THE FUTURE OF HISTORY: IT'S ALL ABOUT THE WEB

by

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The Future of History: It’s all about the Web

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Master of Arts
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ABSTRACT

THE FUTURE OF HISTORY: IT’S ALL ABOUT THE WEB

Jessica Pritchard, M.A.

George Mason University, 2010

Thesis Director: Dr. Doug Eyman

This thesis explores the rhetoric of online history exhibits and the methods historians employ to translate the physical into the virtual. I begin by explaining the evolving relationship between history and digital technologies, more specifically the relationship between history and the web. The data for my study come from six interviews with historians who work and conduct research in both physical and virtual museum exhibits in institutions in the greater Washington, D.C. area: Timothy Grove from the National Air and Space Museum; Sharon Leon from the Center for History and New Media (CHNM); Nicole Osier from the Civil War Preservation Trust; and Laura O’Hara, Kathleen Johnson, and Matthew Wasniewski from the Clerk’s Office of History and Preservation. The latter half of my study investigates the pedagogical extension of these online historical museum exhibits and the ways in which historians see their digital work aligning with teacher’s curricula.
1. Introduction

History can often be a tough discipline to teach, especially at the secondary education level because many students have difficulty grasping the importance of the past and understanding how it fits into their day-to-day lives. For instance, Kathleen Johnson, a former history teacher who is now the Historical Publication Specialist for the U.S. Clerk’s Office of History and Preservation, reflects, “When I was teaching, a lot of my students would be turned off because they thought history was something that didn’t connect with their own lives.” However, history has the power of artifacts and primary sources that help engage students and bring the past to a more personal level; so when students can see artifacts or primary sources, the past suddenly becomes the present rather than some foreign entity from yesteryear.

Enhancing history’s lessons with these artifacts and primary sources, Johnson adds, allow students to make “some kind of family connection, personal connection,” and hopefully “they’ll start to find history more exciting and more interesting.” Furthermore, when it comes to history, teachers can integrate the element of imagination to grab students’ attention and make the subject more engaging. Albert Bushnell Hart, a former American Historical Association (AHA) president, discussed this relationship between history and imagination in a speech given at the annual AHA meeting in 1909:
A little imagination helps one to sympathize with the great men of the past; to understand the limitations of their surroundings. At every turn, whether you consider the field of the historian; the scope of history, the historical method or the purpose of history, one finds this impotence of facts taken by themselves, this infusion of a shadowy something which may be called sentiment, or the ideal, or spirit, or imagination. (Hart 1909)

Because young students are more apt to connect to history via people and narratives, it is this human element that allows teachers to inspire students to delve into the past and make these personal connections that help history truly come alive. As Hart explains, imagination opens the door to scripting stories to accompany history lessons. Something as simple as seeing a dilapidated building, or smelling the remnants of a wood fire, or feeling the floorboards of an old house can awaken the senses and allow students to imagine what people in the textbook might have been feeling and thinking.

Hart later says in that same speech, “There is no great history without large imagination” (Hart 1909), but how does this imagination translate a century later in what is now becoming an ever-expanding digital world? How does the teaching of history translate online? Furthermore, how do historians disseminate history’s lessons to a broad, unknown online audience? It is important to note that the web does not replace physical artifacts and primary sources, but rather serves as an alternative venue on which to represent these artifacts and primary sources. This new venue supports a new type of historical inquiry that now affords a greater circulation of artifacts and primary sources, albeit digital representation, which are the objects that help teach history’s lessons.
This study, in the broadest sense, will explore the rhetorical methods historians utilize when creating digital history exhibits and how rhetorical invention unfolds when historians transfer history into a digital medium. I will investigate online exhibits from the Smithsonian, the U.S. Clerk’s Office of History and Preservation, the Civil War Preservation Trust, and the Center for History and New Media, as well as interview the historians behind these digital operations.

This paper will unfold as follows: I will begin by setting the historic backdrop of an evolving relationship between history and technology, as well as the gradual transferring of history’s objects—artifacts and primary sources—to the web. I will then introduce the institutions and the corresponding historians whose digital historical research I investigated. From here, I delve into the rhetorical invention of digital history exhibits and the masterminds who create them, getting a better understanding of how historians anticipate their audience and create exhibits accordingly.

The second part of this paper will focus on the implementation and extension of these digital history exhibits into the classroom. I look at the ways in which these exhibits promote imagination by supplying primary sources and encouraging students to become historians, allowing them to “enjoy a historian's sense of discovery as they learn about the past by actively examining places to gather information, form and test hypotheses, piece together ‘the big picture,’ and bridge the past to the present” (Teaching with Historic Places). After all, part of making history come alive involves turning a classroom full of students into a classroom full of young historians who investigate the past, not merely memorize the facts.
2. The History of Digital History

“Digital history,” according to John Lee (2002), “is the study of the past using a variety of electronically reproduced primary source texts, images, and artifacts as well as the constructed history narratives, accounts, or presentations that result from digital history inquiry” (p. 504). This contemporary term—digital history—applies to many things in the field, from digital archives, to photographic galleries, to audio and visual collections, to podcasts of history lectures and notable historic figures. Another article written by John Lee and W. Guy Clarke (2004) says, “The Web’s unique features allow site developers to incorporate multiple sources of text, still images, video, and audio, as well as nonlinear approaches to presenting and teaching historical interpretation” (p. 86). The use of digital outlets creates a more engaging and interactive medium for students, teachers, historians, and enthusiasts to connect with the past.

To better frame my research, the following sections explain the evolution of digital history, from its origination in the 1960s and 70s, to its current use in classrooms across the country.

The Once Upon a Time of Digital History

There was once a time when historians grappled with their place in academe—were they aligned with the humanities or with the social sciences? Orville Burton (2005)
says, “It is interesting to note, history as a discipline has long been divided as to whether it belonged to the humanities or the social sciences” (The Growing Field of Digital History section, para. 2). In the 1960s and 70s, when computers were making their debut in realms outside of the military and government, historians quickly realized that the use of computers offered a new arena in which to interact with texts and discover new methods of historical inquiry, hence broadening their research. Burton (2005) explains one of the facets that contributed to historians’ shift to the humanities: “It is the computer, which some traditional narrative historians despised in the 1960s and 70s because a group of so-called historians used it for quantitative analysis, that has moved history as a discipline firmly into the humanities and away from the modeling and quantitative techniques generally associated with social sciences” (The Growing Field of Digital History section, para. 2). Because computers were stereotyped as instruments used to organize quantitative data, many historians initially had difficulty understanding the practicality and applicability of the computer in their disciplinary research; however, moving into the early 1980s, “historians were beginning to develop courses using the computer and census information to teach students how to do history” (Burton, 2005, The Growing Field of Digital History section, para. 1) because computers encouraged a more interactive forum in which to learn beyond textbooks.

In the 1990s schools and universities began seeing the implementation of technology in the classroom. In his 1997 article, “Who Built America in the Classroom,” Bill Friedheim engages in a conversation about what was then innovative technology: the CD-Rom. Furthermore, his discussion stretches into the role of the CD-Rom in the
researching and teaching of history. Friedheim (1997) covers the list of pros of CD-Roms: “Bits travel the internet across international borders at the speed of light; facilitate interaction between producers and receivers of information; are easily revised, corrected, updated, linked, expanded, manipulated, and re-formulated; and translate into many different shapes and media-text, audio, pictures and moving images” (p. 69). All of the pros Freidheim discusses still apply to the work of historians today, but the list has grown and continues to grow; these pros are also evident in technologies other than CD-Roms, but Freidheim’s discussion offers a splice of time in the evolution of technology and history.

