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Displays of Culture: Personal Museums in Wisconsin

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1988

DISPLAYS OF CULTURE:
PERSONAL MUSEUMS IN WISCONSIN

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Modern Languages
and Intercultural Studies
Western Kentucky University
Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by

Mary A. Zwolinski

January 1988

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DISPLAYS OF CULTURE:
PERSONAL MUSEUMS IN WISCONSIN

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DISPLAYS OF CULTURE: PERSONAL MUSEUMS IN WISCONSIN

Mary A. Zwolinski January 1988 112 pages

Directed by: Michael Ann Williams, Burt Feintuch, and
James Leary

Department of Modern Languages and Intercultural Studies
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Fieldwork was undertaken in the state of Wisconsin to document and interpret privately owned and displayed collections. Collections were comprised of various types of objects, most commonly artworks created and/or collected by the collection owners. These collections often take on an environmental scope, occupying private spheres such as collection owners' homes or outbuildings. An examination of environmental type collections that are housed in bars was also undertaken.

Collections of this specific type are culturally and locally significant. The objects in the collections and the collection owners address and provide important information on such local or regional subjects as history, local storytelling practices, and local aesthetics. These collections also serve as natural repositories for the objects of various folkgroups relevant to the region. In this thesis that region is defined as the state of Wisconsin, and those folkgroups examined include occupational, recreational, and ethnic communities. Personal museums are one way that members of these communities preserve, display, interpret,

and reaffirm their personal involvements in those groups. Collectors preserve and display tangible evidence of the significance of these communities and their affiliations with those groups. In this thesis I advocate a closer examination of personal museums by teachers, anthropologists, folklorists, and others interested in artifacts of culture.

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

At one time in our lives we have all collected something, but few of us would consider ourselves serious or true collectors. The line between the casual and the dedicated collector is not always easy to define. Many of us are surrounded by the beginnings of several collections. Amassing collections that are unorganized, unclassified, or inconsistent, we lack the passion to continue the collection, or we lack the motivation to acquire more objects. Collecting is a behavior exhibited by children, adults, and even some other members of the animal kingdom. The degree to which we promote and exhibit that behavior is the difference between the casual or amateur collector and the serious collector.

The significance of various collections differs according to who is collecting and what it is they are acquiring. One may argue that the art collection of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, who eventually founded the New York City museum that bears her name, was not only a significant contribution to the world of modern art, but was also extremely important in terms of its monetary value. To suggest, however, that Whitney's passion for collecting lay in the monetary value of her collection rather than a

predilection for acquiring something unique or something that she found aesthetically pleasing is to dispel her collecting passion. One need not, however, collect paintings or anything of great financial value to possess that same passion. Serious collectors who may collect rocks, doorknobs, dolls, or hubcaps are exhibiting similar behaviors.

There exist those occasions, however, when a collection surpasses a static arrangement of objects and takes on qualities that may be considered environmental. In these instances, the collector catapults a collection into a new realm, creating a living environment. The collection becomes, in concept, similar to a museum. The collection becomes an educational environment, offering valuable information for visitors. Visitors become the audience as the collectors work towards displaying their collections in orderly fashions, often isolating them from other distracting and insignificant objects or somehow arranging the environment so that the collections become the center of interest. In her article "The Personal Museum: An Important Local Resource" folklorist Betty Belanus defines a collection of this type as an "idiosyncratic but significant collection of personal and local artifacts, written and visual documents, and artworks created by the collector."¹ Belanus's application of the term "personal" is descriptive and captures the most significant aspect of these museums--their personal nature demonstrated through the relationship of owner to collection.

Personal museums reflect the personalities, concerns, and values of their owners while providing more generalized and indigenous information to community members and visitors interested in the region. They may also be considered personal because they occupy the personal space of their owners.

The location that collectors choose to display their collections and to erect their personal museums may vary from individual to individual. Collections may be housed in people's homes, barns, front yards, or even in the owners' places of business such as stores, restaurants, and bars. This decision is basically an individualized one often depending on the availability of space and the owners' own personalities. Collections displayed in such public spheres as bars, for instance, take on less personal, more public connotations. They become the unofficial property of the community, or more specifically, the establishments' patrons. One does not need an invitation into such personal museums. Collections housed in private homes, on the other hand, are collections that are highly personal and protected by the owners' rights of privacy. Anyone wanting to visit such museums must make special arrangements with collection owners or wait for an invitation. Knowledge of the in-home personal museum may be spread by word of mouth or media coverage.

In this thesis I will examine the existence of personal museums in Wisconsin. I will develop the concept of

personal museums emphasizing their dependency on owner involvement. While the majority of well-known collections throughout history have focused on objects that carry international or worldwide references, personal museums that feature local or regional themes receive less notoriety and attention. Those local and regional personal museums are the subject of the present study. I will attempt to show that personal museums can be employed by local groups for understanding and demonstrating their own local cultures. I believe that folklorists, anthropologists, and other scholars interested in culture may find personal museums valuable tools for interpreting the tangible and intangible aspects of a particular society, such as local histories and community aesthetics. This information could be gathered by visiting personal museums, examining collections, and encouraging collection owners to interpret their museums themselves. I would also like to suggest the concept "ethnomuseology" as an acceptable folkloristic approach to understanding museums created, supported, curated, and maintained by individuals in their private spaces.

Comparisons to Tourist and Public Museums

The personal museum is related to two other general classifications of museums: public and tourist museums. The American Association of Museums defines a museum as

. . . an organized and permanent, nonprofit institution, essentially educational or aesthetic in purpose, with professional staff, which owns and utilizes tangible objects, cares for them, and

exhibits them to the public on some regular schedule.²

This definition, however, is most applicable to public museums. Public museums are usually publicly owned and funded. They house a variety of collections and are divided into more specific classifications depending on what type of artifacts they may own and display. Examples of well-known public museums include Chicago's Field Museum of Natural History, New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art, or London's British Museum. Public museums may also be smaller in scale or scope, such as local historical societies.

Tourist museums are privately owned, profit making businesses. Their collections are varied, but the general content is something that will appeal to a wide range of populations. The famous "Ripley's Believe It or Not" chain of museums is an example of a tourist museum, but many smaller, locally owned museums exist also, such as Hayward, Wisconsin's "Freshwater Fishing Hall of Fame."

All museums house collections of artifacts: objects, documents, photographs, recordings. For some reason those artifacts are deemed valuable and special. All museums put those things on display when possible and allow the public limited access to their collections. The motivation behind both tourist and public museums is similar in that the preservation of artifacts is one of their main objectives, but the nature of their relationship to the public is different.

Inside many established history, science or art museums the viewer is immediately confronted by the physical surroundings. Marble pillars, soaring ceilings, and immense skylights create an atmosphere that is almost religious, never frivolous. The viewer is immediately warned that the contents of such a museum borders on the sacred. Enclosed within glass cases or behind plate glass windows, the objects are removed from the viewer's physical sphere. Lined up, hung, or encased, artifacts are removed from their original context and become objects in and of themselves. Ideally these museums provide information that allows the viewer to mentally re-contextualize these objects which in turn should lead to a better understanding of different cultures, times, and important events.

The tourist museum also collects, preserves, and displays important artifacts. Its physical structure provides reaffirming information regarding the museum's motivations and intentions. Whether housed in restored mansions, or giant, walk-through muskies, tourist museums are meant for the entertainment of thousands of tourists on a daily basis. The objects are interesting, curious, rare, or unbelievable. Some strive for the sensational. "Halls of fame" usually fall into the tourist museum category. Museums of this genre serve as shrines to a variety of activities, from fishing to football, and rely on various artifacts to carry information regarding important events, record-making scores, or lifestyles of particularly worthy individuals within the museums' particular fields of

interest.

These differing styles of architecture and the contents contained in the museums serve to mold and predetermine the visitor's conception of the experience that is about to take place once he or she crosses the thresholds. The physical environment of a personal museum, in this case the owner's private space, also plays an important role in a visitor's experience. The message at these museums is a personal one. Entering a person's private business or home, one is immediately immersed in the private world of the museum's owner. The relationship between viewer and owner, and viewer and object, is a highly personalized one. The tangible and intangible contents of the museum are related to the owner's life experiences, and the viewer is allowed to confirm this relationship. The owner becomes the docent, leading the viewer through a labyrinth of rooms, often filled with typical bedroom, living room, or kitchen furniture. The collection may be displayed in a basement where one must confront washing machines or drying laundry on the way to the display.

A visit to a personal museum can provide the individual with an experience that exceeds what public and tourist museums can offer. The presence of collection owners provides the visitor with firsthand information on the museum's contents in an informal and hospitable manner. Not only is one enlightened and entertained by the variety of objects, but the visitor has also been witness to the

interaction of collection owner and object. A visit to a personal museum also provides the viewer with interesting information regarding the owner's personal life. Owner's family members are often present, and through them the visitor is given additional information and opinions regarding the history and significance of the particular collection. Visitors are not allowed to play a passive role. In exchange for this experience they are expected to contribute some information of their own. Museum owners will often inquire of their visitors as to the nature of their particular interests, the way they found out about the museum, where they are from, and where they may be going. Formal barriers are broken down or, at the very least, decreased. The personal museum experience is a living, dynamic, and personal interaction between collection owner and visitor.

History

The personal museum is not a unique or idiosyncratic concept. The historical beginnings of museums provides the personal museum with antecedents. In all cases the initial motivation was a collection amassed by one or two individuals. The size and significance of the collection would eventually account for its transformation into a public museum.

The first such collection to be noted belonged to the John Tradescants, father and son, in 1623. In Lock, Stock and Barrel, Elizabeth and Douglas Rigby credit the

Tradescants with being the founders of the world's first modern museum.³

The British Tradescants, father and son, are generally credited with having founded the first true museum of modern times, although the chief difference between their collection and the ordinary ones of their period lay in the fact that it was regularly open to the general public (no invitation being required, as was usually the case) and that a catalogue to its contents was published.⁴

The Tradescant collection was locally known as "Tradescant's Ark," and the catalogue that the young Tradescant issued, Musaeum Tradescantiu, lists in its collection:

. . . preserved birds, animals, fish, and insects; minerals and gems; fruits; carvings, turnings, and paintings; weapons; costumes; household implements; coins and medals; and beautiful and exotic plants, shrubs, and trees. The garden was especially strong in Virginia materials, many of them gathered by the son on three trips he made there. Typical rarities in the collection were 'Unicornu Marinum (Narwahl); dodar from the Island Martities (the famed now-extinct dodo); a cherry-stone, upon one side S. Geo: and the Dragon perfectly cut; and on the other side 88 Emperours faces; Pohaton, King of Virginia's habit all embroidered with shells, or Roanoke; Henry the 8 his stirrups, Haukes-hood, Gloves; and Anne₅ of Bullens Night-Vayle embroidered with silver.'

Their precise and conscientious record keeping and cataloguing has enabled future generations to create vivid images of the contents of the collection. The collection eventually was moved from the Tradescants' home and established at Oxford in 1683, becoming the first public natural history museum.

The British Museum was also founded on the base of a private collection. This particular collection belonged to Sir Hans Sloane, an eminent physician and collector.

Sloane's collection was vast and varied, including natural history specimens, art, curiosities, and rarities.

Despite the miscellaneous nature of his collection, a great advance had been made since the days of the Tradescants, for the imposing mass of Sloane's exhibits was organized and displayed in systematic order on the several floors of his own house given over to it, while a painstaking catalogue--consisting of thirty-eight volumes in folio and eight in quarto--numbered and described each item, giving a short history of each. Always willing to show his museum to guests, Sloane soon discovered that curiosity, rather than scientific interest, impelled many of them to seek admission
. . . .

Sloane was subject to a fair amount of ridicule as well as admiration because of his collection and apparant collecting nature. In 1695, a former employee of Sloane's, James Salter, set up his own museum in what was referred to as "Don Saltero's Coffee-House" located in Chelsea. Salter's museum may be the first recorded instance of a private collection being displayed in a public business space, similar to contemporary personal museums that exist in stores, bars, and restaurants. Salter's collection was placed in the coffee-house for the entertainment of his patrons. His collecting and curating techniques had probably been shaped through observation of his former employer. Many of the artifacts in Salter's collection were said to have come from Sloane.

Mr. Salter's collection of curiosities" was very popular and is referred to by such contemporaries as Steele, Swift and Benjamin Franklin. Steele, in the Tatler, no. 34, is suspicious as to the worth of Slater's exhibits. 'There is really nothing, but, under the specious Pretense for Learning and Antiquity, to impose upon the World.' This criticism is born out by

the Catalogue of the Rarities to be Seen at Don Salter's Coffee-House, first issued in 1729, which went through numerous editions up to the end of the eighteenth century. It contains particulars of many odd and amusing 'curiosities' which the proprietor had collected for the 'Delight of the Publik,' such as the Queen of Sheba's Fan and Cordial Bottle, Robinson Crusoe's and his Man Friday's Shirt, the Four Evangelists cut on a cherry stone, a curious Ball of Fishbones found near Plymouth, and Pontius Pilate's Wife's Chambermaid's Sister's Sister's Hat. It seems improbable that all of these came from Sloane's own collection. The 'museum' was sold by auction in 1799 and its contents dispersed.

