floor space is completely dedicated to events, so it's not at all interpreted from, you know, the Brown time period, but we are in the process of interpreting the servants' quarters rooms up on the third floor. And we're gonna make that a part of at least a servant tour, and we're trying to decide if we can make it part of the full tour, or if it'll just take too much time, so these are kind of the, again, things that we're going to have to try out. I think we definitely, again, we have felt that it's sort of been underinterpreted, and that's why we want to bring in that story, and we have these scholars who are working with us to put together a really good script for

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the servants. And of course this space, the carriage house, was also a servant's space, a male servants' space, they lived up here, and the carriages were down below, but we've changed that into the gift shop and the offices, so this space isn't interpreted either. So I think it will be really good to have that as part of, as an option anyway.

E: Definitely. And what do you think you would, what would you emphasize the most in interpreting those spaces? I know this is still like, in the future.

S: Yeahh….I think….uh...I think it could be interesting, I think what we WILL end up doing is doing surveys and finding out what people WANT to see, which we've already done a bunch of those surveys, but i think what we will probably try to do is put them, the servants within the Brown family, and sort of interpret, like, how their lives were working for the Browns and how that was, whether or not that was, Margaret, coming from that sort of lower-class background, whether or not she, maybe, treated her servants differently, or how, how, how are her servants different from the servants next door, basically. So I think we're trying to get some research together to maybe tell that story a little bit, that we're actually meeting next week with the scholars, to really, like discuss an actual script, so I'll know a little bit more then when we're all able to talk about, like, everybody's findings, and kind of the direction we want to take. But I think more than anything, it's just another part of their lives that it's important to talk about. And upstairs, I mean, these people LIVED upstairs on the third floor, and we just sort of skip through them. So I think it's important to just have that be part of the house, I mean, they ran the house in many ways, so. But it would be nice to sort of focus on how these servants were different, because then it's just, you could just insert it anywhere, in any historic house. So we've been trying to do some research on Margaret, and Margaret's servants, specifically, to try to tell their specific part of the story.

E: So kind of, focusing on them as individuals.

S: Yeah.

E: Okay, gotcha.

S: Yeah. And I mean, I know it's difficult to get information on the servants unfortunately, but yeah, we want to talk about them as individuals, their names and everything, at least the ones we know of. But I mean, we know she would have had multiple servants coming, you know, sometimes she would sort of recruit them in for a specific event, those would be more generalized things. But we'll try to hone in on a couple of those individuals, especially like Mary Mulligan, was here I think the longest, so we really want to tell her story, because she was, you know, she was really close with Margaret.

E: I had a thought, just flew out of my….oh, ok! Um, so, would you say then, you'll be able to focus on some individuals, and then also maybe, for the people who didn't stay

here very long but still, you know, helped out with the house, would that be an opportunity to say, you know, these are individual stories, and then kind of widening it out to talk about servants in general?

S: Yeah, a larger story. I think so. I think we definitely want to hone in on a couple of these individuals that we know of. But it WILL be a larger story. And like I said, I'll know a little bit more when we meet with the scholars next week.

E: As it stands now, what kind of stuff would you want to put in there? In the servants' spaces?

S: So we will put, we'll make it, you know, look like a servant's room, unfortunately we don't have ANY photographs of their specific rooms in, you know, Molly Brown's house, and unfortunately we don't have any written descriptions of their specific room, but there are, you know, there's plenty of research on, and we did find this one kind of article that talked about, kind of, this is what you should have in your bedroom during that time as a servant, you know. There are all kinds of things like that, you know. This is what you SHOULD be doing with your house. So, you know. We will just interpret it as close to that as possible. Like I said, we're not quite there, I'm not sure what exactly, based on the research that scholars have done, that there's anything very specific like, Oh, Mary Mulligan had this specific thing that we want to include. I think we want to include a sewing machine, because we know that she had a seamstress at one point, because she was, you know, sort of a fashionista, she would have clothing made that was likethe style in Europe, she would have her seamstress make them here, for her. So, we wanna do that, but just, we want to, you know, make it look similar to other servants' rooms at the time, so it's a space where we can kind of talk about them.

E: So it's kind of, based on what you know about servants in general, kind of setting that stage and using that to talk about, using real people?

S: Yeah!

E: That's gonna be cool. That's gonna be so. Cool.

S: I knowwwww.

E: And so fun for you too, as like, a collections person, to be able to interior decorate this—

S: So. Fun. Like, jumping into this like, fun projects, has been like, awesome—

E: I want your life. One more year, one more year!

S: You will, you will!

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E: Um, so kind of switching from the servants in the house back to Margaret herself, how would you describe our leading lady, Miss Margaret Brown?

S: Well….I feel like I'm just gonna start repeating myself though!

E: Go for it! That makes it easier for me to transcribe.

S: Oh, ok! Um, how would I describe her...she...well, it sounds like she was, had a very strong personality, she was really willfull, and she, and it sounds like when she wanted something, she went and got it. Like, when she was 18 and ready to be married, she just picked up and moved to Leadville. Because… I mean, there were probably, there WAS better opportunities for a woman to work in Leadville versus on the tobacco fields in Missouri, but it's, I mean, it's pretty cool that she just took a, I mean, you HAVE to have a certain personality to kind of pick up and move out to Leadville in the 19— the 18..70s, it would have been, when this territory was sort of brand new to America. But, what was I gonna say...but yeah, it's interesting how she really wanted to move out there, wanted to get married to someone wealthy, but then she met JJ and decided she just wanted to get married for love, so that was, it's interesting, because she's really, what's that word? Hard-headed, hot, oh—

E: Not hot-headed? Sort of a go-getter?