Freidheim’s primary focus in the CD-Rom discussion is “Who built America? From the Centennial Exposition of 1876 to the Great War of 1914,” created by Roy Rosenzweig, Steve Brier, and Josh Brown in 1993. This CD-Rom, which originated in print form, was one of the first widely known and distributed pieces of digital scholarship that helped teachers make history come alive. Freidheim (1997) explains that while he still had a bias towards the physical book—“the green day-glo highlights” and “the sensual, tactile qualities of the book” (p. 70)—he feels that the electronic version of the book (i.e. the CD-Rom) offers “an invaluable tool for teaching history” (p. 70). He chose to use the CD-Rom in conjunction with the physical text:

Used in tandem with the print version, it enables students to demystify the historian's craft by opening an archive that suggests the richness and complexity of human interaction and historical evidence. That archive, when used properly, becomes history as inquiry rather than history as received knowledge…The CD-
ROM invites students through hypertext to interpret and link human experience, and to interrogate historical sources that come in many different shapes and forms: oral, visual; moving and still. By studying political tracts, deciphering economic and demographic data, sampling songs, movies, advertisements, comics, vaudeville routines and other variants of an emerging consumer culture, and listening to the diverse voices of ordinary and extraordinary Americans, students can bring drama and context to history in sound, images, events, objects and popular icons. (p. 70)

Though written over a decade ago, Freidheim summarizes the benefits of technology in the researching and teaching of history that are still very much current, from promoting historical inquiry, to shaping history’s dramas in a more interactive manner, taking them beyond the textbook. I will revisit these benefits in the discussion of my study and explore how these benefits have expanded in our ever-expanding digital culture.

Just as history began to shift from a primarily print discipline to a balanced print-digital discipline, Edward Ayers (1999) suggested, “Historians might begin to take advantage of the new media by trying to imagine forms of narrative on paper that convey the complexities we see in the digital archives, perhaps emulating writers of fiction in this regard even as we maintain our rigorous fidelity to the evidence” (para. 14). Once historians realized that the web had the potential to strengthen their research and teaching methods rather than jeopardize them and all of their past, present, and future work, digital history blossomed. This blossoming, however, did not happen overnight. Digital history had its fair share of skeptics to combat from the late 1990s through the early 2000s.
The Voice of Concern and Apprehension

The transferring of history to the web has faced resistance from its initiation. For instance, Barbara Weinstein (2007), New York University professor of history and metropolitan studies and former American Historical Association President, explains how she used to feel that the implementation of visual aids such as movie clips and sound bytes were “fillers”, an easy way out of thoroughly planning and executing a lesson (para. 2). However, Weinstein says that this perspective changed after reading students’ reviews of her class. She quotes one student in particular who when asked, *What do you think should be changed, if anything?*, responded, "Better classroom! That classroom blows . . . no power point was used . . . no pictures, no movie excerpts . . . just copying outlines and listening" (para. 1). It was then that she realized her own shortcomings as an instructor and furthermore as a historian resisting an expanding technological culture (para. 1).

Part of Weinstein’s ration rested in her belief that nothing could or would ever replace a trip to an archive or an encounter with an original artifact or primary source. She adds, “I also initially scoffed at the many internet tools and digital databases that could help me with my research, assuring myself that archival research was an artisanal work process in which direct, tactile contact with documents was a meaningful experience and serendipity was a major methodology” (para. 2). Furthermore, Weinstein’s original belief that technology-based research could not compare to the more traditional forms of research—going to the library, exploring an archive—leads to another point worth mentioning: history, as many other humanities disciplines, tends to be very individualistic. However, in digital history it is common to find documents and
projects researched and written collaboratively. To this end, Burton (2005) feels that historians should embrace and encourage digital history since “much of the best digital history is done collaboratively and that is likely to be the way of the future” (Issues Facing American Digital History section, para. 10). One of the strongest digital collaborations is Wikipedia, the online collaborative encyclopedia.

In his article “Can History be Open Source? Wikipedia and the Future of the Past,” Rosenzweig (2006) researched the accuracy of Wikipedia, a volunteer-based digital encyclopedia, and its implications for history teachers. Rosenzweig (2006) delved into the accuracy and scope of this online encyclopedia. As with most encyclopedias, not every entry is going to be 100% accurate; however, even the American National Biography Online, written by experts, still has one factual error for every twenty-five entries. Though Rosenzweig (2006) found a few factual errors in Wikipedia entries, he says, “Like journalism, Wikipedia offers a first draft of history, but unlike journalism’s draft, that history is subject to continuous revision” (p.11). Mistakes can be quickly and easily fixed, giving Wikipedia almost self-healing qualities that print encyclopedias lack. These self-healing qualities are yet another advantage of digitizing history—historians can quickly and easily change and/or update an already existent document without having to reprint and redistribute a publication.

For an entirely volunteer-operated project, Wikipedia is not only surprisingly accurate but also interestingly broad in its entries, such as the 900-word entry on Union general Romeyn B. Ayres. Additionally, Rosenzweig (2006) reports, “The 1865 to 1918 entry only briefly alludes to the Spanish-American War, but devotes five paragraphs to
the Philippine War, an odd reversal of the general bias in history books, which tend to ignore the latter and lavish attention on the former” (p. 6). The flip side to this semi-appealing spectrum of entries is that while some abstract entries like the Philippine War receive five paragraphs, other topics like the 19th amendment are completely overlooked, according to Rosenzweig.

In his article “American Digital History,” Burton (2005) lists other concerns voiced by both old and new historians: the cost of training historians to work in a digital realm, the requirement of historians to research and write on a much different level, and the lack of value placement on digital texts over print texts, to name but a few. Tying in with the latter point of digital history not receiving equal value as traditional print history is Carl Smith’s article, “Can You Do Serious History on the Web? (1998),” which explores the advantages and disadvantages of digital history. Smith (1998) believes “serious history to mean original work that is responsibly based on primary sources, is intelligently informed by relevant scholarships, and makes a clear argument or group of arguments” (para. 9). Early skeptics thought that the web failed to engage and stimulate audiences because of its sole use of sights and sounds, which led back to Smith’s question: “Can You Do Serious History on the Web?” Smith (1998) later concludes that serious history can indeed be done on the web; history, he argued, should be done on the web: “The only way to see to it that there is serious history on the web is to put it there ourselves [historians]” (Smith 1998, para. 19). Smith stresses the importance of putting history on the web to remain contemporary, especially because he sees history as being under siege in our contemporary “information revolution” (para. 19).
Another topic that concerned historians with regards to transferring history to the
web was that of digital archiving. According to James Brodman (2000, para. 2), digital
archiving served as “a milestone in the dissemination of knowledge,” though historians
were concerned with its legitimacy compared to physical library archives. Brodman adds
that digital archiving was a sort of “intellectual wild west” to a lot of historians
(Brodman, 2000, para. 3). A number of historians feared the instability of the web—
information could be posted one day and gone the next, which is intimidating for
scholars; they could post months’ worth of research on the web only to have a
technological glitch lose all of it in cyberspace. Luckily, new backup methods have been
developed, so scholars today can store and protect their research on a more stable system.

One other concern Brodman discusses is that of funding digital archiving. Even if
an organization digitized their library of documents into an archive, they were not
entirely convinced that they would then be able to get libraries to subscribe to their digital
records on top of the library’s regular book purchases. It was a big step for historical
organizations to take, and frankly a big risk because there were more costs involved than
simply the initial setup of the archive; these organizations then had to keep the site up and
running, which took manpower.

Many of the concerns that early historians initially had have since dissipated. For
instance, because countless museums around the country have created digital archives
and exhibits, users can better gauge the legitimacy of the site in which they are visiting—
like the Smithsonian or the National Archives, for instance. Similarly, countless academic
journals have begun to upload their articles and papers onto the web, so users can access
the same material online as they would in a library. While there are still certain unknowns with the web, which I will discuss later in this paper, time has alleviated many of the initial concerns historians had towards digital history endeavors.

**Digital History in the Pedagogical Arena**

“For anyone interested in how the past is used in the present,” O’Malley and Rosenzweig (1997) explain, “the web is a unique resource. It can allow fascinating assignments that illustrate to students that the past is not dead and forgotten but actively and diversely used” (p. 6). Once more, part of successfully teaching students history rests on the ability to encourage them to construct their own historical narratives and make their own historical inquiries, which the use of digital history resources allows through a remote access; there is an abundance of historical resources now available online, so students from around the world can interact with both popular and abstract resources.