Almost thirty years after the establishment of the British Museum a similar venture was under way in the newly formed states of America. Charles Wilson Peale, noted painter and collector, had been amassing his own collection which he put on display in his Philadelphia home.

In 1786 he announced that he was forming a museum there--a 'Repository for Natural Curiosities,' or 'the Wonderful World of Nature' to be arranged according to Linnaean classification. Among other exhibits was a grotto showing snakes and reptiles in natural surroundings.

By 1794 Peale's museum had outgrown his house and he moved the collection to the newly completed Philosophical Hall of the American Philosophical Society. In 1802 it was transferred to what is today Independence Hall. Peale's museum and his techniques for display were more advanced than his contemporaries may have known. What began as Peale's own personal museum became known as "Peale's Museum in Philadelphia," and it was in this venture that Peale first introduced overhead lighting for exhibits and the local publication of benefactors' names, which Peale believed would continue and increase their support.

Many twentieth century museums have also grown out of private collections. One of the most noteworthy is the Mercer Museum in Doylestown, Pennsylvania. Henry Mercer of Bucks County, Pennsylvania began his collection of "the tools that built America," in 1897. He collected tools that would reflect the everyday lives of people in the nineteenth century. Realizing even then that technology was quickly changing, he hoped his collection would remain a physical documentation of the building of America and would provide future researchers with valuable information regarding the disappearing past. In 1913 Mercer donated his collection of 15,000 objects to the Bucks County Historical Society. He built a concrete, castle-like structure to house the collection that is today the foundation of the society--the Mercer Museum. His personal visions and concerns exist in the collection, and his subsequent work in classifying and explaining the objects remain today as one of country's most complete collections of nineteenth century material culture.⁹

The "Personal Museum" Concept

It would be inaccurate to suggest that collecting objects and allowing people to visit these collections began in the seventeenth century. It would be more accurate to say that traditional history texts linked these particular collections to the origins of public museums and that collectors before and after the seventeenth century did not receive historical acclaim because of their insignificance

to the historical development of museums. Most personal museums do not end up in public institutions. It is more likely that the objects in these collections are dispersed in the same way that James Salter's Coffee-House displays were--piece by piece at auctions. It has been and will continue to be impossible to trace personal museums once their owners have died. The personal museum is inextricably linked to its owner, and it is this bond that allows a collection to become a personal museum. Once owners die, the personal museum concept, which may have at one time been applicable to their collections, dies also.

Following the death of their owners, personal museum collections change form. In some instances they may be installed in public museums or sold to collectors. Collections may remain intact or are dispersed among several people. Objects may be retrieved and treasured by family and friends or simply discarded. Once the collection is removed from its original context, it becomes something else, but it never remains a personal museum. Similarly to objects placed in museum cases, objects removed from a personal museum become individual artifacts that are transposed in new surroundings and injected with new interpretations.

In my research, I attempted to locate collections in Wisconsin that retained their personal museum status. These were collections still in the possession of the owners who could explain and interpret their significances. I chose

Wisconsin partially because of my familiarity with the state, but also because I expected to find personal museums of various kinds in all areas of the state. Through newspaper clippings and simple roadside discovery, I located several collections and collectors that I considered to be examples of personal museums. Folklorists James Leary and Janet Gilmore provided me with the names of many collection owners whom they met during their survey of Wisconsin folk art and artists.

Because of its rural landscape and strong ties to the Great Lakes, Wisconsin is a state rich in farming, hunting, and fishing. Many of the collections I saw were based on these important regional activities. Stuffed deer, moose heads, squirrels, duck decoys, and mounted fish were all in abundance in most locations. They represented trophies of a sort, locally familiar and acceptable objects of display. Wisconsin's long and harsh winters provide the perfect setting for artists who move inside, away from outdoor chores and activities such as farming, fishing, and lawn maintenance. Winter workshops established in basements and workrooms become new homes for many artists and collectors, and productive winters enhance and expand their collections, whether they consist of duck decoys, steam engines reproductions, or whittled "balls in cages."

In The Passionate Collector bibliophile Walter Benjamin discusses the personal relationship of collectors to their collections.

But one thing should be noted: the phenomena of collecting loses its meaning as it loses its personal owner. Even though public collections may be less objectionable socially and more useful academically than private collections, the objects get their due only in the later.¹⁰

The existence of a living owner is essential to the personal museum experience. The experience of the museum is dependent on owner interpretation and explanation. It is the visitors' interaction with owners, their lives, and their collections that make the personal museum experience unique. Without the presence of an owner, a collection may remain significant but it does not approach the experience offered by direct communication with the owner. Fred Smith's collection of cement figures, adorned with glass, is one such example.

Fred Smith's Concrete Park survives through the outside help of the Kohler Foundation and its home community.¹¹ The personal museum quality of this collection can only be imagined, however, since Smith had died several years ago. Outside support had done a tremendous job of preserving the original artworks, but without the owner's presence the personal museum qualities that had existed as long as he had were gone. To have met Smith, toured the collection with him, or seen him working on the objects would have been the heart of the personal museum experience. Without him the collection has taken on entirely different meanings, and while it remains a positive affirmation of his intentions and visions, it remains a reinterpretation.

The relationship of an owner to his personal museum is that of curator. The owner is responsible for all areas of the museum, from maintenance to education. These are tasks that owners perform individually guided by specific visions and concerns. Collection owners become local and regional historians, researching and collecting objects that reflect their own particular interests. These acts allow craftspeople and collectors to align themselves with past ways and traditions and to become personally involved with the preservation of those traditional ways. In their survey of Wisconsin folk art and artists Gilmore and Leary noted many such instances.

The later fascination with 'things of beauty' has compelled many folk artists to become informed practitioners and a few to become amateur historians of their own traditions. Besides making his own fish lures and fish and duck decoys, Tom Winter avidly collects them. Ryszarda Klim reads extensively about Polish paper cuts called wycinanki which she makes. These artists and many like them delight in understanding precisely how their own art links them¹² with present and bygone style and practitioners.

Wisconsin's Folk Groups and Traditions

Traditions are shared, transmitted, and shaped by the value systems of different communities, or groups, of people. In Wisconsin a variety of differing groups can be defined. Three of the most prominent and easily identifiable groups in the state are occupational, ethnic, and recreational communities. The creating and crafting of art objects and tools, as well as the collecting and displaying of particular artifacts is one way for members of these communities to reaffirm their involvement with the

traditions that form a portion of their communities' identifiable features. Wisconsin is a diverse state made up of all types and groups of people. Separately they serve as pieces of a puzzle. Together they form a complete and distinctive whole.

Many personal museums owners make direct references to these communities and groups through their collections. Owners are usually involved in one or more of these groups, and in many cases their group involvements overlapped. Skill acquired through occupational involvement in such fields as lumbering and machinery repair are used in the crafting of objects that reflect an area of technical expertise. These skills may also be used in the creation of nonutilitarian objects that convey information about the artist's ethnic heritage. Owners identify themselves as members of communities and subcommunities. This group identification provides an extension to individual's lives. It provides individual traditions and skills with substantive meaning, and allows owners to become curators of these traditions. Their personal museums often serve as vehicles for transmitting their knowledge, skills, and identities. Occupational, recreational, and ethnic communities are only three examples in a diverse world of associations within Wisconsin's populations. These three groups form the most distinctive images and have left the most noticeable marks on the cultural landscape of the state.

Occupational groups in Wisconsin are varied, but among those most closely linked to the state are its farmers and lumbermen. These individuals helped build and develop the state and they continue to add to the state's economy. The tools they craft and use, the machines they employ, and the objects they have created based on skills developed in their trades, are objects reflective of a group's traditions and images of themselves.

Recreational communities in Wisconsin are a varied but integral part of the state's identity. Wisconsin's rivers, lakes, fields, and forests have served to nurture a thriving community of sportsmen and women. Their tools and trophies have become familiar objects. Cities in Wisconsin often promote themselves on their natural resources in order to attract hunters and fishers from all over.

Wisconsin's various ethnic groups continue to thrive and grow. Scattered throughout the state, Swedes, Poles, Germans, Mexican-Americans, Armenians, Norwegians, Lithuanians, and numerous others are practicing and promoting traditional ways. They continue their ethnic traditions through the crafting of arts and instruments, festivals, and cooking. Wisconsin's Indian populations, most notably the Chippewas, remain a strong unit involved in political disputes over land rights. The retention of customary ways and the desire to promote familiar traditions have helped Wisconsin's ethnic communities to thrive and survive.

Individuals within these folk groups use their objects

and skills as a way of binding and linking themselves to other members of their groups. Duck decoy shows and thresherees are just some of the examples of events that offer craftspeople the opportunity to come together, compare their work, and reaffirm their involvement in their communities. Festivals are not only ways of introducing traditional skills to outsiders, but they also allow group members to keep in touch with each other, learn from and inspire each other, and to reaffirm the significance of their crafts and skills. These folk groups, or communities, serve to support their members and provide audiences for the crafting, preservation, and continuation of traditional arts, skills, beliefs, and values.

Personal museums are one way for individuals to do this. On a personal scale they are natural repositories and archives for locally significant groups. Owners display and preserve important aspects of their own communities. Their involvement with the collections allow them to direct the information they feel is significant. Personal museum owners become experts and curators of their traditions.¹³

In the following three chapters I will examine some personal museums I visited in Wisconsin. I will describe the collections and display techniques exhibited by collection owners. I will also provide some information on the owners and will attempt to discuss their relationships to their collections. I looked for personal museums that contained information regarding the region and communities

where they existed. I have divided these significant informational contributions into three categories: history, local narratives, and aesthetics.

In the chapter entitled "History" I will examine collections and their owners whose displays provide the visitor with information regarding both local and natural history of the region. Much of this information focused on agrarian and rural lifestyles as well as early settlers and important individuals. I also will discuss a collection based on the geological formation of northern Wisconsin around the Lake Superior region.

"Local Narratives: Verbal and Visual" will involve collections that present visitors with visual stories about local heroes and legends. Collectors may also play an important role in the storytelling process. One owner in particular is a very important component of his "personal museum," and his presence and subsequent storytelling complete and are necessary to the experience.

Aesthetics can also be examined on regional and community levels. A common folk aesthetic found in various folk groups in Wisconsin concerns the technique involved in the crafting of an object, as well as in the beauty and usefulness of utilitarian objects. It is also formed in the beauty of objects that convey memories or recollections. For many Wisconsinites, this beauty and technique is exhibited in the crafted tools and artworks of local artists, as well as the mounted heads of locally hunted animals, mounted fish, and stuffed birds.

Although I have divided the collections into these three categories, the categories should in no way be considered exclusive. A collection that demonstrates community aesthetics may also carry valuable information on local history. Objects that depict local legendary characters may also be considered finely crafted and aesthetically pleasing to the community.

I interviewed personal museum owners and photographed their collections, and gathered any available information that addressed these specific museums. I also noted my own responses as a visitor. I attempted to ask owners similar questions regarding the fate of their collections. Great differences were noted in collectors' attitudes towards the museum qualities of their collections. Many owners had never thought of their collections as museums, while some went to great pains to name their museums, provide privately written brochures about their collections, and request visitors to sign guest books. These differing attitudes may affect the appearance of a collection or the information the collector may choose to provide, but they do not change the status of a personal museum. Most collection owners would not necessarily consider their collections to be personal museums. This concept can be applied to particular collections for a variety of reasons and these reasons are not always dependent upon the owners' personal opinions regarding their collections.

Notes for Chapter I

1. Betty Belanus. "The Personal Museum: An Important Local Resource." History News. (March/April, 1987) p. 29.
2. Quoted in G. Ellis Burcaw, Introduction to Museum Work, (Nashville: American Association of State and Local History, 1979), p. 43.
3. Douglas and Elizabeth Rigby. Lock, Stock and Barrell: The Story of Collecting (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1944). The Rigby's present an interesting overview of the history of collecting, highlighting some very famous collections. Although the book is somewhat dated, it remains one of the comprehensive examinations of the history of collecting. Another more recent publication that focuses on specific collecting practices is Ellen Land-Weber's The Passionate Collector, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1980). Land-Weber's book is a photographic documentation of a variety of collections and collectors, and includes oral narratives regarding the collections by the owners.
4. Rigby, p. 205.
5. Edward Alexander, Museums in Motion, (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1979), p. 43.
6. Rigby, pp. 245-246.
7. Edward Miller, That Noble Cabinet: A History of the British Museum, (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1974), p. 26.
8. Alexander, p. 48.
9. For a description of the Mercer Collection see: Marilyn Arbors, Tools & Trades of America's Past: The Mercer Collection, (Doylestown, Pennsylvania: The Bucks County Historical Society, 1981). This catalogue was the result of a 1978 National Endowment for the Humanities grant awarded the Bucks County Historical Society for the purpose of labeling and cataloging the collection. It is used as a guide to the collection and general source of information on "the tools and the people who used them."
10. Weber, p. 17. This quote is from the Introduction to Weber's book which was written by Walter Benjamin entitled "Unpacking My Library: A Talk About Book Collecting."
11. The Kohler Foundation of Sheyboygan, Wisconsin has supported work done on Fred Smith's Concrete Park in Phillips, Wisconsin and The Painted Forest, a mural in the

lodge hall of The Modern Woodsman of America, a fraternal organization. The hall is located in Valton, Wisconsin and through the support of the Kohler Foundation it has been presented to Sauk County. It is now maintained by the Historical Society of Upper Baraboo Valley and is open to the public. For more information on The Painted Forest and the Kohler Foundation see: Daniel Franklin Ward, Personal Places: Perspectives on Informal Art Environments, (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1984).