S: Strong-minded, strong-willed, um…

E: Forceful?

S: Yeah! She was strong-willed, but, you know, she married for love, and she gave to so many charities, she was kind of a, I'm having trouble with words….she was strong-willed, but really seemed to be down to earth, like, she felt that certain causes, it's like she was, she was strong-willed but ended up being a millionaire, but she wasn't necessarily above everyone, like maybe she kind of gave off, cuz I think she sort of gave off that vibe a little bit, that she was, you know, so regal and important, but um, she really felt, you know, she had that kind of background, of being lower-class, and having come up from hardship, that it wasn't really beneath her to fight for miner's rights, and to fight for women's suffrage, and for um, children's rights, and things like that so...um, gosh, it's hard to bunch her all up into a couple, like, words, but...like I said, she was more than just the Unsinkable Molly Brown...she did a lot of very important things, and here in Denver but also in Europe!

E: Driving her ambulances around.

S: Exactly!

E: So, what do you think is the MOST important part of her story?

S: Hmmmm...the MOST important part…

E: I know it's hard to choose. Just like, for you, what do you think is the most important part?

S: The most important thing she DID, or…?

E: I guess really, whatever that means to you. What's the most important part of her story for you?

S: That's an important question. I think...gosh. I'm trying to go through the story in my head...Um….I think the...maybe the most important part is...no, see, no! I don't know! I can't decide what the most important part...but ONE important thing is that, you know, with her experience on the Titanic, um, I think it's very interesting to learn her background coming up to the Titanic to understand the ways that she reacted on the Titanic, and after having survived, and after witnessing this horrible, tragic event, she, you know, she, you know, she made her millions with JJ, and she WAS considered upper class, and she WAS an elite, and she was in the upper class portions, you know, decks of the Titanic, but when she witnesses this tragedy, you could see that, you know, it was her character, and whether it was because she came from humble beginnings or not, she had this character that she, you know, jumped into action to help these people that had lost everything, you know, not only had they lost their belongings, but they had lost their men, who were, you know, the breadwinners, and these third class citizens, I mean third-class passengers, were not citizens, necessarily, a lot of them were coming over to America, and they needed to have money to be able to enter America, and now they had nothing. So it's interesting to see how, you know, with her background and with her life, and all of the things she did in Denver, was doing in Denver, before she got on board the Titanic, she spoke 6 languages, and so she was able to talk to these immigrants and comfort them. She formed the Titanic survivors committee, and with her elite status, kind of forced, almost, these elites to contribute to this cause. And she made a huge difference for them, I'm sure. And I mean, what I think is so cool is that she changed that law that said women and children only, because she saw how horrible this was, that people were just being torn apart, and I think that just has to do with her character. Whether it was that she was brought up that way, or she felt a connection to maybe third-class citizens, passengers, citizens, whoever, um, so...I think, I think it's really one of the most interesting things, one of the most interesting stories about Margaret is what she did after she survived the Titanic, not necessarily that she was ON the Titanic. It's very, kind of admirable what she was able to accomplish afterwards. So.

E: Do you think, do most visitors kind of come here knowing mostly about the Titanic kind of thing, and then all of a sudden kind of like, but wait, there's more!

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S: Yes. It's like, YES it's so cool, that she was on board this amazing, huge ocean liner, and it's horrible that it got hit by this iceberg, and everybody knows that part, and it's amazing that she survived, she's one of the very few survivors, but we do try to stress that there's all, there's this whole other story involved that you totally miss when you just watch the Titanic movie.

E: There's so much more. But wait, there's more!

S: Yeah, exactly!

E: So, just kind of going off describing Margaret Brown, how would you describe women who lived, kind of, during her lifetime? Like, women in general?

S: Um...well..I can't. I can't describe women in general. At any period. Um, I mean, I think she was a little bit different from the vast majority of women during that time. I think she liked to stir things up, I think she liked, it was JJ who said that a woman's only supposed to be in a newspaper three times during her life, but she was in the newspaper every week sometimes.

E: Like always.

S: Yeah. So I think she was, like, popular here in Denver, she was very much into fashion, also, and she, you know, it's, again, the way she handled the Titanic situation, a lot of the elites just felt, you know, the third class passengers, I mean, a lot of the first-class passengers felt that oh, you know, I'm just gonna focus on me right now, and I think a lot of people in general do that, and I think it's not necessarily that during that time, every woman was this way, but she was unique in that she really felt strongly about helping these people. So I mean, it's hard to make a statement about women in general, but I mean, of course it was Victorian and Edwardian times, and it was very, you know, your appearance in society was so important, that I think Margaret was probably a little more robust or something, oh, what's the word, not, well, robust is kind of good, than the other, maybe some of the other women at that time, that were more willing to sit back and let their husbands take care of things. Margaret was not at all like that.

E: Nope. Nope! The best thing that I learned about her out of all of the things about her, or my current thing, is that she took boxing lessons, and would like, work out, like, she could lift—

S: Exactly! Yeah! That's so cool, yeah!

E: So you mentioned before that you did your thesis work with masculinity? So I was wondering if you could kind of define for me femininity? Also, like, I don't know if you, in defining masculinity and things, how would you define these concepts of masculinity, femininity, inininity—

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S: In general?