O’Malley and Rosenzweig (1997) continue to discuss the topic of accessibility: “It seems less likely that the web presents a radically new paradigm or way of thinking; in many ways, the web simply gives us speedy access to existing documents” (O’Malley and Rosenzweig, 1997, p. 3). Such accessibility allows historians and students alike to make connections they likely would not have been able to make with print documents accessed at a local library, for instance: “The power to access information at great distances and great speeds offers the possibility of making new connections—between disparate ideas and between the past and the present—that might otherwise be missed” (O’Malley and Rosenzweig, 1997, p. 3). Digital history brings a new level of interconnectedness to academe that continues to expand the discipline into new realms.
In the classroom, digital history resources enrich the learning process, offering students a new medium in which to construct knowledge, make connections, and draw conclusions. However, it is worth noting that history teachers have always been cognizant of the need to prepare their students for academic research, whether in a physical library or at a digital archive; students who are ill-prepared to conduct historical research form misconceptions and draw inaccurate conclusions. What digital history offers is more freedom in learning because of its novel form of communication and networking; students now have access to a whole new venue for connecting meanings. Lee (2002) says, “By shifting the focus from the teachers to the learner, web-based digital history resources empower students to construct a more personal understanding of history” (p. 504). History is a subject that is hard to learn without truly grasping the personal, human thread that runs throughout each lesson, forming historic facts into stories. These stories, in turn, help students connect with the past, especially if they are able to construct these stories through their own historical inquiry, which is precisely what digital history promotes. When students conduct historical research online, they tap into a wealth of knowledge from various websites and are able to then draw their own conclusions about what they are learning.

Lee (2002) says, “These new forms of inquiry must focus on genuine historical problems whose consideration will enhance not only our understanding of the past but our ability to negotiate the present and progress into the future” (p. 514). Teachers now have a new branch of facilitation in the classroom—encouraging inquiry from digital history resources. As they begin to move their researching and teaching into a digital
realm, teachers also move into an interesting cross-section between academic publishing, higher education, and popular culture. Within this unique cross-section is the popular buzzword, *interactive*, which again serves to engage and stimulate students. I wrote a blog entry for the American Historical Association reviewing *Picturing U.S. History: An Interactive Resource for Teaching with Visual Evidence*, an interactive website that taps into the invaluable cliché of a picture is worth a thousand words. The past is not without its visual media forms, offering students and scholars a window into past events, societal ideas, cultural opinions, and overall trials and tribulations of the past. By making digital archives more accessible, prompting discussions that strengthen students’ critical thinking abilities, and teaching research methods, this interactive website offers a contemporary approach to stepping into the past (Pritchard 2008).

Digital archiving allows both historians and students to conduct comprehensive full-text searches, another advantage of this advancing medium. For example, O’Malley and Rosenzweig (1997) report how “one student found fourteen documents containing the words ‘gas station’ and produced a paper concluding that unlike gas stations today, a small town gas station in the 1930s functioned as a combination of informal town hall and poor man’s social club” (p. 8). This example shows how a student can begin researching one topic, come across an interesting nugget of information, conduct a comprehensive online search, and find a whole new research outlet between seemingly disparate ideas.

The website, *The History Engine*, is another good example of collaborative research and inquiry of American history. The site explains, “The History Engine is an
educational tool that gives students the opportunity to learn history by doing the work—researching, writing, and publishing—of an historian. The result is an ever-growing collection of historical articles or ‘episodes’ that paint a wide-ranging portrait of life in the United States throughout its history, available in our online database to scholars, teachers, and the general public” (About the History Engine, para. 1). On the site students can conduct a basic or advanced search, looking for keywords, or they can browse already compiled keywords, which the site calls tag words, such as slavery, education, and immigration. Once students locate a keyword they would like to search, they can then explore what the site refers to as episodes, or snippets of historical information, complete with a list of references to validate the content and serve as a springboard for further research.

“Unlike television,” O’Malley and Rosenzweig (1997) conclude, “the web allows alternative or contrarian viewpoints to flower, and it encourages users to compose their own narratives of the past” (p. 15). Once again, part of making history accessible, particularly in the classroom, is to bring the lessons to a more personal level and encourage students to become history’s investigators, thereby constructing their own narrative.

The same way digital archiving can bring history down to a personal level, remote access can bring history to people who cannot actually see it as they could going to a museum or visiting an archive like the National Archives. The Computer Museum Network allows users to virtually visit different museums as though they were actually standing in the building with history. O’Malley and Rosenzweig (1997) point out how the
web’s multimedia potential might be used to recreate lost historical spaces” (p. 12). In that same vein, Google Earth recently released their new interactive web site that takes users back to 320 A.D. when Constantine the Great ruled Ancient Rome. Users can tour the insides of famous Roman buildings, visit Roman landmarks, and learn about typical Roman lifestyles.

Another digital history website that employs remote access is Teaching with Historic Sites (TwHP), a site that encourage students to become historians by engaging with the people, places, and things of the past. As many historians know and understand, historic sites uniquely bring alive something that students rarely get from solely reading a text. In many ways, historic sites make the past real. TwHP believes that if students understand history at a smaller, more local level, than they are much more apt to apply this local chapter to the much larger context of American history as a whole. Clarke and Lee (2004) argue that studying history at a local level “enables students to connect to the major themes historians use to organize the past […] The study of personal or local history,” they continue, “positions students to make sense of larger narratives about the past” (p. 85). They hold that glossing over or even neglecting local history deprives students of the intimacy and interconnectedness of humanity, because once again, history is about people. If teachers are better able to encourage their students to connect with the past via the personal connection, their students are more apt to respond to history’s lessons and understand the larger context.

Furthermore, TwHP hopes to make students historians through the evaluation of primary sources, the examination of maps and photographs, and the exploration of actual
historic sites. “[The students] enjoy a historian’s sense of discovery as they learn about
the past by actively examining places to gather information, form and test hypotheses,
piece together ‘the big picture,’ and bridge the past to the present,” the website explains,
“By seeking out nearby historic places, students explore the relationship of their own
community’s history to the broader themes that have shaped this country” (Students as
Historians section under “About TwHP” link). Resources include “a series of lesson
plans; guidance on using places to teach; information encouraging educators, historians,
preservationists, site interpreters, and others to work together effectively; and
professional development publications and training courses. Each lesson includes maps,
readings, and photographs, all of which are accompanied by questions. At the end,
activities pull together the ideas student have just covered and require them to initiate
their own research” (Pritchard 2009). The ultimate goal is to turn students into historians,
particularly by bringing history to a more personal, accessible level, which is often easier
to do through teaching local history lessons because local history does not seem as distant
to students—they are better able to make the personal connection through more personal
history lessons.

History teachers have a unique perspective because they sit right at the cross-
section of this melding, as they are both historians conducting historic research and
teachers utilizing digital media to make lessons more engaging. To stay afloat in an
increasingly competitive and digitized arena, history teachers are looking to alternative
ways to engage and stimulate their students, particularly through the digital medium.
Likewise, historians working and conducting research in museums and other
organizations are looking for alternative ways to disseminate history beyond museum walls and historic sites. These alternatives exist in the digital arena.
3. The Extension of Audience and Museum Design into a Digital Arena

I found early on in my study that research in the digital history arena abounds; however, my goal with this particular study was to better learn not only how historians are using the web, but also how they create virtual museum exhibits and the pedagogical implications of these exhibits, if any at all. Where does the organization process begin when creating a digital history exhibit? What are the criteria for selecting information, artifacts, and primary sources to transfer online? Is there a hierarchy of importance in the creative process? How do they create teaching resources and lesson plans? How do they maintain the educational value of the physical history they upload online?

Furthermore, I wanted to see the parallel and overlap between creating online exhibits and physical museum exhibits. Were the goals the same? Were the audiences similar? Is the pedagogy the same for both exhibit forms? Do the historians who create them believe one is more effective than the other?

To begin, I will explore popular theories on audience and invention to provide a rhetorical framework in which to place the experiences and work of the six digital historians I interviewed for this study. I will then move into Saul Carliner’s descriptive model for informal learning in museums to supply a context to better understand the transition from physical exhibits to virtual exhibits.
A Writer and Her Audience

Before writers truly begin to delve into the writing process, they typically have to envision their reader and anticipate interaction and subsequent responses. Walter Ong (1975) believed that writers write for an audience; however, this audience consists of individual readers, not a collective reader. For this reason, writers fictionalize audiences, which Ong argued has always been a part of literary tradition. They encourage their audience to take on a specific role while reading; in turn, readers must, too, learn how to play the game of literacy, which Ong said involves figuring out “how to conform themselves to the projections of the writers they read…they have to know how to play the game of being a member of an audience that ‘really’ does not exist” (p. 12). There is almost a symbiotic relationship between the writer and the reader: the writer fictionalizes the reader, and the reader fictionalizes the role cast upon them by the writer.