12. Janet Gilmore and James Leary, "Cultural Forms, Personal Visions," From Hardanger to Harleys: A Survey of Wisconsin Folk Art, (Sheyboygan, Wisconsin: John Michael Kohler Arts Center, 1987), p.20.

13. For more information on Wisconsin's various communities and their relationships to their crafts see: Robert Teske, "Wisconsin Folk Art: Continuing a Cultural Heritage," From Hardanger to Harleys: A Survey of Wisconsin Folk Art, (Sheyboygan, Wisconsin: The John Michael Kohler Arts Center, 1987), pp. 1-11.

CHAPTER II: HISTORY

History museums in the United States for the most part are devoted to the interpretation of the history of the regions where they are located. The collections are comprised of objects made, used, and gathered by human beings. These objects are displayed and interpreted by professional staff members. The interpretations focus on the role the object may have played in the historical development of a particular place or time, or the significance the object may have held for a specific event.

Many personal museums also house collections that emphasize a certain aspect of a region's historical development. Owners of these personal museums focus on aspects of regional history that they find particularly interesting. The historical information presented in personal museums is particularly personal information. The museums present their owners' special views of the significance of specific aspects of the culture. Owners are responsible for supplying the interpretive information that they hope will transform their own selective views into broader ones--ones that can be appreciated and recognized by others as valuable and significant.

According to James Leary:

The assumption of a curator's role, even in the practice of folk art as ubiquitous as chain carving and quilting, invariably confers status--some measure of recognition that one is doing something significant. Nearly all folk artists have a public with whom they seek communication, from whom they wish acceptance, and without whom they cannot be satisfied.

The owner's specialized knowledge of a particular aspect of regional history is essential for the personal museum visitor. Most personal museums do not provide written labels that allow the viewers to browse the collections on their own and still understand the scope of the collection or the significance of the objects. Personal museum owners' views of history may on occasion be skewed and their interpretive information less objective than in traditional history museums. The objects in personal museums are, however, closely related to the owners' personal views and, in many cases, their lives. The objects in their collections reinforce these personal concerns.

I visited four personal museums in Wisconsin that housed collections that highlighted particular regional histories. Three of these museum collections focused on cultural history: the development of Wisconsin's agricultural, rural, and nostalgic past. The focus of one museum collection was on natural history: the rock formation of a particular type found on the shores of Lake Superior. All owners were experts on their subjects, offering information that exceeded what was included in their collections. Owners themselves became historians collecting and researching their areas of interest and representing

their interests in their collections and museums.

It is important to state also that the inclusion of historical information in no way excludes a highly developed aesthetic sense owners or visitors may possess towards the objects on display. As in larger history museums, personal museum owners create and choose only the best examples for display. In many cases these owners are expert craftsmen intent on recreating an object as closely as possible to its historical original. Authenticity is a major concern whether that be in the actual parts of an object, the recreation of particular events, or the exhibition and discussion of a particular way of life.

Clarence Mirk, Wauwatosa, Wisconsin

Clarence Mirk lives in a small house in Wauwatosa located on the western border of Milwaukee. He has lived in this particular house for almost fifty years. Upon entering his house the visitor may be surprised by the starkness of the living room. Furniture is at a minimum. The walls are void of any type of decoration except for a small painting above the fireplace. The only other decorative elements are five or six miniature models of familiar objects evenly spaced on his fireplace mantle. His kitchen, as well as the rest of the main floor, is similarly arranged.

Mirk's personal museum is housed in his basement. The walls of the basement are covered with a variety of brightly colored pictures and photographs cut from magazines and newspapers. The images on one wall in particular are of

farming equipment and field hands at work. The main theme of these particular pictures is the task of threshing. Centered in the middle of his basement are models that Mirk has built. One is of a steam engine. Approximately four feet behind that machine, on a separate table, is a reproduction of a threshing machine, also built by Mirk.

Mirk is a scale model builder. He builds miniature reproductions of machines, most specifically old time farm machines. His reproductions are all workable and precise. Mirk not only makes each part of the model, but he also creates tools that function for specific purposes in his craft, tools not available in stores. Mirk is a man concerned with precision, accuracy, and most importantly, perfection.

Clarence Mirk was born in 1904 in Dodge County, Wisconsin. He began repairing small machinery as a youngster. His father was a tradesman, skilled in the workings of many complex machines including threshers. The Mirk family owned a large steam engine and threshing machine similar to the one on display in his museum. Steam engines were used primarily before 1914 when they were gradually replaced with gasoline powered engines. Mirk was always fascinated by the machinery around him and was often working on inventions of his own based on the processes he witnessed and observed in the family's machinery. In 1935 he began building scale models. Before he retired Mirk had been an industrial sewing machine repairman for the Singer Sewing Machine Company. This job entailed running to a machine

when its operator called for the repairman. Because operators were paid by the piece Mirk was pressured to work quickly. To know Clarence Mirk is to realize how frustrating this must have been. Mirk is an extremely patient man, interested in quality and not quantity. The craft of scale model building requires skills that allow the artists to work on one piece for several years.

A visit to Mirk's personal museum is multifaceted, and the information available is presented on different levels. The visual level consists of the hundreds of images which cover the basement walls. The most consistent are the threshing images which are separated from the others by their placement on a specific wall. Also on the visual level are the scale models Mirk exhibits in his basement. Two or three are placed against the wall while the steam engine and threshing machine are centered in the middle of the basement floor. There is ample space surrounding these two machines allowing close observation from every angle. Their placement also allows Mirk to display a second level of his personal museum: a performance which consists of Mirk building a small fire in the steam engine that begins to steam the water which had been added to another part of the machine. Pulleys are connected between the engine and the thresher. Approximately five minutes after Mirk begins the process the machines are in full swing. The engine is producing steam, the whistles are blowing, the pulleys are in motion, and the thresher is moving. The noise resounds

off the concrete blocks of the basement making it difficult to talk or hear Mirk's explanation of the process. Despite the noise, Mirk gives an explanation, moving from the engine to the thresher and back again.

After the performance is over, Mirk moves to the threshing image wall recounting stories regarding people or places included in the numerous photographs and pictures. Following this, the visitor is lead to Mirk's workshop located in a small room off the main floor of the basement. Here Mirk provides detailed information regarding his tools and the process of building a scale model. He obtained his metal lathe in 1936 or 1937. His lathe is the center of this room, and Mirk talks about the circumstances surrounding his acquisition of the tool. Mirk makes many of his own tools which are necessary for a limited number of tasks involved in the creation of certain parts of his models. These tools may only be used once, but they are essential.

Mirk explains that the regional significance of these machines lies in their size as compared to similar machines made in different parts of the country. Machines of this type in Wisconsin were made smaller than ones out west because of the hilly terrain and rocky soil. Because they moved on steel wheels they were quite clumsy. Smaller machines were easier to maneuver on Wisconsin's rough surfaces. Mirk began attending thresheres in the early 1950s. He continues to display his reproductions at events throughout Wisconsin and neighboring states. During my

visit with Mirk, I was provided with the dates and locations of upcoming model shows, many of which Mirk will attend and display his work. Mirk has also found that when he travels to scale model shows he finds that many city people as well as younger farmers have never seen older forms of machinery and power such as steam engines.

Mirk's presence is an important component to a personal museum visit at his home. He is a man well versed in the history of the region. His family has lived in Wisconsin for over one hundred years. He understands the machines he has made, and while he feels that he too often lives "in the past," he is fascinated by "American ingenuity" and his models are testament to that.

A visit to Mirk's personal museum is a history lesson full of regional information on agriculture, farming, and the early settlement of Wisconsin. Mirk is a quiet and patient man. He believes that whenever he travels to model shows it is his duty to explain to people not only how his models work, but also why and how these machines played a significant role in the development of Wisconsin's agricultural history.

Mirk's skills as a scale model builder provides tangible evidence of his success as a sewing machine repairman. Mirk and his father were responsible for repairing the machinery on their farm. Mirk's involvement with scale model building and his attendance at numerous thresheres is one way he continues to develop and display

his skills. The tools he creates and uses in the crafting of scale models are similar to ones he used during his years as a youngster on the family farm and as a repairman. The creation of miniatures not only offers Mirk the opportunity to demonstrate these skills, but provides him with an outlet to socialize with other builders in possession of similar interests and backgrounds. Although the model are displayed for the appreciation of everyone, Mirk's peer group of other model makers are his most important audience. Comparisons and criticisms are anticipated and respected. A visit to Mirk's personal museum includes his own opinions on the models made by other builders.

Adolph Vandertie, Green Bay, Wisconsin

Adolph Vandertie's house in Green Bay, Wisconsin, has been completely taken over by his collection of whittled and tramp art. Vandertie not only collects but has also made most of the thousands of pieces he owns and displays. Vandertie's museum is a tribute to his skill as an expert whittler, but he believes that it is, more importantly, a tribute to the hobo culture that flourished in this railhead town earlier in the century. It was the visits to Green Bay's hobo jungles as a youth and his association with the people that lived there that interested Vandertie in the art of whittling.

Born in Lena, Wisconsin, in 1911 Vandertie moved with his family to Green Bay around 1920. He began visiting nearby hobo jungles as a youngster. Vandertie was intrigued

by the stories the hoboes told him of life on the road. He was fascinated by their whittling skills, especially with the whittlers' trick: the ball-in-the-cage.

His first association with the hoboes was at the age of eight or nine. Vandertie's older brother had a friend who was a hobo. When this particular man was in town he would stop in to visit Vandertie's brother. Vandertie describes his first experiences with this man and the hobo jungle this way:

He was always talking about the hobo jungle and so on, and one day he asked me if I'd like to go down to the jungle with him. Sure! He took me down there. And of course it was always a lot of fun to a kid. Always an adventure to go down and listen to these guys tell stories about where they'd been, and some of them had traveled all over the world. And they were always cooking what they called Mulligan Stew. And of course they'd always invite me to eat with them. I got to be good friends with them and I'd go down there often. Every chance I had I'd be down at the hobo jungle. And I met an awful lot of these fellows.

Vandertie traveled only a few times with the hoboes. He considers the hobo life "lonely, cruel, and harsh."

The pieces in his collection are varied. There are several balls-in-cages of varying lengths as well as whittled figures and picture frames. Vandertie's museum boasts of having in its collection the world's longest whittled wooden chain, a claim he can support by its inclusion in Ripley's book of records and various newspaper articles. Vandertie has also collected tramp art and claims to own one of the most extensive collections of this type in the world. Tramp art was a form of whittling introduced in

America by German "tramps" in 1863. The pieces were made from wooden cigar boxes. They were carved by notching out small pieces of the wood at alternating angles. They were formed into boxes, pieces or furniture, and picture frames.³

Each room of Vandertie's home is part of his personal museum. The walls are covered with his whittled pieces. Shelves are full of his own work as well as noteworthy pieces he has collected. A tour of his personal museum begins in the living room where Vandertie introduces the visitor to the art of whittling, placing it in its historical context--that of hobo culture. The visitor is guided through room after room of Vandertie's home. In each room he points out specific pieces, discussing the craft involved or the significance of the piece. The tour concludes in a small room off the kitchen where some of his finest tramp art pieces are displayed. In this room he explains further the history of tramp art and how he has acquired specific pieces in his collection. Following a tour of the house, Vandertie discusses several issues, including the value of his collection. He also possesses a collection of jackknives which he willingly shows and talks about. Throughout the visit his wife Adeline accompanies the small group adding information that Adolph has left out or supplying him with words he cannot seem to find at the time.

Vandertie then discusses the hobo culture he admires. He talks about the history of the group and famous hoboes. According to Vandertie there were several different types of

hoboes. Some were running away from the law while some were misfits who did not fit into society. The "true" hobo, as Vandertie calls them, were "the original migrant workers." Vandertie's particular interest is in the hobo culture that existed immediately before and during the depression of the 1930s. This period was also the time that Vandertie became involved in hobo culture and life by visiting the jungles. These hoboes were men and women who were out of work. Rather than remaining at home, they traveled across the country in search of temporary jobs. They traveled by rail, often riding in boxcars. The name "hobo" comes from the English word "hoeboys" meaning someone who tended gardens. Vandertie states that he came close to becoming a true hobo.

I came within a gnat's eyelash. I was going to leave the next morning. My destination was St. Louis because I'd heard there was work in the brewery there. Boy, what a natural for me! But, there's this little five foot, two inch, something or other, feisty little character that I'd been associating with some. She talked me out of it.⁴

Vandertie was referring to his wife, Adeline, who proposed to him before he was to leave. Each year Vandertie travels to the National Hobo Convention in Britt, Iowa, where he holds the title of Grand Duke of the Hoboes. A segment of this discussion includes Vandertie's dressing in traditional hobo gear: a red handkerchief and a hat adorned with various pins and buttons. Before the visitors leave Vandertie presents them with a copy of his pamphlet "The Romance and History of Whittling and Collecting Hobo and Tramp Art," and he requests that his visitors sign a guest book, one that

contains several pages of prior signatures.