E: I guess, what's the definition that you worked with when you were doing your work for masculinity?

S: How….it's the way that society or individuals feel that um, ok wait….so, femininity is, in my opinion, the ways that society or individuals...I can't get the words...it's like, the way that they're feeling that, how do I say that??? When someone says this is what a good man is, or a man should do this, or a woman should be this way, that they're defining femininity in a way, or masculinity. So it's the ways that societies or individuals define a good man or a good woman.

E: Ok. Yeah, works for me!

S: Maybe. I don't know. I think? I think that's what I mean?

E: I've looked through so many definitions of this, and they're all like, we don't know! So, I don't know….so what role does stuff play in this? Did objects play? In masculinity or in femininity? Womanhood?

S: I mean...people use stuff to say, I am a good man, I am a good woman, and they identify with things and they use things to identify themselves. So like, for example, when, did you, did you want me to talk about a specific era…?

E: I guess just, whatever you're thinking.

S: Just, in general? You know, when people were travelling from east-west around Colorado Gold Rush period, I'll just revert to that, because that's what I'm thinking of—

E: Go for it!

S: You know, individuals would use, for example, clothing to express how they defined masculinity or femininity. So this woman said that she loved, that her husband wore, she loved how he looked in a suit and a tophat, but then later she said that she loved that he was, she loved that the West made him so carefree, because now he's wearing buckskins, and like moccasins or something, so it was interesting, and the whole idea was that, it wasn't that they were giving up tophats and suits, cuz it was still that she thought that made him look great as a man, but they were also incorporating, it wasn't just one or the other. They really toyed with the idea that a good man in the West could have both, you know what I mean? Could BE both, not both but multiple things, so I guess, they use objects, absolutely! Use objects to define your femininity or masculinity.

E: And is there stuff in the house in particular that you think does that?

S: Define….

E: Maybe that kind of, not defines, but kind of represents masculinity, femininity? Like the objects in the house?

S: During that time?

E: Yeah!

S: Absolutely! Absolutely. I mean, I would say, oh, let's see, we have a pretty big fashion collection, I know, and we just got a grant to rehouse the whole, we didn't just get the grant, but we just finished off the grant, finished up with the whole rehousing of that fashion collection, and I think we felt that fashion was important because Margaret felt that fashion was important, very, very important, so Margaret used dresses and hats and accessories to say this is, I'm, this is me being the type of woman that I want to be, this is me defining my own femininity. And we definitely try to incorporate that fashion side in the house, although we don't own, unfortunately, any of HER things, so far as fashion, we, you know, we set up mannequins with dresses, and we put out shoes and hats and things to kind of show what, what a woman during that time would have worn, so, you know, they're all dresses from that time period. So um, and then….oh let me think...I mean, maybe that's going off topic. Anyway, that's going off topic. But yeah, we do try to. Definitely.

E: Is there anything else that's kind of on display in house that does the same thing? Besides like, clothing aspects. What's the other stuff in the house that you feel kind of does that?

S: Hmmmm…I mean, it, it, I think people, if they look in the bedrooms of Margaret and Helen, they look very different from JJ and Larry's bedrooms. It's defining all of the objects that are creating a certain look that sort of encompass, and you know a lot of those bedrooms were photographed during Margaret's time, and we really do try to match the photographs to, to show what they looked like during the Browns' time. But they absolutely create that feeling of, these two bedrooms, that are masculine bedrooms, were...they had a certain style, and these two bedrooms are completely different, because they were more feminine, quote unquote. So.

E: What do you think that difference is? Like, you know, what about Margaret and Helen's rooms seem more feminine compared to Larry and JJ's rooms?

S: Well….it's the way that they, so I, I mean that I think society defines what that is, and individuals define what that is, so um, it's clear that during the period that Margaret lived in the house, um, I would say, it's maybe subtle, like, materials are different, and patterns of, like the wallpapers are different, the shapes of the beds are different, Helen has this

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really, like, kind of grand, flowy, uh, words are hard! Like, billowy sort of look to her canopy bed? But JJ's bed is sort of, less detailed, or something. Maybe less...it's just different. It's hard to pinpoint. It's a good question.

E: It just FEELS different somehow?

S: Exactly. What they were, you know, I'm sure they had their exact— dolies were only supposed to go in a woman's room, or something. I'm sure they had their rules. But it's hard to pinpoint what made a man a man, versus what made a woman a woman during that time.

E: It's like a, know it when you see it sort of thing?

S: Kind of. Yeah. But there's always people that push that, and people that didn't totally conform to that.

E: Do you think that Margaret was one of those people?

S: Um….yup, she was. I don't think she was completely off the charts. I think she was, she definitely pushed the envelope like I said, by not necessarily letting JJ do all the work and she would just sit quietly— which is what some of the, probably a lot of women did at that time, but I don't think she was just completely not a proper woman at the time, I think she was very much a proper woman at the time, definitely not your typical woman, I guess. These are good questions! It's hard to...they're really philosophical things to think about, you know?

E: Yeah, I know! It's what my past year has been.

S: Like, WAS Margaret any different from other women? Well, yes, different than some, maybe not different than others….
E: Yeah. She's an interesting lady. You know, in all respects.

S: Yeah! For sure.

E: Well, that is all of my long list of interrogation questions for you, so thank you so much for letting me pick your brain, I could talk about this stuff all—

S: Definitely!