However, what is particularly interesting and relevant to my study is Ong’s example of the ways in which historians tell history, which he likened to that of a poet making poetry:

The historian does not make the elements out of which he constructs history, in the sense that he must build with events that have come about independently of him, but his selection of events and his way of verbalizing them so that they can be dealt with was ‘facts’ and consequently the overall pattern he reports, are all his own creation, a making. (Ong, 1975, p. 12)

The art of telling history focuses on selecting material and interpreting it to exemplify a story that fits a bigger context and to educate others on the past. That said, individual
historians bring their own set of knowledge to a historical story and make their own historical interpretations; therefore, one particular story will likely yield many different perspectives.

Take, for instance, oral historians, who conduct interviews to get an intimate look at an event or an era. From these interviews, oral historians typically exploit history through themes that they deem significant and relevant, but each oral historian uses a different set of criteria to decide what themes are significant and relevant (Ong, 1975, p. 18). Thus a single interview could yield countless interpretations depending on the set of criteria a historian implements when evaluating the data. Ong (1975) concluded, “What is significant and, perhaps even more, what is ‘interesting’ also depends on the readers and their interaction with the historian” (p. 18). What Ong’s discussion highlights is that once again the audience plays an important role in the success of a text, whether a historical text or a fictional one. I will come back to Ong’s notions of audience as I discuss the interviews I conducted with six different historians.

The Audience Addressed/Invoked Binary

Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford (1988) established the audience addressed/invoked binary, an important concept to understand when discussing audience. They offer the following definition of an addressed audience: “Those who envision audience as addressed emphasize the concrete reality of the writer’s audience; they also share the assumption that knowledge of this audience’s attitudes, beliefs, and expectations is not only possible but essential” (p. 156). For writers, an addressed audience holds a
significant amount of power over the ultimate success of their text, which primarily centers on certain assumptions of the intended audience by the writer.

They offer the following definition of an audience invoked: “Those who envision audience as invoked stress that the audience of a written discourse is a construction of the writer, a ‘created fiction’” (Ede & Lunsford, 1988, p. 160). There is no true way for a writer to know the physical reality of their reader, so they instead guide their readers through textual cues, which are hopefully universal enough to reach each of their readers. Ede and Lunsford (1988) explain further, “[T]he writer uses the semantic and syntactic resources of language to provide cues for the reader—cues which help define the role or roles the writer wishes the reader to adopt in responding to the text” (p. 160). The idea of invoking an audience parallels Ong’s belief in a fictionalized reader, so rather than writing for a specific audience, a writer can reach a broader audience by making it clear how the reader should engage with the text through these cues.

The key point to remember as we move into the six historian interviews is that an invoked audience requires the writer to *construct* the reader, whereas an addressed audience requires the writer to *accommodate* the reader and their known role. However, no matter which audience the writer writes for, they must be able to give life to a text: “The addressed audience, the actual or intended readers of a discourse, exists outside of the text…It is only through the text, through language, that writers embody or give life to their conception of the reader” (Ede & Lunsford, 1988, p. 167). We will see in the historian interviews which audience digital historians anticipate when they create online exhibits and what types of scenarios change these anticipations.
How Museum Designers Make Decisions

Saul Carliner, a technical writer and instructional designer, published, “How designers make decisions: A descriptive model of instructional design for informal learning in museums” in the 1998 issue of Performance Improvement. In this article, Carliner (1998) explains, “Long before the Tax Reform of 1969 officially designated museums as educational institutions, American museums embraced the notion that they should communicate the essence of ideas, impart knowledge, encourage curiosity, and promote esthetic sensibility” (p. 73). Museums are often the first place that rouse curiosity for its visitors, from adults to children, from history museums to art galleries. Part of igniting this passion lies in object-based learning, which is one of the perks of studying history; audiences of all ages typically respond strongly to artifacts because of the tactile element.

But where exactly do museum designers start? Carliner (1998) explores four factors that contribute to museum design, the first of which involves establishing design goals and instructional objectives, which are “broad beliefs that guide the work of designers and, for the most part, are universally accepted by museum professionals” (p. 77). Often museums want their visitors to leave knowing how to perform certain skills or convey certain lessons.

Once designers have outlined these goals and decided what they would like the exhibit to accomplish, they then evaluate their resources; for historians, these resources primarily center on research and archive material. Carliner (1998) uses the analogy, “Designers combine [design resources] in various ways to present information in an
exhibition much as chefs combine spices and ingredients in various ways to create dishes” (p. 78).

From here, designers move into the types of strategies they plan to enact to achieve their set goals and use their set resources. Because history is about people, one of the best ways to tell history is through storytelling and interpretation, so historians are often able to integrate the storytelling element throughout their exhibits and encourage visitors to use their own interpretations to draw conclusions. “Exhibit design teams,” Carliner (1998) explains, “believe that they succeed when they provoke thought and change beliefs; they do not target what specific thoughts or beliefs should be changed. That choice is left to the visitor” (p. 90).

One final consideration designers need to make is that of constraints, from budget, to space, to time. How do these four factors translate into a virtual exhibit? Are the design goals and instructional objectives different? What about online constraints? If designers gauge their success on museum visitor response, how do online designers know if they have succeeded?

As we move into the study portion of this paper, particularly in Chapter 5, we will see how historians use a process similar to Carliner’s descriptive model for museum design when they create online history exhibits.
4. Meet the Historians and their Digital Projects

There are countless digital history projects from which to choose; however, I picked organizations and museums located in the Washington, D.C. area. I interviewed the following six historians:

**Timothy Grove**  Acting Chief of Education at the National Air and Space Museum

**Kathleen Johnson**  Historical Publication Specialist in the Clerk’s Office of History and Preservation

**Sharon Leon**  Director of Public Projects at George Mason University’s (GMU) Center for History and New Media (CHNM) and research assistant professor in George Mason University’s history department

**Laura O’Hara**  Historical writer and researcher for the Clerk’s Office of History and Preservation

**Nicole Osier**  Senior Manager of Education Programs at the Civil War Preservation Trust

**Matthew Wasniewski**  Historian for the Office of History and Preservation under the Clerk of the House from the U.S. House of Representatives

**The Websites**

Of the six historians I interviewed, three work at the U.S. House of Representatives under the Clerk’s Office of History and Preservation: Johnson, O’Hara,
and Wasniewski. I used the following websites as a focal point in my interviews with both Johnson and Wasiewski: *Oral History of the U.S. House of Representatives, Women in Congress, and Black Americans in Congress*. I partially chose these sites because of the historical importance of the U.S. House of Representatives; however, I also liked the fact that the content in each of these three sites seemed to appeal both to the general public as well as teachers and students. For instance, the *Oral History* website features individual stories reflecting on the U.S. House of Representatives, such as those produced by veteran political journalist Cokie Roberts.

![Figure 11](image_url) - A screenshot taken from Cokie Roberts’ profile on the *Oral History of the U.S. House of Representatives*’ website
Figure 1 illustrates that each profile includes an abstract, a biography, sound and video clips, artifacts, and interview transcripts. These profiles are not text-heavy, so they are more likely to maintain an audience’s attention span longer than an online essay would, for example. Furthermore, they integrate elements that an audience would likely experience at any history museum, such as sound and video clips, as well as photographs and artifacts. These elements also carry over to both the Women in Congress and Black Americans in Congress websites.

Figure 12 - A screenshot of a Jeannette Rankin Button from the Women in Congress website
In the screenshot from Figure 2, an online reader can learn more about Jeannette Rankin through an artifact (the campaign button) that the site puts briefly into historical context by offering an introductory snippet that then fits into a larger, broader theme.

However, these three websites also reach a more academic audience, primarily teachers and students, with the data they make accessible through these online forums. The *Black Americans in Congress* website, for example, offers a compilation on historical data, such as Black-American Representatives and Senators by State and Territory from 1870 through today. The site also offers an interactive map that allows its users to explore Black-American Representatives and Senators by State, as seen in the screenshot in Figure 3 below.