Vandertie's interest in his craft is best explained in his own words.

The obsession I have toward the hobby of whittling and collecting hobo and tramp art began as a young boy when I made frequent trips to the hobo jungles where I listened, wide-eyed, to the stories told by the hoboes of the far away places they had been and the many adventures they had experienced. Some of their stories were quite colorful, many not necessarily true, but always interesting to an impressionable young boy. It was in this environment that I experienced the eating of Mulligan stew and the whittling of what has become the trademark of the whittler: the ball-in-the-cage.⁵

Vandertie's explanations and interpretations are peppered with various stories such as the recent visit of the present hobo king, Steam Train Maury Graham, who spent the night at Vandertie's home on his way to Michigan. Vandertie informed the local press and television station who promptly showed up to record the king's arrival.

A visit to Vandertie's personal museum is an extraordinarily unique experience. The artworks themselves are beautiful and expertly crafted. The key to a visit, however, lies in Vandertie's ability to link the tangible artifacts of his museum with his expert and respectful knowledge of the hobo culture. This knowledge was obtained not only through his own research, but also through his direct experiences in hobo culture.

Vandertie remains active in the hobo community. He looks forward to the yearly conventions and proudly talks about speeches he has made there. Although he does not consider himself a hobo, his collection and whittling skills

have allotted him a place of notoriety among members of the hobo community. Vandertie views the hobo community of the depression and pre-depression era as one of Wisconsin's most important occupational groups. Not only did they work on Wisconsin's various farms but they also worked for the railroads, laying and repairing tracks. His collection is his way of documenting the life of these transient workers by providing tangible evidence of their existence and their various skills and culture.

Vandertie is very conscious of the existence of the personal museum in his house. His wife calls it their "mini-museum." In his pamphlet Vandertie describes his reasoning behind forming the museum.

There are only 8 or 10 real rail-riding hoboes left in the United States, and, because most of them are very old, I believe that this is the last generation of them. For this reason, I am most anxious to preserve not only their memories, but also the few remaining artifacts of their art and culture for future generations to enjoy.

My plans for preserving these artifacts involve negotiations with several museum-type organizations that have expressed an interest in providing a permanent repository for them. For the present, my home is a live-in museum where these things are on display at all times. You are invited to visit at any time.

P.S. Please call in advance to be sure we are home.

Gerald Littel, Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Each year Milwaukee hosts the Great Circus Parade. It is a big event for the city, often drawing national press coverage. The three hour parade through Milwaukee's downtown streets consists of marching bands, clowns, floats,

and the highlight of the parade, the antique circus wagons of the old Ringling Brothers Circus. The wagons are housed in Baraboo's Circus World Museum. Each July the wagons move slowly along the train tracks to Milwaukee's lakefront. At each city on the route crowds of people gather at specific times to watch the wagons pass by.

Each year, approximately two weeks before the parade, Gerald Littel of Milwaukee puts on his own circus--the Littel Miniature Circus. For the past nine years Littel's circus has transformed his garage into a local showplace, and it is in his garage that one will find Littel's personal museum. The themes change each year including such circus spectacles as the "Parade of the Elephants," "Here Come the Clowns," "The Wild West," and "A Royal Fantasy."

Littel makes and collects the pieces which he combines to create his yearly themes. He began creating the pieces as a child. He was born near Milwaukee in 1931. As a child Littel spent summer vacations visiting an uncle in northern Wisconsin. During his vacations he was often taken to local circuses. Inspired by the things he saw he began crafting circus images from wooden Velveeta boxes. The pieces and the circuses he creates are three-eighths of an inch to one-half of an inch in size. He scavenges for wood shavings and cork to complete the setup.

Littel is a school teacher in Milwaukee. He began using his pieces several years ago to teach his students a variety of subjects including creative writing and state history. A block party nine years ago was the first time

Littel brought the pieces together and formed the circus housing it in his garage. It has become an event that neighborhood children and adults, as well as other organizations familiar with the Littel Circus, look forward to each year.

The circus plays an important part in Wisconsin's history. The Ringling Brothers' Circus began in Wisconsin in the late 1800s. It eventually moved out of the state, but returned to Baraboo several years later and placed its old, original circus wagons in the Baraboo museum. That museum is today what is known as the circus' "winter home": a place to store and maintain the wagons and other artifacts that typically travel during warmer months.

At one time there were over one hundred circuses in Wisconsin. A traveling circus provided exciting and exotic entertainment to its rural populations. The return of the circus each spring and summer meant the end of the long and bleak winter faced by Wisconsin's sometimes isolated farm and small town inhabitants. Littel is quite versed in the history of the circus in Wisconsin.

Well, it was the Ringling brothers got the idea. There had been circuses, eventually beginning in Wisconsin. Over 100 circuses got their start in Wisconsin, in the Baraboo area, but a lot in the Delavan area, Watertown, a few of the towns, there were many towns. Some of them were successful; some were not. Delavan is another place to look. A lot of circus people are there. But it was the Ringling brothers that started this idea and they began to tour around. And, of course, by 1917 the show had grown very, very large. And that's the present site of the Circus World Museum. Then they left and went to Bridgeport, Connecticut, and they eventually went to Sarasota because of the

climate. It was showbiz. And it began to grow.⁷

To Wisconsin's rural populations the circus was an incredible event. It provided a form of entertainment that could not be found in small towns or on farms. It changed each year, providing a much needed social and emotional outlet to the thousands of town people that showed up at each new performance. The circus was affordable, it was exotic, and it appealed to all the senses in its beautiful displays and death defying feats.

You can imagine in an era when there was no television, or even radios, and suddenly on a barn or a building would be this wonderful poster with all these exotic animals. There were no zoos in a small Wisconsin town, or a midwest town, or any town. And here would come this troupe with all these exotic animals. It was just something that kids lived for, and people did. It was a great social gathering. The farmers came in from all over to view the parade in the morning which was designed to attract the people to the circus grounds, and⁸ follow the parade then for the performance.

The circus functions the same in Milwaukee today as it may have sixty or seventy years ago. The parade, however, has replaced the performance in Milwaukee which it at one time preceeded. Littel believes that additional information regarding early life can be gathered from the information circus owners and participants kept for their own use.

One of the things, the circus always kept a route book; a diary of what happened. We can get information on early Wisconsin from these things, or wherever the circus traveled. For instance, it would say in such or such a town, the lead mines gave out in Shullsburg which is a lead mine there in the southwestern part. This year they had a bad crop; we did not do well in this town. There was⁹ a tornado in--whatever town--so we avoided it.

When the Littel Miniature Circus is not on display it is stored away in hundreds of shoe boxes in Littel's basement. He spends the better part of the year collecting and making objects for his summer circuses, often working on pieces for circuses which will not be erected for two or three years.

Littel limits his circus performance schedule to a week or ten days so that he may be present for each performance--and it is a performance. During the circus days in his garage, Gerald Littel becomes Wilbur the Clown, his alter-ego. It is perhaps as Wilbur that Littel is best known. Wilbur the Clown makes personal appearances around the city, visiting schools, hospitals, senior citizen homes, and of course, the Littel Miniature Circus.

On this rainy afternoon Wilbur is just a costume, draped across a chair. But on circus days Littel vanishes and Wilbur appears at the doorway, large as life, greeting visitors, tickling and honking and joking. The father of four children, member of the geological society, former student for the priesthood, has been replaced by a goof.

'Wilbur is a kind of klutz, careless, mischievous, all the things I'm not,' Littel says. 'And he lives a life I could never live. I would never join a real circus.'

A visit to Littel's personal museum is an experience full of history and entertainment. Visual as well as verbal images create an atmosphere resonant of the performance's historical original--the circus. Littel's familiarity with the circus goes beyond the performances. He is full of information on the lives of circus performers, both in the past and present. Throughout Wisconsin, and other rural

midwest areas, the circus was one of many traveling troupes that provided entertainment and recreation to communities that were unable to partake in more mainstream forms of entertainment such as movies and theatre. Littel participates in a whole network of circus enthusiasts. He subscribes to circus related magazines and newsletters that allow him to keep track of various traveling shows and friends. Littel's miniature circus is a reinterpretation of a long-standing form of community entertainment. His involvement in the circus community of performers, historians, and miniature makers keeps him in touch with others of similar interests. Through his roles as teacher, neighbor, and circus clown, Littel is allowed the opportunity to display and discuss his knowledge. Littel's presence as Wilbur the Clown not only brings the three dimensional display into a fourth dimensional realm, but it reinforces Littel's own belief that a circus is not a circus without a clown.

Byron Buckeridge, Saxon, Wisconsin

Located on highway two, between Ashland and Hurley, along the northern tip of Wisconsin is Byron Buckeridge's Blue Barn. Buckeridge and his wife Dorothy have owned the building since 1973. It lies on the southern shores of Wisconsin's Lake Superior off Chequamegon Bay.

Buckeridge, born in 1916, is a retired philosophy professor who began collecting concretions over twenty years ago.

I came to where I am because Pat Kelly, a painter-sculptor, gave me a shoeboxful of concretions when he left Northland College for Canada. I was fascinated by them and searched until I found the clay banks where they originate.¹¹

Buckeridge's Barn is where one will find his personal museum that houses his vast collection of what he calls "Nature's Sculpture." The sculptures are in reality Lake Superior concretions. A concretion is a rock formation thought to have been formed some twenty thousand years ago inside the red clay cliffs of the banks along the lake. According to Buckeridge concretions can only be found in a handful of locations around the world. In his self-published book, Lake Superior Concretions: Nature's Sculpture¹², Buckeridge presents a variety of theories that explain the creation of these unusual, smooth-surfaced rocks.

According to the Wisconsin Geological Survey concretions originated some 20,000 years ago in Glacial Lake Duluth (now called Lake Superior). They are made of sand, silt, clay, and hardened by lime or ironoxide. Their theory is that concretions began to form around a fossil nucleus, and that : (1) the number of nucleations, (2) the bedding of surrounding deposits, and (3) the direction and rate of movement of mineralized ground water caused the funny, bizarre, and beautiful shapes.

There are other less expert theories: Dripping Clay (Tom Ortman), Sinking Quartz (Frank Myott), Air Bubbles (John Follis), Molten Clay (anon.), Strata Pressure (Cy Buckeridge), Round Mating (Byron Buckeridge), and the Chippewa Legend (Chief Strange Arrow).¹³

To visit Buckeridge's personal museum the traveler has only to pull up into the front yard of the Blue Barn. Organized and arranged in a variety of groupings according to size, shape, or Buckeridge's own systematic method of classification, the concretions are displayed in his front

yard and are available to be picked up and examined more closely. Buckeridge places prices on the rocks within each grouping. A sign on the front of the barn, "Our honor system works 99% of the time," encourages visitors to buy the concretions they want. Payment is deposited in a milk can located on the barn's front stoop. Here guests can also obtain Buckeridge's book Nature's Sculpture. Various other handmade signs are scattered throughout the front yard presenting Buckeridge's explanations for the various theories, but also exemplifying his somewhat dry sense of humor.

The Chippewa Indian legend that Buckeridge includes in his survey of concretion development theories states that according to the Chippewas, "concretions were created by a Chippewa God who gave each one a little soul."¹⁴ In Chippewa culture the Lake Superior concretions were considered sacred. In deciding to purchase a concretion from Buckeridge's collection visitors are encouraged to choose one that matches their own souls.

Although Buckeridge believes concretions to be one of the regions most neglected resources he focuses his interest on the beauty of the natural formation of the rocks. "If a Lake Superior concretion is perfect in form, I classify it as Nature's Sculpture. I contend that it is a work of art produced by Nature as the artist."¹⁵ The aesthetic beauty of the rocks are what motivates Buckeridge to challenge the world of fine art. A sign on the front of his barn states:

"Nothing Like It In New York."

His desire to collect and display the concretions is based on both their natural historical significance to the Lake Superior region and their often complex and fascinating beauty. Buckeridge questions and disputes the more generalized theories regarding concretion formation often combining theories or and findings based on his own collecting experience.

The notion that Lake Superior concretions are about 20,000 years old and that they are being formed continuously is puzzling to me. Perhaps it means that the LS variety consists of pieces which are at least that old, pieces which have birth dates between then and now, and pieces that Nature is just beginning to produce. Scientists are able to date objects of the past (including the age of the Universe), but as far as I know they have not gotten around¹⁶ to dating a fair sample of LS concretions.

A visit to Buckeridge's personal museum is more than just an opportunity to purchase these rare formations. Buckeridge's research into the history of Lake Superior concretions includes the presentation of a variety of scientific and non-scientific theories regarding their formation. Buckeridge respects the Chippewa legends that discuss the concretions and uses these as the basis for presenting the spiritual nature of the rocks. His own personal relationship to the concretions is, however, based on their artistic beauty. He focused his book and a videotape he produced, "The World's Most Beautiful Concretions," on the physical structure of the forms, highlighting especially unusual formations. He classifies their physical structures into over thirty different types,

including such groupings as "animal," "Buddha," "chess," "planet," "symmetry," and "warts."