E: Definitely. I was mentally going like, ohhhh yes the whole time you were talking—

S: Yeah!

Interviewer: Emily Starck
Interviewee: Andrea Malcomb
Date: 8/25/2016
Duration: 38:12

E: All right, today is August 25th, 2016, and if you could state your name please?

A: Andrea Malcomb, museum director at the Molly Brown House Museum!

E: Beautiful! And how long have you been in your position at the Molly Brown House Museum?

A: I've been the director since 2009, but I've been employed at Historic Denver with the Molly Brown House since 1999.

E: Ok. And what did you do in that previous position?

A: I was visitor services coordinator, but at that time we called it museum store manager. But i was in charge of selling tour tickets, assisting guests, purchasing merchandise for the store, etc.

E: Gotcha. And what led you to transition from that position to the one that you're in right now?

A: We did a sort of temporary interim position, and I was the director of operations for about a year, because I'd been here so long already and we had extensive staff turnover, I had sort of the greatest institutional knowledge at that point, of what it takes to run the museum, so I transitioned to director of operations for about a year, year and a half, and then once we got staff settled in and had some new positions shake out, transitioned it to just museum director title.

E: Gotcha. And, speaking of knowing what it takes to run a museum, what DOES it take to run a museum?

A: It takes passion and dedication, and a willingness to...face it all, and be willing to do it all. I recently wrote a paper for a museum professionals class I took in, museum professionals and historic organizations, and my whole paper was sort of centered around a management coin, sort of? Like if you think of a, um, if you have two sides of a coin, you have one, like it's bogged down in day-to-day tasks and operations and gets easily side-railed by, you know, oh, a guest just fainted in the dining room, or this didn't show up, or this happened, versus the other side of the coin, where you need to do the long-term visioning, and planning with the big picture in mind, and in my article I talked about how so often that big picture side of the coin is glued down to the ground with glue, with

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gum, and you as the museum director, you're the one stuck scraping up that poor coin from the floor, cuz that's what museum directors do, it's everything.

E: Yeah, you wear every single hat! It's a good metaphor, I like that a lot. So, um, then, are those sort of your main responsibilities, sort of balancing the day to day with the long-term sorts of goals?

A: So, yeah, overseeing the entire operational budget for the museum, short-term and long-term planning, making sure the rest of the staff has the resources needed to do their jobs, making sure that the museum is well taken care of from a physical standpoint, in that our guests, that we're meeting our best customer service, so overseeing all of that and having that big picture in mind while taking care of the day-to-day.

E: Gotcha. And you mentioned kind of taking care of that visitor experience? For you, what kind of goes into creating a good visitor experience here?

A: I think number one is just having the right people in place, from having a good volunteer and event coordinator overseeing the volunteers, making sure we have a happy and actively-engaged volunteer pool, but for us we have to supplement that with paid docents, because with volunteer pools sort of shrinking as a national trend, with retirees not really retiring anymore, for health reasons etc, we do hire paid docents to help fill in the schedule, so overseeing those paid docents just to be sure they're receiving the best training, and then presenting themselves and the museum in the best light and giving them the content we want them to deliver on the tour. And then overseeing the visitor services staff, so that from front to end of their experience, that they're being met and treated well.

E: All right, so based on your past experience here and all these different positions, what changes do you think are coming up for the museum in the future?

A: We are at an awesome tipping point right now, we have, so many things are falling into place since I've started here as museum director, from the very first words I uttered when I was officially the director was we need to undergo a capital campaign, and everyone around me kind of fainted and fell on the floor, so from that point in 2009 when I uttered those words, til 2014, it took us that long to sort of get comfortable with the concept, go through the strategic planning necessary to have a good foundation to undertake a capital campaign, and then doing a feasibility study to finally actually LAUNCHING the campaign in late 2014, and now here we are less than 2 years later with 100% fundraising success. And we've managed to raise $2 million in 2 years, which a million of that is going to capital restoration for the [unintelligible 5:20] museum, which is going to allow us to open up new spaces, and capture more visitor-services oriented spaces as well as interpretive spaces, so we'll be able to offer more amenities, better amenities to our guests as well as tell more stories, like the servants' quarters, so we'll be able to talk about the servant's lives, that worked for the Browns as well as what

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it was like to be in domestic service at the turn of the last century is shifting, you know, roles were happening in labor at the time, so, putting that all in place, we're also working on becoming physically acceptable to those in wheelchairs and other apparatus, so I mean, all of those are huge game-changers, especially for a historic house museum. So new tours, new spaces, new interpretations...we have to put all that into place. So that takes evaluation, that takes pre-planning, um, to make that all happen. So, that's what's gonna roll out for us in the next two years. Yeah.

E: Whoo! Well congratulations, oh my god! How do you learn, like, when you said oh we need to do a capital campaign, how did you personally know what went into that? I've always been curious….

A: I didn't really...but like, it's a lot of self-learning, going through organizations' records, were capital campaigns have been undertaken before, what steps and strategies, and then really it came down to finding a consultant, talking to other organizations that have recently undergone a capital campaigns, what worked, what didn't work, did you use a consultant, did you not use a consultant, and it really came down to use a consultant, and they will help guide you in putting the foundation down. And they really just get you to the point where you start raising money, and then they walk away and like a child, you're on your own for the first time! And you're actually, you're the ones that raise that money. So, yeah. Yep.