![Figure 13](image)

*Figure 13* - An interactive map of Black-American Representatives and Senators by State from the Black Americans in Congress website
One final feature that drew me to these three websites was the educational resources they provide. The *Oral History of the U.S. House of Representatives*, *Women in Congress*, and *Black Americans in Congress* all offer lesson plans and activities centering on the content supplied throughout each of the sites.

O’Hara, too, works under the Clerk’s Office of History and Preservation, but she worked exclusively on the *Florence Kahn* flash exhibit. This particular site caught my attention because it is almost a mini-documentary, so it once again maintains an online audience’s attention through visual aesthetic to tell a story. Users can choose to enjoy the documentary from start to finish, navigate through chapters, or read a full transcript of the documentary in lieu of watching it. I felt that this site would offer an interesting perspective in the discussion of how historians maintain historical integrity while creating an online exhibit intended for a general audience, especially since this particular exhibit is so entertaining.

Like the three websites from the Clerk’s Office of History and Preservation, I chose to study the *Martha Washington: A Life* website from the Center for History and New Media at George Mason University because it seems to reach a general audience, as well as an academic one. The site supplies a biography of Martha Washington, which reads much like a book where users can navigate the narrative through chapters. Much like the compilation of data from the Clerk’s Office of History and Preservation’s three websites, the *Martha Washington* site contains an archive with digital representations of all of the artifactual material used to tell the narrative, complete with descriptions of each
representative item, from articles of clothing to personal letters, which once again helps captivate a general audience.

However, the Martha Washington site also supplies teaching modules for middle and high school levels, each complete with an introductory video, a lesson plan, and corresponding activities. I wanted to better understand how Leon went about establishing these modules, which I will discuss in chapter six.

Of the two remaining websites, I chose the Lewis and Clark: The National Bicentennial Exhibition website because it complements a physical exhibit, which I thought would supply an interesting perspective as to how the physical exhibit translates into a virtual one. Grove discusses the topic at length in the following chapter.

The final website I chose is the Civil War Preservation Trust because it contains an extensive list of lesson plans teachers can adapt and use in their classroom, from 4th through 12th grades. The screenshot in Figure 4 is of a lesson plan entitled “The Battle of Fredericksburg: Using Maps to Study Battle History”.

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The lesson plan in Figure 4 illustrates a typical roadmap for teachers, such as a list of vocabulary and discussion questions, as well as any primary sources that apply. I discussed these lesson plans with Osier, a former elementary school teacher, to see what criteria she uses when deciding what teachers will find useful and how exactly she anticipates the response from both teachers and students. I will delve further into this discussion in Chapter 6.

The next chapter begins to explore the data collected from the digital historians I interviewed. More specifically, I ask these historians how rhetorical invention unfolds as they create digital history exhibits. What criteria do they use when deciding what artifacts and primary sources to transfer online? How do they construct a historical narrative for a broad, online audience? Furthermore, how do they anticipate their audience? Ong’s fictionalized audience and Ede and Lunsford’s audience invoked/addressed binary will shape the discussion of the latter question.
5. Creating a Historical Exhibit in a Digital Arena

Going into this study, I found the idea of creating a digital historical exhibit somewhat daunting in that digital historians have an extensive bank of historical data and artifacts to use as inspiration for these exhibits, yet they are creating them for an unknown audience. As the study unfolded, however, I found that these historians rely on rhetorical invention, which Janice Lauer (2004) says “provides guides in how to begin writing, to explore for ideas and arguments, to frame insights, and to examine the writing situation” (p. 1). Like other kinds of writers, historians have preliminary steps they must take in order to create a successful text, or in this case a successful online historical exhibit. Lauer (2004) delves deeper into the purpose of invention:

Inherent in the notion of invention is the concept of a process that engages a *rhetor* (speaker or writer) in examining alternatives, arguments, appeals, and subject matters for reaching new understandings and/or for developing and supporting judgments, theses and insights; and different ways of framing and verifying these judgments. (pgs. 6-7)

Historians working in a digital arena must consider the ways in which their exhibit, which can be anything from an online museum exhibit to a digital archive, will tell a story and fit into a larger historical context in order for their online audience to reach
these new understandings. They must also create captivating enough exhibits to draw online audiences into their projects and expand their organization’s or museum’s purpose, which, too, fall into the rhetorical invention part of the creative process.

In the following sections, I explore how the historians I interviewed begin creating their online historical exhibits; how they anticipate their audience; how they establish purpose; and how physical history translates to a digital arena.

**Getting Started: Know your Audience, Set your Goals, Establish your Mission**

One of my many goals with this study was to get a behind-the-scenes look at how historians create online historical exhibits; most start with their audiences, which appear to be a mix between invoked and addressed audiences. As Leon says, “We can’t really do anything until we have a clear sense of who the target audience is.” Although CHNM creates projects for dynamic audiences that vary depending on the objectives on hand, Leon explains that Mt. Vernon approached her and her team at CHNM about creating the *Martha Washington: A Life* website intended for the general public:

The folks at Mt. Vernon came to us because they had some patrons who were interested in supporting digital work for them. They thought that so much of the material in their collection and in their outreach and production focused on George Washington…that they wanted to provide their users and their visitors with a little bit more information about [Martha Washington] because she’s fascinating.

In this particular case, Leon and her team were working with an addressed audience, having a general idea of their target audience, which is the general public.
For Wasniewski, the audience and the site’s mission go hand-in-hand: “I think they [the House historical websites] reflect the mission of the Office, which is to make House history accessible to as wide an audience as possible. The sites are, in a way, our most developed efforts at outreach…the websites, and in particular the educational materials on them, really represent an effort to kind of take [our] work and make it accessible to a wider public audience.” Because the House of Representatives is such a large, integral part of the legislative branch, it can seem somewhat intimidating for the average person, so Wasniewski says that his Office tries to make their history as accessible as possible to as wide an audience as possible, particularly through the virtual medium: “We really want to be able to put some flesh on the published documents that are out there, the official histories, the official records, and give people a toehold in scaling the heights of institutional history by bringing it down to an individual level.”

Given the nature of Wasniewski’s digital work, it seems that he creates exhibits intended for an invoked audience. The exhibits contain cues that guide the online user through the House’s extensive and expansive history, hopefully encouraging them to see and make a personal connection with the past. In short, Wasniewski must construct his audience as he develops online exhibits, which in many ways parallels Ong’s fictional audience. Wasniewski does not concretely know his reader and their inhabited role; thus, he must ensure that the exhibits contain enough contextual cues to allow the reader to understand their role as they navigate through the site.

Once historians establish their audience—invoked or addressed—they typically move into outlining their goals and drafting their narrative, a step that Carliner describes
in the creation of physical museum exhibits. Because Mt. Vernon approached CHNM about the *Martha Washington: A Life* site, they supplied the bulk of the resources to Leon and her team, which makes her experience a bit different from the other historians I interviewed. To begin, Leon conducted background research on Martha Washington using many of the resources supplied by Mt. Vernon, as well as existent biographies, and then “proposed a structure for the site that seemed like it best mirrored the sort of major events and pieces in her life cycle, so the divisions into early childhood, her first marriage, widowhood, her second marriage to George, and political life,” she explained. The screenshot in Figure 5 illustrates these divisions.

![Figure 15 - A screenshot showing the chapter breakdown in Martha Washington’s biography](image)

After Leon drafted the preliminary outline, she met with Rosemarie Zagarri, senior historian at CHNM and professor in the Department of History and Art History at GMU, and James Ashton, a graduate research assistant at the CHNM, to come up with themes that would best suit the outline. Zagarri took the lead in drafting the narrative because of her expertise in early American women’s history, particularly political history.
Once Zagarri finished drafting the narrative, the next step involved establishing goals, which matches Carliner’s observations of the museum design process. Leon summarizes the three primary goals for the site:

1. To provide a general introduction to a general user who just might decide that they want to know something more about Martha Washington;

2. To provide materials to students and teachers so that they can gain some mastery over some of the historical questions around this time period and issues of gender, slavery, and the revolution; and

3. To provide researchers with access to the materials that we have around these subjects so that they can do their own primary work in addition to the general introduction that we’ve provided them with.