Buckeridge's collection has been faced with some controversy. A Milwaukee Journal article of August 1987 explains one such problem. A bank in Milwaukee had taken out several of the concretions which had been placed on display because of some customer complaints. Some customers found the concretions' forms too sexually suggestive. Buckeridge agrees that some forms do resemble familiar human shapes, adding "But how can anybody say other people shouldn't be allowed to see a rock. I think that's totally absurd."¹⁷

Concretions are becoming more difficult to collect. As Buckeridge explains in his book:

When I began my search Nature had gotten stingier and continues to do so every season. The common types can still be found by persistent digging in the clay banks and combing the lake in a wet suit, but finding a rare specimen is like discovering a gold nugget in California or a buck for the poor in the White House.¹⁸

A visit to Buckeridge's personal museum is to experience the concretions he has collected over the past twenty years through his own eyes. Little information is available on the scientific development of concretions. Buckeridge's explanations seem the most comprehensive. A personal museum visit to Buckeridge's barn is to see the abstract beauty of these forms as Buckeridge sees them and to be introduced to the region in which Buckeridge's barn exists. The area of northern Wisconsin where Buckeridge's

museum exists is rich in evidence of the natural formation of the region. Along the shores of Lake Superior one can find geological formations dating back thousands of years. Accompanying these tangible historical clues are stories of the area's first settlers--the Chippewa Indians.

Buckeridge's research into the connection between the concretions and the Chippewas is particularly linked to the area where his museum exists. Communities of Chippewas have resided in northern Wisconsin for generations. Often faced with controversy, the Chippewas have fought to maintain their traditional ways. Buckeridge's inclusion of the Chippewas' association with the spiritual nature of the concretions is a small but existant form of regional Indian legend.¹⁹ Buckeridge's museum collects and combines these interesting and often mysterious clues and presents museum visitors with a unique form of historical reading.

Notes for Chapter II

1. James Leary and Janet Gilmore, "Cultural Forms: Personal Visions." From Hardanger to Harleys: A Survey of Wisconsin Folk Art, (Sheyboygan, Wisconsin: The John Michael Kohler Arts Center, 1987), p.21.
2. Adolph Vandertie interviewed by Mary Zwolinski, Green Bay, Wisconsin, August, 1987.
3. Information on Tramp Art provided by Adolph Vandertie.
4. Adolph Vandertie interviewed by Mary Zwolinski, Green Bay, Wisconsin, August, 1987.
5. Adolph Vandertie, "The Romance and History of Whittling and Collecting Hobo and Tramp Art," (Green Bay, Wisconsin, 1978), p.2.
6. Vandertie, p.4.
7. Gerald Littel interviewed by Mary Zwolinski, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, August 1987.
8. Ibid
9. Ibid
10. "Miniature big top puts on its own shows," The Milwaukee Journal. 12 July, 1987, sec. D, p. 6.
11. Byron Buckeridge, personal letter to author, September, 1987.
12. Byron Buckeridge, "Lake Superior Concretions: Nature's Sculpture," (Saxon Wisconsin, no date).
13. Buckeridge, p.3.
14. Buckeridge, p. 5.
15. Ibid
16. Buckeridge, p. 23.
17. "Bank finds rocks too sexy," The Milwaukee Sentinel, 23 August, 1987.
18. Buckeridge, p. 19.
19. For information on contemporary Chippewa life in northern Wisconsin see: "A separate gathering place: Indians give thanks in special ways," The Milwaukee Journal, 26 November 1987, sec. E, p. 1,6.

CHAPTER III: LOCAL NARRATIVES: VERBAL AND VISUAL

Storytelling in northern Wisconsin often focuses on local heroes and legendary figures including famous Indians and pioneers. Other stories focus on specific ethnic groups and immigrant experiences. They also include the experiences of early settlers and lumbermen as they made their way through the vast north country woods. Many northern Wisconsinites also have a strong penchant for tall-tales. These involve "woody" tall-tale jokes and stories focusing on regional, and often fictitious and unbelievable animals. Fishing tales that imply the biggest, or the most spectacular, are one example of northern Wisconsin's storytelling traditions that entail regional animals in a variety of human and human-like gestures and occurrences. They are creatures with unbelievable characteristics ascribed to them by the storytellers. In Wisconsin this tradition has been promoted both visually and verbally by individuals from a variety of communities, but most importantly, by locally famous raconteurs. These stories are told at home, on hunting and fishing trips, and most often, at the bars of Wisconsin's numerous local taverns. Their characters are locally familiar, and the themes of these stories represent a regional verbal aesthetic for the

unbelievable, the humorous, and the incredible qualities that are conveyed through the storytelling process.¹

The Moccasin Bar, Hayward, Wisconsin

Located in downtown Hayward, in the state's northwest quadrant, is the Moccasin Bar. Hayward is a tourist center with such attractions as the national Lumberjack Competition and The Fresh Water Hall of Fame, housed in a one and one half block long muskie. Surrounded by small lakes and country woods, Hayward is a town dependant on its local resources for its economy.

The Moccasin Bar is housed in an old building that served as a local office in the 1800s. The bar promotes itself as having a wildlife museum that possesses in its collection the world's largest recorded mounted muskie.

Situated along the walls of the Moccassin Bar are numerous mounted fish and wildlife. The most interesting attractions, however, are the several dioramas embedded in the walls. In these dioramas are locally familiar animals in human-like situations. These dioramas are related to a regional storytelling genre that concerns humans involved in a variety of social activities. These activities are reflective of a portion of northern Wisconsinites' past and present lifestyles and activities. In the Moccasin Bar's dioramas locally familiar animals replace the humans. Within each diorama are regionally familiar animals such as chipmunks, red squirrels, wolves, brown bears, badgers, muskrats, wildcats, woodcocks, and beavers. They are posed

in animated ways and embellished with pipes, flowers, fishing hats, glasses, musical instruments, and bottles of beer.

"In the Good Old Summertime" is the title of one such display that features thirteen chipmunks and red squirrels outfitted with musical instruments, fishing gear, and feathered hats. Three members of the group are throwing dice in one corner. A label underneath them reads "seven come leven." Other characters are grouped together. They appear to be singing in harmony as attested to by the small musical score placed above their heads. The others are engaged in a variety of poses. One is drinking from a bottle of Pabst Blue Ribbon beer; a beer made in one of Wisconsin's oldest breweries. The display suggests that there has been a great deal of drinking and merrymaking among the animals on this particular day.

"Northwoods Kangaroo Court" is the name of another diorama. The scene here is a courtroom. It involves such characters as "Judge Wolfe," "Silver Minx," "Sheriff Wildcat," "Squealer Musk-Rat," and "Violator Badger." The crime in question is the alleged out-of-season killing of a woodcock by the badger. The sheriff presents his evidence in a book reading "Woodcock open Season Oct. 1 - Oct. 30." The date of the trial is August third, as verified by a calendar on the judge's desk. This scene is also completed with various empty liquor bottles, cigarette packages, and musical instruments. The sheriff wears a gun in his

holster. The badger wears handcuffs. The details in the diorama are used to establish the humorous legitimacy of the situation described by its title "Northwoods Kangaroo Court." The title, Kangaroo Court, indicates the farce of the situation.

"The Fisherman's Party" portrays the card game of two small brown bears named Royal-Flush Joe and Full-House Pete. There are money and various booze bottles on the card table. Various objects of fishing gear and tackle are also placed in the diorama suggesting the original motivation behind this strange gathering. The game is being held at the "Bloody Gulch Inn Hunter's and Fishermen's Rest." One bear is receiving an extra card from a white rabbit standing behind him. Behind his back, she is slipping him an extra card, and he is handing her a carrot as payment for the card. The viewer immediately recognizes that something is not quite right in the card game. A badger carrying a gun and pouring a beer looks over the shoulder of the other bear.

A fourth diorama, "The Winnah!," tells the story of a boxing match between two raccoons. The referee (represented by a beaver) is holding up the arm of the winning raccoon proclaiming him the winner. The other raccoon lies unconscious on the floor bleeding from the nose. In each corner are the fighters' trainers: two skunks with towels. The scene behind them is of wilderness and an owl watches from a nearby tree.

These four dioramas are only examples of the Moccasin

Bar's incredible collection of mounts and displays. The dioramas, however, are visual stories intended to attract the visitor's attention to important details that provide the displays with descriptive information regarding the event occurring within the cases.

Their humor lies in the incongruity of seeing regionally familiar animals involved in familiar human activities.² These descriptive elements, as well as the dioramas' themes, are regional examples of northern Wisconsin's interest in storytelling. They reflect the region's relationship to the woods and lakes that are so much a part of its environment and that for decades have attracted hunters and fishermen from all parts of the state. The hunting and fishing industry is vital, not only to Hayward's economy, but to its developmental history as well.

It is my contention that museum bars similar to and including the Moccasin Bar are good examples of personal museums. But, unlike personal museums that are housed in individuals' private spheres, museum bars belong to the communities, and more specifically, to the bars' patrons. The patrons become the owners, donating objects for display and creating and providing the interpretive elements essential to understanding the significance of the collection to the community.

In their article, "Museum for the People: Museum Bars," folklorists Kurt Dewhurst and Marsha MacDowell

describe this significant link.

Museum bars can be understood to be directly related to the experience of the community. As a gathering place, the museum bar provides an opportunity for the objects assembled there to be invested with new meanings as well as convey a connectedness to past traditions.³

Similarly to the roles personal museum owners play in their relationships to museums in their homes, community members become curators in museum bars.

Usually developed through community participation, rather than through the efforts of a single curatorial vision, the collection of objects and the related folklore can provide a rich index of community life.⁴

It is the presentation of community life offered by museum bars and their patrons that allow us to consider them a part of the personal museum genre. The bars serve to conserve, as well as display, a region's values and culture in ways that are similar to established local and community museums. Patrons are allowed to play an active role in that display by donating objects that they feel best reflect the lives of their communities.

The Moccasin Bar's collection reflects Hayward's involvement in Wisconsin's numerous recreational communities. Groups of sportsmen and women are involved in a variety of sport subgroup activities, most notably hunting and fishing. The bar's collection is one method of displaying locally acquired trophies such as the "world's largest mounted muskie." The bar also reflects the occupational groups in northern Wisconsin who are attracted to the area by its natural resources. Many of the dioramas

and the situations they suggest stem from the stories and verbal tales told by lumbermen and trappers in the area. In Bloodstoppers and Bearwalkers Richard Dorson describes the value of occupational lore and storytellers in Michigan's Upper Peninsula located just north of Hayward.

Yarns in the woods grew fierce and tall, like the giant pines. Men who cut, haul, search for, sell, and buy timber hear and tell many extravagant tales, for there is much esprit de corps and a great fondness for the prize marvel among these gentry. The witty raconteur is worth his weight in radio tubes and movie celluloid.⁵

Most of the collection of the Moccassin Bar was acquired through patron donation. Both times I visited the bar, in the morning and late evening, many of Hayward's residents could be found in position around the tavern's circular bar. Tourists would often come into the bar, seemingly amazed and confused by the collection. My own observations indicated that most tourists were accompanied by children and came only to see the displays and not to drink. Patrons, as well as bartenders, seemed at home among the displays and willing to answer questions. The Moccasin Bar, similar to community museums, reflects the personal views of the patrons by making important statements regarding what they think is significant and worth preserving in their community. In his article, "Keeping Track of Culture: Grassroots Conservation," Alan Jabbour states:

In contributing to the collections and activities of a community museum, individuals make significant statements about what they value and what they want the community to value in the future...what ought to be preserved and reflected upon now and in the future.⁶

Ed Henkelman, Merrill, Wisconsin

Ed Henkelman was born in 1909 and raised in the house he currently lives in about ten miles outside of Merrill, a town located in the north central region of Wisconsin. The farm surrounding his house has grown wild. Scattered on his property are various outbuildings including a chicken coop and a large barn. It is in this barn that Henkelman maintains his personal museum of locally caught and mounted animals. The animals are fashioned to reflect fictitious tall-tale creatures complete with stories to match.

Henkelman's father had been a forester in Germany before moving to Merrill. An older brother tanned and mounted locally hunted animals. Ed himself worked as a farmer and occasional part-time lumberjack. Several years ago he took a mail order course in taxidermy from the Northwestern School of Taxidermy and the certificate he received from the school is one of the many objects hanging from the walls of his museum.

The building which houses his personal museum is located approximately one hundred feet behind the main house. It is a large structure and often serves as Ed's garage. The floors are wooden and several wooden chairs line the two long walls. Suspended from ceiling beams and placed on several handmade shelves is Ed's collection of

stuffed animals that have been equipped with a variety of affectations including handmade instruments, plastic flowers, books, and various articles of clothing. Also on display are numerous coon and skunkskin hats that Ed makes himself. At one time Ed held weekend dances in this building, featuring local musicians. Ed has a small bar setup in a corner where he once dispensed beer to his guests. His dances brought him trouble when local authorities wanted to shut his activities down because he did not possess a tavernkeeper's license. Ed states that they have also raided his barn, taking possession of his mounts, after people complained about his activities.