E: Ok, yeah. As an aspiring professional I've always wondered how, how you know all these things? Do you get your degree and they're like ALL RIGHT, here's all the secret knowledge, here you go!

A: The secret knowledge! Yeah, no, no secret knowledge, just lots of work!

S: Hey, sorry to interrupt! Did you order a pest control guy?

A: No, did he just show up again? They're supposed to schedule, is he here for pigeon-baiting, or is he here for pests?

S: No clue!

A: Where does he want to go?

S: I don't know, I haven't gone down yet.

A: Ok, and is it Presto-X? That would be the other, Presto-X is who we contract with, they do the outside, sort of spraying? And then they, the only thing they go inside for is to do the pigeon-baiting, and then we take them up to the third floor and we open the balcony door, and they put the crazy corn out for pigeon-baiting.

S: Weird. Ok! All right!

A: Let me know if you need help!

E: Here we see executive director wearing multiple hats simultaneously! Pigeon— crazy corn?

A: Yeah, basically it's a hallucinogenic corn that makes them forget where they sort of live and hang out? So they just sort of fly off and they don't remember where they were! And they don't come back.

E: That is the best thing I've ever heard! Oh my god, that's wonderful! Log— logging that away for the future! Um, so you kind of addressed this a little bit before in your previous answers, but what goals do you have personally for your work in this position in the museum?

A: I think it's really just elevating the museum in the community, and showcasing us as a community resource, and for me personally that means stepping outside of my comfort zone, and being more active in the community, and more vocal in the community, making sure I'm at different community meetings, and all of that. It's hard to make sure my time is there to be able to do that, you know, not being chained to my desk, not being busy raising funds or taking care of daily operations, that I'm building that into my time. So there's sort of a secret in the museum community that 60% of your time as museum director should not, should be spent away from the museum and in the community, and that's definitely not where I'm at, so I'd like to be closer to that goal, so.

E: Gotcha. And what members of the community specifically are you reaching out to, are you building connections with?

A: Um, number one is just building connections with partner organizations, you know, with like institutions, cultural institutions with being an SCFD tier 3 organization, that really allows us to network with all the other Tier 3s, and create creative partnerships around programming, um, and then we also work with different, you know, public-private partnerships like um, Community Resource Center, which is an offshoot of Denver Public Schools, which takes care of sort of their school trip planning and things like that, working with groups like ArtReach that help kiddos get into cultural institutions, um, and then working with public entities, whether it's the landmark commissioner at City Council, or you know, in policy-making things, working with government institutions or tourism bureaus, just sort of all of those different facets. Yeah.

E: Ok, gotcha. I noticed the first time I walked over here that there's that street sign that says, you know, like Cap Hill Neighborhood Association The Unsinkables, is that just kind of a nickname that they've kind of adopted?

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A: Yeah, they've been around for quite a long time, so they're sort of self-charged with monitoring the neighborhood, so their members actually patrol the neighborhood at night, um, just walk around, talk to people, that's just to be sort of a deterrent, as well as be sort of welcoming, so. Yeah.

E: Ok. It seems that there's a real sense of community pride in having this space here, having this story here? Everyone seems really proud of it.

A: Yeah! Yeah. So we are, we consider ourselves to sort of be the gem in Capitol Hill, we're in an unexpected place and in an unexpected way, in an unexpected block, certainly. So that makes us difficult to find sometimes? But that's ok, um, but there's definitely been so many changes in Capitol Hill over the past 20 years that I think we can serve as that anchor for the neighborhood in keeping its identity as so much change happens in the city.

E: Yeah, uh, it's kind of, my first time visiting over here I did have a little difficulty finding my way around, but just because I'm unfamiliar with Denver, but then when I did find the house, it found like a real, like whoa, there it is! It felt like a big reveal, sort of.

A: Like, we're not on a block filled with other remarkable, Victorian-era homes where we would just sort of blend in? So unfortunately because of urban renewal, we're the last house standing, but that makes for a good story as well.

E: Um, so what would you….how would you characterize the visitors that typically come to the museum?

A: I mean we definitely have a—

S: Sorry to interrupt again!

A: No no, it's ok!

S: He's just walking around the exterior and inspecting? Is that—

A: Yeah, there's mice traps they usually have to rebait, and things like that. But they're not allowed to like, spray the house.

S: Ok, ok! I will let him know! Thank you!

A: Like, they can spray, but they can't spray THE HOUSE. Kay! Sorry! What was the question?

E: Oh! Uhhhhh….what was the question...oh! What types of visitors do you normally get?

A: Oh! We definitely have a demographic that is attracted to the museum, and it's typically the sort of 45-55 year old white female? And I think that's really because that's when Margaret was seemingly her most powerful, and I think they are inspired by her and drawn by her as a fellow female role model? And a source of empowerment. And it just resonates easier with someone like that. But historic house museums in general have a fairly typical visitorship of sort of that middle-ages, wealthier demographic, um, for us I think we have a pretty diverse visitorship, and for us I think we'd like to be more diverse than it is, but we're trying to find ways to make it more diverse. But we have onsite about 45,000 visitors a year who come here to take tours, or to participate in an event, and it runs a whole range from the 10,000+ third- and fourth-graders that we deal with every year, to the, you know, the hundreds of people that come each year for our young professionals happy hour, so we're really working on diversifying, you know, the age groups and demographics that are coming, so, yeah.