Similarly, Grove says that he and his team begin the designing process by “story booking” for both physical and virtual exhibits, which is exactly as it sounds: creating a sequence in which to tell a specific history lesson or a specific theme amongst various history lessons. Grove explains,

If you have an initial storyline, then the artifacts support the storyline. Sometimes an exhibit is built around a specific artifact, like the Wright flyer or planes that are already hanging in the exhibit. Most exhibits start with a narrative, but the narrative is based closely to what the collection is, unless you’re doing a heavy loan exhibit where you have to do the research and find out what it available in other collections.
It seems as though Carliner’s theories of museum design apply to Grove’s work as he collects historical data and decides which of this data to include in the exhibit. Think back to Carliner’s analogy of a chef combining spices to make a dish; similarly, a museum designer like Grove must carefully choose and piece together historic data to include in both digital and physical exhibits.

Furthermore, Grove must decide what strategies he will employ to ensure that the exhibit’s goals are met, which corresponds to Carliner’s observations in his descriptive model of museum design. While Grove says that there are countless variables that contribute to the creative process, he explains, “Educators want to make sure that the learning objectives are received by the various audiences. We’re keeping in mind the different audiences and the different ways that people learn, so we’re always pushing for a variety of visuals and texts and interactive experiences, trying to think of the different audiences that we need to target.” In terms of audience, Grove seems to create exhibits for an invoked audience more often than not; he encourages the fictionalized user to engage with exhibit’s content and consequently offers various paths for this fictionalized user to take while experiencing the exhibit, physically and virtually.

I then asked Grove about the methods he finds students and visitors respond to when they visit the National Air and Space Museum, to which he responded,

Well, bells and whistles of course. They [students] have short attention spans. They’re not going to read a lot of text, so they respond to strong visual elements. We do try to choose artifacts for younger students that…will catch their attention, such as an exhibit I’m working on now, *Pioneers in Flight* in the 1920s and 30s.
We have a series of toy chests around the gallery that will have toys from that period that kids play with related to aviation. We do try to select artifacts that will be attractive to certain age groups…Tactiles are important for the younger kids, so those are usually reproductive objects. We also try to show process whenever possible; kids want to know how things work. As do adults!

As Carliner points out, museum visitors respond to the tactile element, as Grove has also noted from his experiences with exhibit design, again both physically and virtually. Thus it seems that the initial designing process for physical and virtual museum exhibits follows many of the same steps outlined by Carliner; however, I interviewed historians who discussed the differences between creating and implementing physical and virtual exhibits, as well as some of the challenges they face working in a digital medium. For historians, the web still contains a number of unknown variables, which can be challenging when creating these virtual historical exhibits.

The translation of the physical into the virtual

Part of the reason I chose to interview Grove is because he sits at an interesting cross-section between physical and virtual museum exhibits. I asked him how the methods used in the designing process for physical exhibits translate into virtual exhibits. He responded,

Well, we’re certainly still learning that. The biggest similarity I would say between on-site exhibits and online are the attempt to layer information. There’s a top layer for people who are not that into the topic but are skimming. Then the deeper you go, the more information is provided, so the people that are really
interested in the topic, who are really knowledgeable about the topic can find the
details that they want.

As mentioned earlier with regards to invoked audiences, one of the keys to museum
design is that of creating various paths for the audience to take in order to meet the
exhibit’s objectives. Grove refers to this online layering of information as *multiple entry
points*, unlike most physical museum exhibits where the route is fairly linear: “With the
web, people can pick-and-choose how they go through a website; it’s less linear.” This
idea of the user choosing their navigation path also makes history lessons more personal
because the user is in control; they can decide how deeply they want to delve into the
historical content. Furthermore, one of the appeals of digital history is the very idea that
historians can draw audiences into an exhibit, encouraging them to engage with the
historical resources, while simultaneously providing them with a bank of sources from a
digital archive.

Grove also notes that with both physical and virtual exhibits, the key rests in not
simply putting the contents of a book on a wall or online, explaining that historians need
to know the medium: “An exhibit or an online exhibit, they’re not books, so it’s [the
designing process] figuring out how to focus on artifacts, how to make it a more active
learning experience.” When historians solely upload the contents of a book to a digital
exhibit, it is less likely to captivate an audience, which in many ways is
counterproductive because they have the advantage of making history come alive through
the use of digital media, drawing in an audience and encouraging them to engage with the
past.
A thread I noticed throughout my series of interviews was the idea of knowing, or rather figuring out, the web and how best to approach it when creating a virtual exhibit. Grove confesses, “I think we’re still at the point where we’re trying to figure it [the web] out because curators just want to put a book online, and educators and web designers say No, no, no! It’s a different medium, so you have this constant discussion about what makes the web unique, and what will a web user respond to that is different than what a museum exhibit user will respond to.” Grove’s point of the unknown variables is well taken, which links back to the discussion of audience. Generally historians are unaware of their audience, so they establish goals and criteria for reaching goals. In doing so, they simultaneously construct their audience, guiding them to the roles they need to inhibit to understand and engage with the text, or in this case with the digital exhibit.

Despite the challenges historians face in discovering ways to tackle the web, Grove insists that this new medium offers numerous advantages for a contemporary culture, “such as you [historians] don’t have to worry about security, lighting, conservation issues. [Users] can really zoom-in on a map or details of an artifact. If you’re using an image online, you can zoom-in and see much more clearly than in a physical exhibit.” The advantages of virtual exhibits alleviate the constraints Carliner discussed when creating a physical museum exhibit, like security, lighting, and conservation, exemplifying a difference between the physical and the virtual.

For instance, Grove worked on the award-winning website, *Lewis and Clark: The National Bicentennial Exhibition*, which complemented the traveling physical exhibit that started in St. Louis, Missouri in 2004 and ended in Washington, D.C. in 2006. He
explains, “The curriculum has links to the online images and oral history videos, [so] we could incorporate short video clips that were not part of the physical exhibition. That was an example where an online exhibition in some ways was just as rich or richer because we could include those video clips of Native Americans talking, [which] were incorporated into the curriculum.” Along with the advantage of fewer constraints, digital history exhibits offer other creative outlets that may not be as easy to include or even update in a physical exhibit. Grove explains further,

Another difference [between the physical and the virtual exhibits] was that, for students specifically, we had a series of interviews that we did with people today talking about different scenes, such as women, mapping, medicine, so [for example] medicine during Lewis and Clark’s time versus today. The role of women: we were looking at cultures, how different cultures see the role of women. The exhibit was talking about how Lewis and Clark viewed the Indian women that they encountered; then today we had [Dr. Fatemeh Keshavarz, assistant professor of Persian and Comparative Literature at Washington University in St. Louis] talking about Muslim women and how they’re seen through western eyes. It was really fascinating. We couldn’t do that in the [physical] exhibit, but that was an added component in the online exhibit that made it much richer.

The *Lewis and Clarke* online exhibit allowed users to explore various themes, such as the *Imaginary West* and *Discovering Each Other*, each offering a section entitled, *Connections to Today*, with the contemporary interviews Grove discussed above.
Figure 16 - An excerpt from an interview with Dr. Fatemeh Keshavarz, assistant professor of Persian and Comparative Literature at Washington University in St. Louis.

Figure 6 is a screenshot taken from an interview with Dr. Keshavarz, who discusses Muslim women and the western world’s perception of them, which parallels how Lewis and Clark viewed Indian women, as Grove discussed on the previous page.

While online exhibits can offer richer content, as Grove suggests, the historians I interviewed seemed to agree that they still lack the special connection audiences get by seeing the real thing. Grove opines, “I personally don’t think an online experience will ever replicate the physical because it’s about the intrinsic power of artifacts.” However, something is certainly better than nothing, especially for those unable to make it to the physical exhibit, which is a point Leon stresses. In addition to her work on the Martha Washington: A Life website, she also worked on The Object of History, a website that was “an effort to find a low cost way for students and teachers of U.S. History to have access to the [Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History’s] collections and the expertise of the curators” (The Object of History). She explains, “There are thousands
and thousands and thousands of students who never get to make that typical middle
school trip [to the Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History]…Certainly
QuickTime virtual reality interaction with an object is not the same as being able to walk
up to something, but it’s better than nothing!” Historians strive to teach and inspire their
audience about the past, encouraging them to engage with it, regardless of the delivery—
in a physical or virtual museum exhibit.