Two important components of a visit to Ed's personal museum is the storytelling and descriptive commentaries that Ed provides regarding not only the collection, but also his local reputation for being a "character." His stories recount his experiences with local authorities,⁷ female conquests, and particularly significant animals, as well as jokes, tall-tales, and stories that left me wondering after my visit what was fact and what was fiction. Ed has a way of telling a story, leaving it, and moving on to another before visitors are able to comprehend and question what he may have told them.

The most fantastical of his stories, however, involve particular mounted fish and animals in his collection. The visitor is introduced to a particular display and without any hesitation Ed recounts the unbelievable story of the

display's existence and subsequent placement in his collection. One of these displays involves a five piece squirrel band and dancers that include a dancing couple, a fiddler, a drummer, an accordionist, and a guitarist. Ed made the animals' instruments from wood. According to folklorist James Leary "the band's instrumentation matches that of common up north old time and bar bands--the sort that play at Henkelman's during the summer."⁸ Ed's own explanation of the squirrel band is less informative. "I was walking in the woods and I came upon these squirrels playing and dancing; I killed them and stuffed them."⁹

Ed's "mermaid" is one of his favorite pieces. He spends a great deal of time talking about women and fictitious girlfriends and speaks with similar affection about the mermaid. It was made with the body of a fish, and the arms, head, and legs of a doll. Ed painted over the fish body as he does with many of the mounted fish in his collection. According to Ed, the mermaid was a saltwater creature that swam up from the Mississippi. It entered nearby Trap River via tributaries. Here it died from exposure to the river's fresh water.

Ed has also made what he calls his "African Moth." This piece was made from a folded beaver pelt, pipe cleaners, duck wings, and had been painted green. His model was made from parts of the original which Ed claims to have shot down while duck hunting.¹⁰

Standing in one corner of the museum are male and female mannequins. They are dressed in a combination of

Indian and Mexican style clothing, and both wear headresses. Ed has made several such headresses, dying locally collected bird feathers in bright colors and replacing traditional Indian beadwork with bits and pieces of shiney costume jewelry. Ed claims to have dressed up as an Indian at one time and visited a local supermarket where he attempted to fool shoppers into believing he was a starving Indian. Eventually, he claims, store official asked him to leave and never return.

Traditional taxidermists regard the work that Ed does as disreputable. One taxidermist told me that the type of taxidermy Ed practices is disrespectful to the animals he uses. Ed feels otherwise. He finds traditonally stuffed animal forms do not capture the true nature of the hunted animals. They present the animals as noble and fearless at the time of their deaths. Ed prides himself on mounting the animals in their true stances at the times of their deaths; recapturing the positions and looks they possessed when killed. He often embellishes his several fish mounts with colored paints, attempting to recreate what he considers their true and beautiful colors. He makes his animals come alive through animation by posing them with scavanged and handmade objects. He creates stories that emphasize the animals' true natures and embellishes these stories with tall-tales regarding their lives.

Ed's collection is reflective of his involvement in the state's recreational group of hunters and fishers. Because

Ed is a lifelong member of those communities his collection is a natural form of display. The display of mounts is similar to the ways that other sportsmen and women display their own mounted trophies on walls in their homes. Ed is also a licensed taxidermist. Northern Wisconsin houses an abundance of taxidermy businesses and wildlife museums. His involvement in this community reflects his own interpretations and personalizations. His hunting stories are full of unbelievable encounters and experiences with the animals. His mounted forms represent self-styled, traditional methods as he injects his own personality and interests into his work. Rather than allowing the objects to remain static he has added the storytelling dimension. His association with traditional groups of hunters and taxidermists are personalized to reflect his own values and concerns. As a local character Ed transforms these objects into four dimensional experiences by including the unbelievable descriptions of the animals' lives and their subsequent placement in his barn.

A visit to Ed Henkelman's personal museum is an entertaining and interesting experience. Ed is an expert storyteller aware of how and when to emphasize certain elements of his stories. He is easily encouraged by the visitors' quizzical looks and laughter. A visit to his museum is a wonderful escape into the fantasy world of Ed Henkelman. His creatures and stories are examples of a form of entertainment commonly promoted and practiced in northern Wisconsin.

Notes for Chapter III

1. For information on storytelling in the northern Wisconsin region see: Richard Dorson, Bloodstoppers and Bearwalkers: Folk Traditions of the Upper Peninsula, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952), and James Leary, "George Russell: The Repertoire and Personality of a North Country Storyteller," pp. 354-362, in Folklore on Two Continents, edited by Nikolai Burlakoff and Carl Lindahl, (Bloomington: Trickster Press, 1980).
2. The dioramas were created by Karl Kahmann. The Moccasin Bar's bartender was unable to provide me with detailed information regarding Kahmann. She did state, however, that she thought Kahmann had been a museum worker in Chicago. He often vacationed in Hayward, and eventually retired there. Another story was told to me by a friend in Chicago, Michael Bulka. Bulka had heard that Kahmann had been employed at The Academy of Sciences in Chicago. The dioramas he created for the Academy were so outrageous that he was fired. He then moved to Hayward. I was unable to locate Kahmann or any documentable information on him.
3. Kurt Dewhurst and Marsha MacDowell, "Museums for the People: Museum Bars," Material Culture 18 (Spring 1986), p. 47.
4. Ibid
5. Dorson, Bloodstoppers and Bearwalkers, p. 264.
6. Alan Jabbour, "Keeping Track of Culture: Grassroots Conservation", in Passing Time and Traditions: Contemporary Iowa Folk Art, pp.149-159, edited by Steven Ohrn, (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1984).
7. According to James Leary: "There are two different authorities who have given Ed trouble. The sheriff's department enforces liquor license laws, while game wardens, employees of the state's Department of Natural Resources (DNR), have 'raided' stuffed animals. The DNR was concerned with mounted songbirds in Wisconsin. Stories about clashes between the DNR and hunters, farmers, trappers, fishermen, etc. are extremely widespread in northern Wisconsin. The DNR and its 'Bush Cops' or warden are invariably the villains; hence Ed's fondness for the topic." (Quoted from a letter to the author, November, 1987.)
8. Much of the information regarding Ed Henkelman and his collection, as well as some of the other collectors discussed in this paper, was gathered from the Wisconsin

folk art survey fieldnotes compiled by Janet Gilmore and James Leary. Information from the survey was used to develop the exhibit "From Hardanger to Harleys: A Survey of Wisconsin Folk Art." The exhibit was sponsored by the John Michael Kohler Arts Center of Sheyboygan, Wisconsin and was curated by folklorist Robert Teske.

9. Ibid

10. Ibid

CHAPTER IV: AESTHETIC

While history and natural science museums strive to provide educational information through their display and exhibition techniques, art museums are first and foremost interested in promoting the aesthetic qualities of the artifacts they display. Two and three dimensional works of art are displayed in ways that allow visitors to appreciate the visual aspects of the work. Minimal label description is one way of focusing viewer attention on intrinsic qualities rather than the on the work's historical or pedagogical significance. Displays are categorized according to the type or style of work being exhibited, such as "impressionist," "abstract," or "minimalist."

The function of most art museums, therefore, is to heighten a visitor's aesthetic appreciation of the collection on display. Because this focus is the product of recent western art history it can be referred to as the "Western elite aesthetic."

In order to understand an aesthetic that falls outside the Western elite concept of the term it is first necessary to understand the principles associated with the objects and displays of particular folk groups. For the purpose of this paper those folk groups have been defined as

occupational, ethnic, and recreational communities. These communities often overlap each other, but they are basically broad divisions that form the diversity of Wisconsin's populations.

The Western elite concept of aesthetic is applied to those forms that are perceived as art. But if the group creating the objects does not acknowledge that they are indeed creating art is there also an aesthetic response? In his article, "The Concept of 'Aesthetic' in the Traditional Arts,"¹ folklorist Michael Owen Jones argues that there is such a response, but that first the principles associated with defining that concept must be uncovered and must be examined under specific criteria. Alan Merriam in The Anthropology of Music² argues that without a verbalized philosophy there can be no aesthetic. The situation arises, however, that responses to certain folk and traditional arts are not verbalized within the communities where these forms exist. By not considering various forms as works of art many people do not adopt verbalized responses to those forms.

Art historians use such terms as style, symmetry, balance, and rhythm in defining the aesthetic principles of art forms. Folklorists have long contended that evaluations of traditional arts must first examine their contextual existence, or, more specifically, the role the objects and artists play in their communities. For the subject of this study I will rely on three principles that can be applied when analyzing the aesthetic the people of Wisconsin possess

in response to various forms of traditional art and display within their state.

The first of those principles is the response to the technique and forms used to create specific objects. Franz Boas has defined this response.

It is the artistic pleasure derived from control over tools and techniques and the mastery of form, and the aesthetic pleasure derived from an³ involvement with and the enjoyment of form.

The second principle is the response to the success of utilitarian forms. An object must successfully fulfill its intended function. If the object is successful in those regards it is considered of value by its creator and user and, thus, aesthetically pleasing. This conforms to the midwesterner's aesthetic sensibility for the "practical." This is not to presume that the creators of utilitarian objects are ignorant of style or beauty, but that the functional ability of an object supercedes these later concerns.

...in traditional utilitarian art, usefulness is the primary basis for judgments of the object, since an object that cannot be used is a waste⁴ of time to make and a loss of money to purchase.

The third principle of response is the association an object creates for the viewer. This principle of association is a direct negation of the Western elite aesthetic notion of psychic distance that is defined as the ability to objectively view an object in and of itself without any emotional associations and attachments.

Beauty in art may be generated not by that which objectively conforms to artistic principles, but by that which develops from associations between the object and lingering memories or pleasant fantasies in the percipient, as when a song reminds one of mother or of a son who died in battle, and a sketch evokes dreams of a sequestered way of life that never existed but draws one to it in fantasy to escape the oppression of reality.⁵

I visited three personal museums that provided good examples of each of these three aesthetic principles. Since an aesthetic response to certain forms is not always verbalized I relied instead on the ways the objects were integrated into the communities. Were the owners' collections considered valuable in a non-monetary sense? Did community members respect the owners' collections and exhibit that respect without having to verbalize their reason for doing so? And do the owners and artists themselves adhere to the principles such as mastery of technique and form and concern with object usefulness? The answer to these questions, in regards to the museums discussed in this chapter, were yes.

The aesthetic value of a collection for the community or region it is housed in is reflective of that community's life. A personal museum is an excellent place to experience a community's aesthetic values for it reflects the concerns and interests of community individuals. Its success or failure in terms of its notoriety, acknowledgment, and place in the lives of community members is contingent upon the fact that it does adhere to and reflect the values of the larger group: the community. As members of that larger

group, museum owners become the exhibitors and caretakers of a complex system that may be best described as community preference and taste.

Most displays of objects are attempts by one or more individuals to create an aesthetically pleasing form. All the collections I viewed were based on owners' developed aesthetic senses. The following examples were chosen because they emphasized the differing value systems used in understanding community aesthetics. Those value systems are response to technique and forms, success of utilitarian objects, and associative responses between objects and viewers.

Art Moe, Stone Lake, Wisconsin

Thirty miles south of Hayward on the shores of Lake Lac Court Oreilles is Thor's Kitchen. Owner and operator, Art Moe, has run this supper club for over eighteen years. The lawn of the restaurant provides a breathtaking view of the lake. It also is the home of Art Moe's personal museum. The museum contains Moe's several pieces of chainsaw carvings depicting various regional figures, animals, and characters that reflect Moe's Norwegian roots.

Moe was born in LaCrosse, Wisconsin in 1927. At the age of six he was given a jackknife by his father and he began whittling animals. Moe had been a contractor before taking over the restaurant. He made his first chainsaw carving in 1961 in order to leave a memento of the work he had done in building a camp in the region. This first

carving consisted of a bear which he sculpted from a tree stump. Several years later Moe was challenged to a chainsaw competition. The competition was sponsored by a chainsaw distributor and the event was widely promoted in nearby Hayward. The following year he competed in Hayward's Lumberjack World Competition where he carved alongside a chainsaw carver from California. Moe has carved steadily since then.

He estimates that he has probably carved over one thousand figures in his lifetime. Several of these are arranged around the front of Thor's Kitchen. Many are housed inside the restaurant, arranged next to dining tables. The images are familiar to Moe and to the community.

Moe and his carving skills are highly regarded by community members. He is often asked to demonstrate his skills at festivals and other special events in northern Wisconsin as well as parts of neighboring Minnesota. I saw Moe carving at the opening of a new hardware store in Hayward. Moe's demonstration took place in the parking lot of the store. Several people stopped to watch while on their way inside. Only a handful of people remained throughout the hour demonstration. Because of the noise from the chainsaws, Moe works without talking. He works rapidly, understanding and pre-determining each reductive move before he arrives at it.

Moe does most of his carving in the warmer part of the year. This time frame allows him to work in his yard or

garage, but more importantly, it prevents winter moisture and frost from permeating the wood, making it difficult to carve. He prefers to carve cottonwood but has also worked with oak, basswood, and walnut.