E: Ok. And do you think that most of these visitors are coming with some preexisting knowledge about Margaret? About her time?

A: Definitely! Lots of survey work over the years, just getting to understand our audience better and getting to understand what preconceived ideas they have when they come to the museum. Are you, are you interested in a guided tour or self-guided tour? Well most people self-select that it's gonna be a guided tour, cuz they know most historic house museums it's a guided tour, and you know, they have heard of Mrs. Brown in some capacity, whether it's the Unsinkable Molly Brown play and movie, or it's the '97 James Cameron Titanic film, so then Kathy Bates resignates more with them. Or you know, whatever sort of their notion is of Margaret Brown? Most often it's that mythical Molly Brown that they're aware of? So we're charged with, by the time they leave, they're gung-ho for the real Margaret Tobin Brown.

E: Ok, gotcha. So what, you mentioned the movie and the musicals and things, what are the most, what are these preconceived ideas that people are bringing here about Margaret?

A: I— I say the number one thing about Margaret that people think about her is that she's unaccepted. That she was socially unaccepted and that was, from what we can discern, absolutely not true. Upon moving here to Denver, she was very socially active, she was able to rally hundreds of people to donate millions of dollars to different causes, and helped jump-start reform here in Denver, so she was really active and outspoken. I think those notions of being unaccepted are that, those notions of old money versus new money, you know, Catholic vs Protestant and all of that that existed at that time, I mean, she was outside of all of that. I mean, she didn't have TIME for that, so I mean I think a lot of people want to put her in that unaccepted bucket, I think they want to put her in the uneducated bucket, so we're able to just amaze them when we tell them that she was able to continue her own education, you know, as well as fostering her children's education in

that she came from a background of education, so that this was just something that she was continuing on with her own life and her own children's lives, I think she was able to accomplish so much in relatively a short amount of time, I mean, 40 years, 45 years, that's huge! That's what's inspiring about her story, and I think people are so pleasantly surprised when they leave, that they DIDN'T hear a story about her firing a gun in her bloomers in the lifeboat, and she didn't burn her money in the stove, that the real story's SO much better.

E: Yeah. It really is. Coming, coming to this myself and not having any background, even in the myths or anything, it's still really interesting to learn even the myths, and think, this is where it came from, this is what really happened.

A: Yeah. And when I started here 17 years ago, I think there definitely was, all of the visitors were grounded in the MYTH, but since I've been here in this time, I've seen that more and more visitors, there's a tip, there's a shift happening. More and more visitors are coming with at least the basic understanding that the myth exists, but that she doesn't fit the myth. And so they already kind of, well she wasn't called Molly in her lifetime, was she? She was called Margaret! And she managed to accomplish this, so there, the shift is happening, which is awesome. Which means we're doing our jobs and getting the real story out there, which means they're just coming to find out how awesome she really is, they already know she's awesome in that she doesn't fit the myth, but let's find out how awesome. So it's nice to see that shift over the years.

E: And where do you think that shift is coming from?

A: Hopefully from us! Hopefully we're getting it out there, you know, serving school kids over the past 15 to 20 years, the sheer number of visitors we've had in the last 15, 20 years, when I've started, we were in the process of getting several grants, we've gotten a National Endowment for the Humanities, uh, planning grant that allowed us to convene a huge scholar planning roundtable, which allowed us to really assess the tour that we were doing to make sure that it wasn't still embedded in those myths, and really assessing our volunteer tours, really making sure every single person who was giving tours, to really sort of put an end to the myth-making, to perpetuating those stories ourselves. And then working outwardly to make sure all press, all sort of communication is also debunking, sort of, you know, muting that myth, and then we've been building on that ever since. Especially with that Kristen Iversen book, using that new scholarship, um, and then 20087 NEH Interpretive Grant allowed us to put in an exhibit and a film about Mrs. Brown that allowed us to put it in sort of an international context? And understand why she's this great focusing lens of her time. You can take her story and sort of overlay it over the industrial, um, you know, changes, on labor reform, on civic activism, there are so many things we can take her story, use her as a way to drill down, so since then been able to get all those additional stories out there, and then exhibits as well, we've really in the last 10 years stepped up our exhibit game. When I started there was really no such thing as exhibits here? Um, so we do rotating and new exhibits, where we take one of

those smaller topics and themes and we really explore it. We call it pulling a thread, so we pull that thread out of her story and see what happens, see how we can apply it the larger historical context, and then draw it forward, and how can we draw it forward and make it relevant to today's audiences.

E: Awesome. Is that what was in that back porch area, with the Titanic things? Is that part of that?

A: Sorry, yeah, so that space we used to completely dedicate to exhibits, when that one back room was still separate from the rest of the museum, we used to be able to do exhibits out there all the time. So now we're having to rethink again how are we going to do exhibits, now that there's no discrete space to sort of leave people in? So.

E: Ok. So, uh, you mentioned that, you know, part of your emphasis now is debunking those myths, this is what you might know, this is what really happened, so, in the museum's early days, did they kind of run with these myths?