Like Grove, Leon discusses the advantage of being able to post videos online for
their audience: “The sort of nice thing about that site [The Object of History] is that
there’s a whole set of curator interviews. They are sort of like small bit secondary
narrative perspectives from the folks who really are the experts on the artifactual
material, so that adds another layer of personality on top of the historical narrative that
would be available.” With upbeat music and callouts reminiscent of comics, these videos
are sure to make an impression and capture their audience.

Figure 17 - A screenshot taken from the video of the Lincoln-Keckley dress from the
Object of History website
The video clip seen in Figure 7 has a hip-hop music mix featuring Billie Holiday with a narrator telling the story of Elizabeth Keckley, a freed slave, a confidante of Mary Todd Lincoln, and a notable seamstress. Each frame of the video features images and photographs with catchy word bubbles next to each historic figure meant to mimic dialogue, though appealing to a younger demographic, thereby making history entertaining through accessible language.

O’Hara, who worked exclusively on the *Florence Kahn* flash presentation in the Clerk’s Office of History and Preservation, expresses a similar sentiment as Leon with regards to making history a form of entertainment, which historians are able to do in part because of the human element—again, much of history is about people. O’Hara said that she and her colleagues partially chose to create a flash exhibit on Florence Kahn because “she’s got a really good research collection [and] she’s very quotable.” For instance, in chapter seven of the exhibit, illustrated in Figure 8, users can see the power of Kahn’s words through the quote that begins the chapter’s narrative, thereby getting a better understanding her political beliefs.
As with Wasniewski’s work, O’Hara created this exhibit for an invoked audience, which in this case is the general public. Of the historians I interviewed, it seems that those who create digital exhibits for a general audience typically do so with an invoked audience in mind; they must construct this audience and supply contextual cues that encourage the online user to inhibit a specific role or set of roles. Because of O’Hara’s audience, it was critical to implement visual elements, media that captures and maintains the audience’s attention. Once again, the need of visual elements contributed to the decision to use Florence Kahn as a historic figure because her life and her professional work offered “a lot of good image opportunities,” such as the screenshot in Figure 9 that shows a newspaper clipping of Kahn after she was appointed to Congress’ Military Affairs Committee.

**Figure 18** - Notable quote of Florence Kahn
The *Florence Kahn* exhibit, if watched in full, is only about 12 minutes long, which O’Hara hopes will maintain the audience’s attention; in many ways, it is a condensed documentary, as one you might watch on the History Channel. O’Hara explains her goals with the exhibit: “I’m hoping that they’ll [the audience] be entertained; that they’ll learn something from it; [and] that they would be, perhaps, more interested in Florence Kahn [and] in what we [the Office of History and Preservation] do and in the history of Congress.” While not all historians look to the entertainment value of the past, O’Hara’s goals are well-taken in that getting an audience to engage with history, even if it is through a 12-minute online flash presentation, is better than not reaching them at all.

The web allows historians to create exhibits like Grove’s *Lewis and Clarke*, Leon’s *Object of History*, and O’Hara’s *Florence Kahn* to initially attract an audience,
captivate them with entertaining and engaging elements, and hopefully teach them about
the past. This is not to say that museum exhibits do not accomplish the same objectives,
but what historians are realizing is that the web allows them to reach a larger invoked
audience, thereby disseminating history at a higher rate than physical exhibits allow. The
next chapter discusses this dissemination in the classroom and how historians see their
digital work playing out in a pedagogical arena.
6. Educational Outreach via a Virtual Medium

The second part of my study focuses on how historians create the educational portion of their virtual exhibits. More specifically, I wanted to find out how historians anticipate their audience and how they create lesson plans and teaching modules without really knowing the ways in which teachers will implement them in the classroom.

Creating Lesson Plans, Considering Standards

Leon says that much of the work they do at CHNM centers on “the cognitive science work that Sam Wineburg has done about how historical thinking actually happens and how we might best pose authentic modes of inquiry for students, that we may put them in situations in which they can pursue real historical questions and do it with actual primary sources where they can start to question change over time and perspective and those sorts of things.” This theory—that of authentic inquiry—is precisely what the web allows historians to more readily promote; everyone can become investigators of the past through the democratization of primary sources, which can be anything from digital archives to the types of online museum exhibits discussed thus far. Promoting authentic inquiry of the past is particularly crucial in the classroom.

I asked Leon how she and her colleagues anticipate the needs of teachers and their students when creating the online teaching lessons to accompany their exhibits. She
explains that CHNM look at “general standards for the time period, not actually the Virginia Standards of Learning, but the standards that were sort of general standards produced by the National Center for History in the Schools in UCLA (that were generally rejected by the country several years ago!). But you know, they’re still quite good, and they’re all we have for the sites and for organizations that hope to reach a national audience.”

Because the lessons offered on CHNM’s online museum exhibits are geared for teachers who follow general standards of learning, historians intend to reach an addressed audience, which ties into one of the differences I noted between creating digital history exhibits in general as opposed to organizing online educational resources and lesson plans. Historians have a fairly good idea of who their audience is when they create online educational resources because teachers around the country adhere to some general form of standards of learning; however, when creating digital history exhibits intended for the general public, historians then have to fictionalize their audience and construct the exhibit accordingly to reach an invoked audience, one that will understand their role by following the exhibit’s contextual cues.

Part of the reason CHNM ties their online lesson plans with standards is to help teachers match it to their pacing guide, Leon explains. The screenshot in Figure 10 illustrates the National Historical Standards for the site’s teaching module on slavery, allowing teachers to determine if and how they can implement the module into their classroom.
Furthermore, each teaching module on the site offers inquiry questions for both middle school and high school teachers to use in order to frame each lesson plan, which Leon says helps to broaden the scope of each lesson:

We tried to ask inquiry questions that took us a step beyond Martha Washington. I’m looking now at the teaching activity for sociability for high school teachers, *Questions to guide their thinking might be, ‘In what specific ways did women contribute to the planter class economy in the Chesapeake region?’* That’s using Martha Washington as a case study to get at larger trends and questions about what gender and economy look like during this time period.

The goal for Leon is to encourage students to begin to make those larger connections by better understanding the smaller, more accessible history lessons: “We hope that framing
things in that way pushes students and teachers to look at a particular case, and then start to make some larger generalizations and understandings from the material that they’ve encountered.” Leon’s goals mirror those of Wasniewski and his efforts in the Clerk’s Office of History and Preservation: promoting a more accessible version of an otherwise overwhelming history lesson. This theme of accessibility and personal connection links much of these historian’s digital efforts.

The same idea of teaching the small lessons to guide students to the bigger picture is something O’Hara stresses in my interview with her. O’Hara worked on the Florence Kahn exhibit, which is essentially a flash documentary on the first Jewish woman to serve in Congress. She explained that part of what made Florence Kahn a good candidate for a flash documentary is the fact that she was a woman in Congress; she witnessed the San Francisco Bridge Project; and she built up the military infrastructure during her period. O’Hara sees Florence Kahn as a sort of vehicle for audiences interested in women in Congress, as well as “the evolution of San Francisco as told through the story of Florence Kahn.” Johnson continues the discussion of the role of standards in creating lesson plans, saying that she reviews “the national standards just to see what would be the most compelling for U.S. history for government teachers to use” when creating lesson plans for the House’s online exhibits.

Johnson then begins to discuss how the lesson plans they create are designed to give the most flexibility to teachers: “Our basic philosophy is to give teachers a lot of options and that we have a lot of lesson plans, a lot of resources that they can just pick-and-choose from what we have on the site.” The theme of flexibility once again surfaces,
giving teachers more than one option so that they have the room they need to adapt and apply outside lessons into their curricula.

Wasniewski, who works alongside Johnson in the Clerk’s Office of History and Preservation, asserts, “One of the things that we try to do is develop teaching tips to accompany that site [the Office of the Clerk] to allow teachers the greatest amount of flexibility in incorporating specific lessons or events or sketches about personalities into their curricula because we know the curricula are set and teachers are teaching to tests; it’s very hard to fit very specific material on House history into that kind of curriculum.”