Moe's carving tools are chosen from seven chainsaws of varying sizes. He begins his carving with the largest saw, a forty-eight inch bar chainsaw. The large saw is used to rough out the basic image from the wood. The smaller saws are used for detail work. He rarely creates drawings before working, but he will occasionally make chalk marks on the wood to emphasize small details.

Moe's skill as a chainsaw carver reflects a northern familiarity with the tool. It is his ability to use this familiar tool to create objects that reflect certain community values that make Moe a locally respected and regarded craftsman. His work is appreciated not only for the regional images he creates, but because of his ability and skill in working with the chainsaws. Local people who understand and commonly use the tool appreciate the skill that Moe possesses which allows him to manipulate the instrument and use it in ways that are not commonly attributed to it. For many people who have used the tool for years Moe's carving opens up new doors and provides new ways of seeing their own skills.

While learned, to some extent, on his own, Art's chainsaw carving nonetheless stems from occupational, regional, and ethnic traditions. It is not uncommon for carpenters and building contractors concerned with excellent work to leave some mark of themselves on the structures they

have built for others. One of Art's trademarks has been the door handle fashioned from an antler, but his first chainsaw carving likewise served to mark his presence. From a regional perspective, the chainsaw is a valuable practical tool in the northwoods. Carving and woodworking have also been prevalent youthful hobbies and valued adult skills. The chainsaw allows a carver to work on a larger scale, to minimize hand labor, and to demonstrate the ability to convert a largely functional device into an artist's instrument. In other words, it was inevitable that people would begin chainsaw carving on their own, and Moe is one of several of the northwood's first generations of carvers.

Finally, I have encountered at least two other examples of faces carved in stumps by Norwegian-Americans in Wisconsin. Could it be that Art had seen or heard something of this and was, perhaps unconsciously, moved to carve his first chainsaw figure in a stump?

It is precisely Moe's ability, to transform the familiar tool into a tool that creates nonutilitarian objects, that attracts attention to himself and to his work. As a respected area businessman Moe's notoriety as a carver and as a restaurateur come together in his personal museum where he is not only known as the owner of Thor's Kitchen, but also as the creator of the carvings on the restaurant's front lawn.

A visit to Moe's personal museum begins with a drive down Thor's Lane, a short wooded street named after Moe's restaurant. The lane ends at the shores of Lake Lac Court Oreilles, in the yard of Thor's Kitchen. There is no designated parking lot. Patrons park on the grass or dirt that forms the front yard. The building that houses the supper club is the biggest object in the museum. After buying the building, Moe did extensive work on both the exterior and the interior. The most noticeable part of this

renovation is the front section of the restaurant which juts out from the main body of the building. This portion is fashioned to resemble the bow of an early Viking ship. Moe made the ship from overlapping pieces of pounded metal. At the tip is the head of a dragon or sea creature. Two yellow lights form the eyes. Scattered across the sloping hill in the front are numerous pieces of Moe's chainsaw carvings. These consist of nordic figures, women, animals, and a large hand that hold a temperature gauge.

Moe's discussion of his work begins with a discussion of his early jobs. He talks about the contracting business that eventually led to his first creation. Moe downplays his local popularity, instead focusing on his craft, by talking about his materials and tools and how the carvings are made. Moe has been reluctant to sell his sculptures; he prefers to donate them to local organizations. The remaining pieces go into his front yard where they can be appreciated and enjoyed by his guests. He feels that the best vantage point from which to view the works is the restaurant's bar which is housed in the ship's bow. The bar is lined with windows that overlook the lake and the yard.

Moe's restaurant and many of the pieces he carves are reflective of his identification with Scandinavian communities in northern Wisconsin. Similar to the strong Finnish communities in the region, they promote their ethnic heritages through festivals and the creating and crafting of traditional objects. Each year Moe attends a Swedish

festival in Minnesota where he demonstrates his carving skills. In The Colossus of Roads Karal Marling describes Moe's participation in the festival.

On the second afternoon of the Swedish Festival, the people of Cambridge were invited to Riverside Park, where Art Moe, a self-styled 'Chainsaw Artist' from Stone Lake, Wisconsin, was slated to 'carve a Scandivanian mythological figure.' The statue made during the demonstration was not an outsize monument, nor was it calculated to attract tourists to Cambridge to see something so unique as to justify the detour. Indeed, despite feeble efforts to make the world at large beat a path to downtown Cambridge every June, the Swedish Festival remains a local, or at best, a county event.

The theme of Thor's Kitchen is Moe's Norwegian roots. The entire form of the building and the sculptures in the front are his own demonstration of his connection and affiliation to this community. Moe prides himself on being able to trace his family's roots back over one thousand years. His interest is in the stories told about Vikings and Norse settlers. The images he creates are based on characters from many of these stories. His skills as a builder are widely recognized throughout Hayward, and his skill with the chainsaw is demonstratable proof of his proficiency. Thor's Kitchen is where he brings together his skills and interests.

A visit to Moe's personal museum is a chance to understand the skill involved in the manipulation of chainsaws. The pieces highlight occupational and ethnic traditions in both form and creation. Moe is the perfect host. He is proud and willing to talk about his skill and his collection, but reluctant to call himself an artist or

the things he makes art.

Rich Riemenschneider, Oconomowoc, Wisconsin

Rich Riemenschneider and his wife Mary have lived on the shores of Lake Sybil in Oconomowoc for thirty years. Oconomowoc is in Wisconsin's southeastern section, about thirty five miles west of Milwaukee. Riemenschneider is a duck decoy maker and collector and his impressive collection is housed in what has been called the world's only Duck Hunter's Hall of Fame. According to Riemenschneider the title was given to the collection by a local reporter several years ago. Riemenschneider liked the idea and now a sign reading Duck Hunter's Hall of Fame hangs above a converted bar in his basement. It is in this basement that one will find Riemenschneider's personal museum.

Riemenschneider was born in 1913 in Milwaukee where he worked and lived until he was fifty three. He attributes his interest in decoy making to two people. The first was a woodworking teacher, Alexander Bick, who encouraged his young students to make what they wanted. Riemenschneider's uncle, Tony Grueninger, was the second influential individual. He allowed Riemenschneider to accompany him on duck hunting trips with the stipulation that Riemenschneider would repair all his uncle's broken decoys. Decoy making was a hobby for him until he retired and began devoting the majority of his time to carving and collecting the hundreds of decoys he now owns. Riemenschneider now makes, sells, buys, trades, and repairs the decoys. He and his wife

travel frequently to decoy shows where he is well known for his collection and his skills.

As a decoy maker, Riemenschneider has two concerns. The first is the creation of the decoys. He uses wood and cork to fashion the bodies of the ducks. Cork is a material that was commonly used by decoy makers of the past. Because of its cell structure cork is a light and highly durable material. Whereas cork was once easy to obtain, it is more scarce now, and more expensive. He makes wooden ducks from basswood and cedar. Heads are made separately and almost always of wood. He then paints the decoys. Once he relied on printed pictures and designs to create the natural colorings of the various ducks. After making decoys for years, and seeing the live models, he now works completely from memory.

The second and most fundamental of Riemenschneider's concerns is the usability of the decoys. A decoy that is not successful as a decoy is simply a decoration. As a hunter himself Riemenschneider is aware of what makes a good working decoy. A decoy consists of a head, body, and a weight that holds the decoy upright in the water. Riemenschneider makes his own weights by melting and then molding lead. One of his rarest decoys was made by "Mr. X"; a title familiar to other decoy makers. "Mr. X" weighted his decoys from the inside by building the body around the lead weight. This clever trick is considered ingenious and difficult to do.

Riemenschneider's collection is significant to the region where it is located because it contains an example of every bird that flies the Mississippi Flyway. The flyway extends through the Great Lakes and down the Mississippi River. This area includes Wisconsin. There are five such flyways in the country. Decoy makers also rely on regionally available woods in the construction of the decoys. Riemenschneider prefers to use Wisconsin white cedar when he can get it. He is also extremely knowledgeable regarding the once thriving business of factory made decoys and a visit to his museum is completed with information on the histories of the factories highlighted by examples of the decoys they produced.

Decoys are made to look like the various ducks that travel the flyway. Riemenschneider insists, however, that a real duck is not able to discern any differences in the decoys. It was a hunter's belief at one time that they did. Instead, the painting of the decoys allow the craftsmen to personalize and transform the familiar body shapes into individualized works.

A visit to Riemenschneider's personal museum begins in his office. Here he keeps a variety of books on decoy carving and three shelves of his latest acquisitions. He keeps no official records of the collection; the decoys themselves serve as records. The Duck Hunter's Hall of Fame is housed in the basement of his house. The collection is placed and displayed on shelves that Riemenschneider has made or bought. One large display case was salvaged in the

1940s from a local grocery store. There is no systematic method of organization or classification in the collection beyond the pairing of like drakes and ducks. Also included in the collection are his guns, and various articles of fishing gear and clothing. The tour concludes at the converted bar. Here Riemenschneider provides the visitor with copies of newspaper articles that discuss his collection.

Riemenschneider is very active in a community of duck hunters and decoy makers in the midwest. His reputation for being a notable decoy maker has firmly secured him a position of respect among other decoy makers. Not only does Riemenschneider know what makes a good decoy, but he is also aware of the entire business of buying, trading, and selling the objects. His knowledge extends into the history of decoy making as well. Riemenschneider's works are valued by other decoy makers and hunters. He is often besieged with request for his decoys from all over the region. His participation in decoy shows allows him the opportunity to display his own work as well as collect individual pieces for his extensive collection. The shows provide him with a community of decoy makers interested in obtaining and creating the forms.

Riemenschneider is a highly regarded decoy maker within Wisconsin as well as the rest of the country. He often sells or repairs decoys for people on the east and west coasts, but his collection specializes in decoys most

commonly used in Wisconsin. His vast knowledge of both the skill involved in carving decoys and the act of collecting are expanded with accounts of hunting trip experiences and significant people he has known. He is a man who likes to talk about his collection and the differences between a successful decoy and one that fails.

Trudelle's Buckhorn Tavern, Spooner, Wisconsin

Along Spooner's main street the visitor will find the shops and businesses that are common in any small midwestern town. But the subtle orderliness that greets the visitor can be put to a halt upon entering Trudelle's Buckhorn Tavern. On the outside the tavern resembles any other tavern which lines the street. Upon entering, however, the visitor will be surprised by the tavern's massive collection of stuffed animals and fish mounts.

Spooner lies in the northwest corner of Wisconsin, only fifty miles from the Minnesota border. It is an area rich in hunting and fishing activities as well as other sports such as snow skiing. The building that houses the tavern was originally built as a tobacco store. In the twenties it was owned by a man named Ally Richardson and was used as a cardroom. In 1933, Tom Trudelle, the present owner's father, converted the storefront into Trudelle's Buckhorn Tavern. In 1950 it was taken over by the present owner, Chuck Trudelle. The tavern is a local spot, patronized by Spooner's residents and visitors looking for an inexpensive beer and some conversation.

The tavern is large compared to most local taverns. Chuck Trudelle expanded the business to include a second large room connected to the back. Along the walls and stacked four or five deep to the high tin ceilings are hundreds of stuffed animals and fish mounts of a regional kind. Also included are such things as a two-headed calf, a collection of antique lanterns, and numerous photographs and newspaper clippings that focus on important events that have occurred within the tavern. One such documented event was the 1960 visit of John Kennedy during his Wisconsin campaign. According to Trudelle, Kennedy visited the tavern, shook hands with people, and drank a small beer. After he was elected president, the glass that he drank from was auctioned off in the tavern.

The afternoon that I visited Trudelle's Buckhorn Tavern several small groups of people could be found assembled along the expansive bar. Children played in the backroom that had been converted into a video gameroom. Trudelle himself no longer tends the bar day and night as he once did. He has turned over many of his old duties to his daughter Sandy.

In his article, "Interpreting Material Culture: A View From the Other Side of the Glass," Harold Skramstead argues that we should examine exhibitions and displays as artifacts in and of themselves.

... that the selective arrangements of artifacts and other related information in a public display is a museum's most fundamental means of communication, and that such displays or exhibitions are the basic building blocks for

exploring the intersection of material culture and its larger constellations of meaning. Perhaps more than anything else a museum's exhibition environment is an accurate index of its attitude toward material culture.

If we consider the display in Trudelle's Tavern as one entire artifact, we are better able to associate the meaning the objects may have for patrons with the way those objects are displayed and arranged. Rather than a haphazard or unconcerned method of arrangement, Trudelle has placed objects so that they may be appreciated by his guests. The tavern itself becomes one large artifact and the displays are placed in an attempt to provoke intellectual or emotional stimulation while providing for a pleasing visual sense of order. Smaller, more fragile items such as lanterns are placed on a shelf behind the bar. Glass encased fish and birds are arranged around the wall of the tavern at eyelevel. Larger mounted animal heads are placed higher up on the walls while some complete animals are situated in the front windows and shelves. The display encompasses the entire tavern, making it seem smaller, and providing for a more intimate sense of space in the large room. In essence, the patrons become part of the display enclosed and immersed in the somewhat surreal atmosphere created by the hundreds of objects on display.