A: Yeah, uh, there was still no, when she died in 1932, there was the obituaries, one that pretty much got the story right, the second one that pretty much started all the myths? But even the stories that surrounded her when she was alive, the press tells stories, we know about the fabrication of stories today that happens in the media. And she was never one to sort of put a kabash on it really? Cuz she was sort of all press is good press, you know? And after she died that media became short stories, and serials in newspapers, and that led to the play, and that led to the movie, and it was literally less than 40 years later that this place was becoming a museum, and there's, the people that came of age when the myth was being formed was the people who were the first visitors, so the first people who first volunteers, and the people shaping how the museum was, so that myth component just found its way into the tours, into the interpretation that was happening, because the research hadn't been done yet on who she really was, and it took a long time! I mean, when I started here in the late 90s, this sort of core biography that we recommended to our visitors was STILL embedded with fab— with poor, oh what's the word, with not so much the myths, but it was getting there. That it still was mostly based in myth, not fact. So a lot of just, making assumptions that wound up not being true.

E: So y'all are kind of, myth busters these days, like?

A: Yes! Yes. Yeah, and I think we're coming out of our mythbusting days. I think we've done such a good job that mythbusting is still always going to be a part of what we do? But I think now it's just celebrating her story and how we can relate to her story, and the important lessons embedded in her story, so it's nice to have the mythbusting be only a portion of that. It seems that that's sort of behind us now.

E: Yeah, it seems from the tours, the tourguides will touch on some of these things saying, does anybody or has anyone heard this bit, but then they devote most of their time to this other information.

A: Yeah, yeah. We're just finding the audiences who grew up with the myths, and the musical, and the movie, they're mainly dying off! You know, so we have whole new generations for whom they don't have that in their cultural consciousness.

E: Gotcha. In full confession, I haven't seen the musical yet.

A: It's ok!

E: Or even the Titanic movie from '97….so, uh, I feel like I should, just to get the full picture here, to get the full, untainted perspective at best at this point. So, with all the myths, the legends, and everything, could you give me some words, just some adjectives that describe Margaret for you?

A: To me, she's unstoppable. When she sort of set her mind to doing something, she most of the time saw it through. She's very driven and passionate, I think she, she just had a great social conscious that just drove her, that said if I don't do it, who will? To me she's just, that's what makes her remarkable. Because for all of us, it's so easy for us to just sit back and see the world unfold on our facebook feed and see that Louisiana's flooding, or that Italy's had an earthquake, or that there was a bombing in Paris, or whatever horrible thing is happening in the world? We have that safety of remove that allows us to sit back and think, this doesn't affect me, so I don't have to get involved or concerned. But then you think back 100+ years ago, she didn't have a facebook feed in front of her face. She had newspapers and telegrams, and these sort of removed second and third hand accounts, and who knows if the media was getting the story right, but she just knew that something was happening that she had to get involved and help make right. She had this sense, that this was something that needed to be fixed, whether it was the Ludlow massacre, or it's, you know, you know, women getting the right to vote on a federal level, or looking around in Denver and seeing orphans on the street who are starving and you know, things needed to be done, and she had the capacity. So why shouldn't she step in and do something to make a change? Whereas we're all sort of, it's easy for us to sit back and sort of, who am I? I don't have the capacity to make change. Well it's like, but you do! We all have the capacity, we just have to have the fire and the will to do it! So.

E: Do you think most other women who were alive at the same time, were they different from Margaret? How would you describe—

A: I wouldn't say most, I think Margaret is definitely, you know, not your average, typical woman for the time, but there was a whole, sort of cadre women, of her peers who were very socially conscious and active, and you know she ran with women like Ann Morgan, and Mrs. William K. Vanderbilt, and Alva Belmont, who were certainly women

of means, not all of them were, if you look at Mother Jones or Alice Paul, you know, those women, they were women who were in the trenches, who were the ones working in the orphanages, working in the settlement houses like Jane Addams Hull, so from every strata of social class, there was this whole cadre of amazing women who, I don't have to stay at home, I don't have to raise children, I don't have to be the spirit guide for my, you know, the spiritual guide for my family. I can make a difference in the world, and I can travel independently, I can have my own money, I can fire a gun, I can ride a horse, I can drive a car! The I can do this, versus being a we, or a part of a family, that shift, there was definitely a group of women who went against those social conventions, and Victorian conscriptions for womanhood, so. Margaret was ONE of them, but we like to use her as a good example.

E: This makes me want to stop this interview and just go outside and fix something! Like, ok, who out here needs some social justice! Um, let's see...so, would you say that that's sort of, the most important takeaway from her story? Or are there other things that you think are more important for visitors to take away from their time here?

A: I think the most important thing is that you can make a difference, that Margaret was able to make a difference, regardless, to me her story's awesome because it didn't matter whether or not she would have had money, because even before she was wealthy, she had that drive and ambition to make a change because that was the environment she was raised in by her parents, and she was coming of age at the end of the Civil War, and the whole world was changing around them as a family in the middle of the United States, and, you know, she was raised on that ethic, and she took it and made it into something amazing as an adult, and even in Leadville before they made their money, she was active in sort of labor causes and the suffrage movement, and she would have continued that regardless of their social class. That doesn't need, the money doesn't need to be a barrier. And I think that's what I would like to impart. That it doesn't need to be your class, it doesn't, your background, it doesn't matter your economic status, you can make a difference!

E: And touching off the idea of social class, why is it important that we include, do you consider it important that we include that in what the tour guides are talking about, and how you're opening up the servants' quarters and things, is it an important thing that people take away?