Flexibility is key in the extension of these online museum exhibits in the classroom. The historians I interviewed seem to agree that the educational resources and suggested lessons need to offer teachers the ability to mix-and-match based on their curricula. Again, the web permits this flexibility all while disseminating historical resources and lessons to a greater audience through greater accessibility.

But how exactly do historians know the effect their digital efforts have in the classroom? Johnson stresses the importance of going to workshops because it allows her to receive direct feedback from teachers using these resources:

Most of them [teachers] say, *Well, we have five days to teach this aspect of government, so as much as we would love to use the whole lesson plan, we can’t.* And so that really came to mind, too, when we were designing the lesson plans that we tried to do it so that teachers could pick-and-choose. If they just want to take an extended activity or if they just want to have comprehension questions or if they want to have students look at photographs, that they could use it...
piecemeal, so it wouldn’t be like you have to use this lesson plan and it takes a week, so if you don’t have a week, well then too bad!

Johnson’s efforts would be moot if teachers were unable to adapt and apply the lesson plans she creates into their classrooms.

This idea of picking-and-choosing, which in essence offers a sense of flexibility through online lesson plans, is something Leon touches on as well from her experience working on the *Martha Washington: A Life* website. She explains the setup of the site’s educational resources section:

[There is this] sort of step-by-step process: There’s the introduction, the primary sources, and then we hope that teachers will do the sort of set-up of introducing the activities, letting the students explore the material, and then perhaps pursuing the teaching activity that we suggest, whether it be the one for sociability or slavery or the revolution. You’ll notice the ones that are targeted at the middle school students have a little bit less writing, a little bit less form, but I totally see a middle school teacher looking at the high school lesson and adapting it down and having the high school teacher adapt the middle school one up.

Leon also acknowledges that teachers may not always follow the intended step-by-step process, which is why it is so important to create lesson plans that are malleable so that teachers can go in and adapt the plans up or down to accommodate their immediate pedagogical needs.

Similarly, Osier talks about the need for flexibility with the lesson plans they offer on their website. The Civil War Preservation Trust hosts the *Best Lesson Plan* contest
each year, encouraging teachers to share their own Civil War lesson plans with teachers from around the country. The top three winning lesson plans are then posted and archived on the Trust’s website for other teachers to implement in their classroom. Osier explains, “We are working towards a national audience, [so] we look for those overarching themes and objectives, [as well as] interdisciplinary stuff. So if they [the lesson plans] cover math or language arts, then it becomes all the more valuable. More of a good lesson plan falls into many different categories. I was an elementary school teacher, and if it [the lesson plan] didn’t cover another topic like language arts, then it wasn’t going to get used because you just don’t have time for that kind of stuff.” The idea of a flexible lesson plan, as Leon and Johnson discuss, moves beyond the ability of adapting and implementing to fit immediate pedagogical needs. This flexibility provides teachers with ways to cover more than one topic under the umbrella of a single lesson plan, adding another level of adaptability in the classroom, especially since, as Osier discusses, teachers have extensive ground to cover with subject-matter.

Johnson, too, recalls her experiences from teaching, explaining that the Clerk’s Office of History and Preservation tries to make people from Capitol Hill seem as human as possible by integrating primary sources with quotes, photographs, artifacts and hopefully generating more interest that will allow students to “take it from the personal level and make the larger, broader conceptual connection,” as Johnson puts it. One of the many goals for Johnson is to try and make things more interactive, to make history more exciting. As a former teacher, Johnson recalls,
When I was teaching, a lot of my students would be turned off because they just thought history was something that didn’t connect with their own lives, so we’re trying to use the approach of if we can make this [House history] something interesting that students can see some kind of family connection, personal connection, and will start to find history more exciting and more interesting, delve a little bit deeper...The whole idea is just to generate interest and hopefully get kids excited about Congress [so that the can make] those personal connections so that it doesn’t seem like such a large, faceless institution.

Not only does Johnson consider standards and lean on her experiences as a teacher, but she also relies on the House’s archive to help structure the lesson plans: “We’re trying to think of what would possibly interest students and teachers and fill gaps in their curriculums by finding unique quotes, unique photographs.” Johnson’s goal of appealing to the visual and personal appeal of history mirrors what many of the historians I interviewed have said: the visual and interactive element of the web allows historians to better captivate audiences and teach them about the past.

Although the web brings a new, creative outlet into the classroom, it is not without its hurdles. Historians are still working towards better understanding how teachers are engaging with the online resources available to them, if at all. The next section explains the demographic differences and how these differences affect teachers’ use of digital resources.
Educational Outreach and Computers

One final consideration historians make when creating virtual exhibits, particularly for pedagogical purposes, is that of computer availability from school to school. Grove admits, “I’m still getting a sense of how teachers are using the web. There’s always the question of, *Are the assigning their students homework at night online?* or *Are they working with one computer in the whole class?* or *Are the going to a computer lab where each student can do an activity on their own?* I think ultimately we try to address the various scenarios as best we can, but it’s really hard.” Grove alludes to the difficulty in creating online museum exhibits and corresponding lesson plans for an invoked audience because historians do not know concretely who is using their resources and how they are using them, if at all.

Leon, too, says that computer usage amongst teachers and their students varies depending on the demographic. She explains, “The folks that we know who are using it in Alexandria [a wealthy suburb of Washington, D.C.] have laptop schools and laptop classrooms so that the kids actually have machines of their own. Certainly other teachers are using it on sort of a single machine projection basis, and they’re going sort of a group experience of [The Object of History site]. My sense is that [the latter] is much, much more common. The single group experience.” Although some students may have the luxury of computer labs and even laptop computers, it is worth noting that most students now have access to digital experiences, such as those offered on the *Object of History* website.
Furthermore, Leon says that there are other avenues for teachers to share online materials with their students: “There are transcripts available for all of the interviews [from the Object in History site] and things like that. There’s a way to take most of the information on that site and make it paper-based if [teachers] have to. We’d prefer that they didn’t! But it’s certainly a possibility because we know that that’s a reality. That’s absolutely a reality for so many teachers.” The same way historians are in accord that a virtual experience will likely never be quite the same as a field trip to a museum, but something is better than nothing; the same standard applies to online teaching materials. Although some teachers may not have access to computers, they can still utilize the materials offered by online historical websites, such as the six I highlighted in my study, even if it means having their students engage with primary sources printed off-line. The key is that teachers now have the option of accessing and consequently sharing these new pedagogical resources with their students, even though their students may not have access to the full digital experience.
7. Conclusion

While it may seem almost counterintuitive to meld history and technology, the two strongly complement each other. Much of the traditional work historians do, from archiving, to creating museum exhibits, to organizing educational outreach, still apply in a digital arena. Historians can still archive, but now they have the option of doing it digitally; they can still create museum exhibits, but now they have the option of doing it digitally; they can still organize educational outreach, but now they have the option of doing it digitally. It is not that history as a discipline has changed or even abandoned its roots; it simply continues to grow and remain current. By doing so, history becomes contemporary, as oxymoronic as it may seem.

Rhetorically speaking, the majority of the historians I interviewed seemed to create their online museum exhibits for an invoked audience, having a general idea of their user but still needing to include contextual cues and informational layers to guide them through the exhibit in order to reach the set objectives. However, there were historians like Leon who targeted an addressed audience, but even still there does not yet exist a way to establish a concrete audience when working with online historical exhibits.

The idea of audience in the classroom is interesting right now because yet again historians are not entirely sure how teachers are using their online exhibits and
corresponding educational lessons. There still exist a number of unknowns: Are teachers using a single projector to share these exhibits with their students? Does each student have their own computer on which to choose the path they want to explore the exhibit? Do teachers not have access to computers at all in their classroom? There are still a number of avenues to research in terms of digital history’s pedagogical uses.

Of the six historians I interviewed, they seem to agree that although the web does not present the intrinsic power of artifacts, as Grove describes, it still offers an engaging and entertaining outlet for audiences from the general public to elementary school students to learn about history and hopefully have fun along the way. Before the web and the subsequent creation of online museum exhibits, audiences had to either live near historical institutions and sites or visit towns and cities with historical institutions and sites. Today historians can disseminate their historical research to a broad, diverse audience, whether invoked or addressed, which is a core objective of many historians: teach about the past today to move to better prepare for tomorrow. After all, the future of history is quickly becoming all about the web.
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CURRICULUM VITAE

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