A: I think it definitely is. I think class issue is something we avoid like the plague in the United States, and because we don't want to sort of imprint these perceived European social issues on our own problems, but it exists to me, and they're there, and you know, as we're struggling with the 1% in America and the wealthiest people taking the most resources, and CEOs giving themselves 6000% pay raises, while they're not willing to pay their workers $12 an hour, so there's definitely labor issues mixed with class issues. And those social strata, they exist, and to ignore them is not providing a full picture of the story.

E: Yeah, I'm excited to see how opening up that part of the house changes— -

A: Yeah, Mrs. Brown was definitely, she was a great employer, so she had a better rate of pay! She gave them better benefits, you know, so she was known to be a great employer. So what does that mean, given that they were a wealthy family, not Carnegie wealthy, they weren't Rockefeller wealthy, so they still managed to have a great group of people working for them and a great rate of pay.

E: Yeah, gotcha. I kind of, I was reading her docu— not documentary, her biography, and they touched on that a little bit. I was just thinking, wow, it would be so interesting to see those spaces and things. Is there anything, like I know that this space that we're in right now, the carriage house, had housed servants at one point, are you, like obviously you can't move everything in here, but are you just gonna kinda, just talk about that?

A: Mhmm, yeah. So we're gonna physically op
en up the 3rd floor servants', one of the rooms up on the 3rd floor that most likely would have been the servants' bedrooms, that space we'll open up, so between that space, the servants' stairs themselves, and then the kitchen, we'll be able to sort of talk about all those activities, and sort of who was doing them and when.

E: And why do you think it's important to open up those spaces and tell those stories in and using those spaces instead of just keeping it closed off and talking about it elsewhere?

A: Cuz without sort of being about to visual— I mean, we're all tactile learners. So having, getting actually to go up to the 3rd floor, which is a HUGE thing for our guests, they're so interested in, what's on the 3rd floor, so having finally to have that opportunity to go up on the third floor and actually see that space, that's the only way you can picture yourself as being that person at that time, is by literally putting yourself in their shoes and in their space, and doing some of their activities and seeing those objects, you can have that more sensory experience. It's just that if you haven't seen it, it's harder to visualize it.

E: That's one thing people ask on every tour I've shadowed, like oh can we go up there? And everyone's very like oh, we wish we could, but one day, and people's eyes just light up, so.

A: And that one day is finally coming!

E: Yay! So close! All right then, my last question is kind of an aside, but you had mentioned at the beginning of our talk that you were, you used to be in charge of like, gift shop oversight and things? So how did you choose what you stocked your shop with?

A: Yeah, um, that was, I was talking to Eileen, who's now in that position the other day, and just kind of walking her through, you know, what to plan for, what to expect, things like that, and it really took me 4 years, I think, before I was really comfortable with and confident with making the best selections and understanding the visitors, but also, it has to be fluid. You have to change as the trends change, and things like that, and I think it really is just finding the things that relate to the experience that they just had in the museum, whether it's a near direct replica of something they just saw, or whether it just evokes the same time period or same feeling that they got while in the house, and something that just helps them connect back with the story and remember their time here, and I think that's what's most important as, as, for a takeaway, rather than something they can get at any other store, so, yeah. Um, I think we've been able to, for quite a long time, have that good mix, and of course with all the Titanic stuff it all comes about pretty easy, yeah. So I was doing all that while I was also going to school full time, so I was working here full time while I was putting myself through school, and studied, um, women's history and art theory and criticism, so I think that's been a good combination for me, while also working here full time and sort of able to pull it all together, so by the time I stepped in to director of observations and then to director, I had a level of comfort with just, what it takes to open the doors in the morning, to sell tickets, to get people on the tours, and then I've just been so blessed to have that opportunity to just stay here as the director and just grow as a professional, and have a better understanding of the museum field as a whole in general, and then specifically how to apply those emerging trends to us here, especially as a historic house museum which, we face challenges unlike other museums, a lot of working with historic house museum peers and making connections through organizations like AASLH, um, and um, really just making sure we're staying true to Margaret's story but evolving and being relevant for our guests.

E: Sure! And I, I lied. Actual last question. So how did your academic/education background, working with art criticism, women's history and things, how did, how has that informed your time and your work here?

A: I've always been a very visual person, so for me, that was just a natural, to sort of study art, but for me, it's, there's, there's the aesthetic purpose of art, but then there's the social purpose of art and the social function, and what role does art, and social history, and material culture mean for us, and I think that really just helped me have a good foundation of, understanding what role art and material culture plays in society and how we can use it was a tool to shape our future decision-making, without history we have nothing to help guide us in our future decision-making, so I love being able to be a historian, but also being able to keep sort of my roots in material culture and art and art history, and just being able to pull all of that together.

E: And what is the stuff in Margaret's house, the "stuff", what does that do for visitors?

A: It's just, it's how they can relate, because they have a bed in their house, and they have clothes, and they have dressers, but theirs are different, and how are they different,

and why have we changed over time? Why don't we all have those funny little fainting couches in our bedrooms, and why don't we have that weird gadget in our kitchen anymore and instead we have a microwave? How did Mrs. Brown use these things, or how did the rest of the people in the house use them to support the activities that we're doing, because we can picture ourselves in our own house, but then how do we step out of our house and make those differences in the world? And you can have all of those same things in your house and still make those differences. And make an impact.

E: Well with that beautiful quote, which is going into my thesis, thank you so much for sitting down and talking with me today—

A: You're welcome! I thought we would be an hour! Do you have more questions?

E: Well I could! But knowing that you have 600 different hats, I don't want to completely exhaust you!