The objects on display were donated by local people. Trudelle does not know how or when the collection began. When he inherited the tavern from his father the collection was already quite large. It is quite probable that the collection began in the tobacco shop and was simply sold as

part of the building as it changed hands. Objects are donated less frequently now and Trudelle claims to have a room full of objects that he has no place to display. He himself believes that many of the objects date back to the turn of the century and he remembers the time that he helped his father dispose of many of the objects that were impossible to display.

Trudelle's Buckhorn Tavern is not only Chuck Trudelle's personal museum of locally familiar and donated stuffed animals and objects, but it is also the community of Spooner's personal museum. Similarly to other museum bars that exist in northern Wisconsin, the collection is comprised of objects that patrons for one reason or another deem valuable, worth preserving and displaying.⁹

It is in that value system that we can begin to understand and appreciate the aesthetic of community members. The objects provide patrons with associative feelings of home, and, in a larger sense, of their relationship and identity to the region where they live. For decades, the people of Spooner have donated their objects, stuffed animals, and fish mounts to the tavern because they believe it to be the proper place to house these items. The donations continue today. The Buckhorn Tavern would seem out of place in an urban setting, or in an environment that does not possess such deep associations to its natural resources. The Buckhorn Tavern and its collection allows its patrons to be reminded of who they are

and where they came from. In a nostalgic sense, the bar has preserved those instances that hold significant meanings for local residents, such as Kennedy's visit. The tavern is similar to a community archive or museum in that it continues to display the values and important historical events of Spooner. It is a place where anyone can feel at home.

It is difficult to state the specific qualities that prevail in the aesthetic values of Spooner's residents. The success of Trudelle's Buckhorn Tavern for the past fifty-five years is an indication that the place holds special meaning for those in the community. Its continued success will rely on community members and the ability of Chuck Trudelle to pass on the tavern and its collection to somebody else in possession of similar values.

Notes for Chapter IV

1. Michael Owen Jones, "The Concept of 'Aesthetic' in the Traditional Arts," Western Folklore (30:2), p. 77-104.
2. Alan Merriam, The Anthropology of Music, (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1964).
3. Franz Boas, Primitive Art, (New York: Dover, 1955), p. 58.
4. Jones, p. 93.
5. Jones, p. 95.
6. James Leary, from the Wisconsin Folk Art Survey fieldnotes.
7. Karal Marling, The Colossus of Roads, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 58.
8. Harold Skramstead, "Interpreting Material Culture: A View From the Other Side," in Material Culture and the Study of American Life, ed. by Ian Quimby (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1979) pp. 175-200. Also see: Neil Harris, "Museums, Merchandising, and Popular Taste," also in Material Culture and the Study of American Life.
9. For a further discussion of museum bars in Wisconsin see: Marsha MacDowell and Kurt Dewhurst, "Museum for the People: Museum Bars," Material Culture, Spring 1986, pp. 37-50. Also, Dennis McCann, "A bar of furry friends," The Milwaukee Journal, 29 November, 1987, Wisconsin section, p. 4. Another museum bar I know of exists in Boulder Junction, Wisconsin called Van Order's Bar.

Chapter V: Discussion

Self-documentation

As indicated through the descriptions of specific personal museums owners approach their museums with differing levels of involvement. In some instances this is clear by examining what sorts of materials owners develop regarding their collections. Self-documentation is an important aspect of many personal museum owners' concerns. Photographs of collections in various stages, videotapes, newspaper clippings, and self-produced books and pamphlets are all forms of self-documentation that help to describe the degree to which an owner is dedicated to the collection. For some, self-documentation provides tangible evidence of collections; evidence that can be shared outside the physical space of the collection display. Byron Buckeridge has produced a videotape entitled "The World's 100 Most Beautiful Concretions."¹ The tape is intended to document the drying process of the rocks, as well as emphasize their unusual shapes and formations. The concluding segment focuses on Buckeridge's barn where the collection is displayed.

Some forms of self-documentation provide owners with outlets for interpretation of their collections and allow

owners to emphasize certain qualities or aspects of the collections that they feel are special. Buckeridge and Adolph Vandertie have both produced booklets and pamphlets on their collections. Buckeridge's Nature's Sculpture contains photographs of particular concretions, the various theories of development, a description of Buckeridge's classification system, as well as stories and anecdotes that reflect his political views and sense of humor.² Vandertie's "The Romance and History of Whittling and Collecting Hobo and Tramp Art" tells the story of the hobo culture and his involvement with hobo art and life.³ It briefly discusses his plans for the collection and concludes with an invitation to visit his "live-in museum."

The degree to which owners go in documenting their museums relates to their involvement with the collections and their desire to disseminate the information that the museum may contain. The Moccasin Bar in Hayward sells postcards of the dioramas. On the back of the cards the bar lists the address and the claim that they have in their collection the world's biggest mounted muskie. The postcards provide visitors with tangible evidence of their visit and their experience with the bar and its collection.

It is important to state, however, that owners who do not engage in forms of self-documentation should not be considered uninvolved or unconcerned with maintaining or discussing their collections. It may instead be thought that those owners are not concerned with documenting the

collection or are unaware of how and to whom this information may be passed on.

Front and Back Regions, Personal and Private Space, and the Touristic Experience

The degree to which personal museum owners open their private worlds to visitors differs from museum to museum. More communal, less private information is exposed during visits to museum bars, for example. A visit to a personal museum within an owner's home, however, allows visitors to view and experience the private space of museum owners. Erving Goffman has delineated this separation of private and personal space into two regions: a front region and a back region. According to Goffman,

A region may be defined as any place that is bounded to some degree by barriers to perception. Regions vary, of course, in the degree to which they are bounded and according to the media of communication in which the barriers to perception occur.

He goes on to define a front region as "the place where the performance is given."⁵ In an analysis of personal museums the owners become the performers and the visitors become the audience. A front region is the area that the audience is allowed to view and partake in a particular experience. Goffman defines a back region "as a place, relative to a given performance, where the impression fostered by the performance is knowingly contradicted as a matter of course."⁶ In the case of public or tourist museums front regions would consist of exhibit halls and galleries, gift shops, and lobbies--anywhere the public is allowed access.

A public or tourist museum's back region would then consist of the behind the scenes areas such as work rooms, collection storage rooms, and offices.

A visit to a personal museum, however, challenges those notions of back and front regions according to the level of involvement between the museum's collection and its owner. When discussing the front region/back region dichotomy, as it applies to a person's home, Goffman clearly defines particular spaces as back regions.

The line dividing front and back regions is illustrated everywhere in our society. As suggested, the bathroom and bedroom, in all but lower-class homes, are places from which the downstairs audience can be excluded. Bodies that are cleansed, clothed, and made up in these rooms can be presented to friends in others. In the kitchen, of course, there is done to food what in the bathroom and bedroom is done to the human body. It is, in fact, the presence of these staging devices that distinguishes middle-class living from lower-class living. But in all classes in our society there is a tendency to make a division between the front and back parts of residential exteriors. The front tends to be relatively well decorated, well repaired, and tidy; the rear tends to be relatively unprepossessing.

Because personal museums are inextricably linked to the personal lives of their owners they can often be found edging their way into what Goffman defines as back regions. In some cases collections take over a portion of an owner's house, and in other cases, they may take over the entire house. The degree to which a collection may expand within a home can be based on the size of the collection, the size of the house, or the owner's desire not to limit the collection to a certain size. When a collection does take over an

entire house the bond between owner and museum becomes deeper and more intimate. On individual bases owners make decisions regarding their personal involvement with their museums. This decision itself is based on varying personal factors that are impossible to define in general terms.

In his book, The Tourist⁸, Dean MacCannell has used Goffman's front and back regions as polar points on a continuum that contains four differing levels of regions, or stages as MacCannell refers to them. It is his belief that tourists long for and seek out the "truth" in any experiences in which they may engage. That truth is most clearly found in the back regions or those stages most closely related to it. By experiencing the back region a tourist is allowed access to information that is not normally or routinely offered on their more typical touristic journeys.

It is only when a person makes an effort to penetrate into the real life of the areas he visits that he ends up in places especially designated to generate feelings of intimacy and experiences that can be talked about as 'participation.' No one can 'participate' in his own life; he can only participate in the lives of others.

A personal museum experience can offer visitors a chance to participate by challenging Goffman's distinctions between front and back, personal and private space. Because personal museums and the experiences they offer are shaped by owners' personalities, categories such as front and back, or personal and private, become more fluid, less easy to define. The front and back exposure exemplifies

individualistic involvement of each particular museum owner. The front region of a personal museum is similar to the front regions of public and tourist museums by including the areas where collections are displayed. The fluidity of this region, however, lies in the fact that in many cases this front region within a personal museum is analogous to Goffman's back region where performers engage in intimate and personal activities. An analysis of front and back regions in personal museums must then be theoretically examined by an arrangement of varying levels and degrees similar to MacCannell's stages which attempts to reproduce the "natural trajectory of an individual's initial entry into a social situation."¹⁰ These levels must be flexible enough to consider the situations that museum owners face, the types and levels of involvement that museum visitors are allowed to experience, the personalities of museum owners, and the particular method of display within each museum.

Of the museums I visited, clearly the one that offered the most participatory experience was the museum belonging to Adolph Vandertie, the Hobo historian and whittler. Vandertie's entire house, including the bedrooms, bathroom, and kitchen became accessible on the museum tour. While the objects that Vandertie displays may be small in size, the collection is vast. The house has been completely taken over by the collection. If indeed Vandertie's house had a back region where, according to Goffman, he "... can relax; he can drop his front, forgo speaking his lines, and step

out of character,"¹¹ it was not evident on the tour. While visiting Vandertie's museum the visitor is allowed to see portions of his home that even friends on a social call may not see. Since Vandertie's museum encompasses his entire house a tour of the collection exposes the house's back regions to the audience, thus providing for a more "truthful" experience as determined by MacCannell.

Whereas Vandertie's personal museum may encompass his entire house, other personal museums are more directed to specific rooms or areas of the house. Clarence Mirk and Rich Riemenschneider have erected their personal museums in their basements. Because of the informality of the personal museum visit, however, these tours may also include glimpses of back regions and exposure to back region activities. Specific objects may be placed in bedrooms and kitchens and the paths that lead to in-home museums may cross through kitchens or may pass by activities such as food preparation. Basements are not generally considered rooms for entertaining. They too host back region activities such as food storage or laundry. Gerald Littel's miniature circus and Ed Henkelman's personal museum are housed in their garages or buildings that often function as garages. Because both owners must utilize their available space as necessary, glimpses of their private lives can be gathered through visits to their collections. Garages may serve many functions such as workshops, pantries, storehouses, or laundry rooms. These functions are not necessarily limited by the presence of museums collections.

Museum bars, on the other hand, because of the very nature of their business activities must allow for some non-public space. This division, however, does not affect the personal museum qualities of the collection. Because the museums can be thought of as belonging to the public their significance and their important experiential qualities are exposed in public spheres where all patrons can partake of the collection. Back region activities are limited to the day to day tasks of the businesses and do not play an important role in the experiences that the collections provide to the visitors. On the other hand, additional information regarding the existence and significance of the collections can be easily obtained from bar owners and patrons. This information adds a sense of intimacy and validity to the otherwise typical experience of a tavern visit and puts the collection into a contextual framework. By experiencing a situation that community members experience (the local tavern), and by partaking in all the activities that accompany that experience (local news, gossip, and the renewal or maintenance of old relationships), the tourist or visitor is allowed into a form of community back region. In concept it is similar to the touristic desire to eat where the locals eat, swim where the locals swim, and live where the locals live. This immersion into local and community lives provides for a richer and more truthful experience, and allows for participation in the lives of the community members.

Problems and Solutions

Another aspect of owner involvement that personal museum owners deal with is with the day to day maintenance of their collections. They must face the problems of limited space, limited or nonexistent funds, and lack of privacy. Their greatest problems, however, are not immediate or routine. As museum owners grow older they must make decisions regarding the fate of their collections.

Belanus has described this problem:

But personal museums are an endangered species. They are run without outside funding (aside from the occasional donation); they are not listed in museum directories; and they are not attached to local historical organizations. People from far and wide visit the museums yearly after finding out about them by word of mouth, but very few of the visitors stop to think what will become of these fascinating collections when their owners die or become infirm. The truth is the collection will probably be dismantled, divided among family members, or sold at auction.¹²

Unlike the wealthy collection owners of the seventeenth and eighteenth century, such as Hans Sloan or Charles Wilson Peale, whose collections merited international significance, local personal museum owners have a very limited audience. Owners are responsible for supplying funds to maintain museums or to purchase objects or tools that would expand their collections. If any formal arrangements are made regarding the fate of their collections they are made by the owners themselves. These arrangements may entail sophisticated and complex dealings with local museums or nationally known institutions, or owners may acknowledge the problem but lack the ability to reach a solution.

On an individual basis, owners are concerned with varying and particular aspects in regards to the fate of their collections. Some are concerned with retaining an appropriate monetary value while some simply want the collection to stay together as a collection.

During my fieldwork I asked the question, "What will happen to your collection when you are no longer able to take care of it?," to each personal museum owner I interviewed. The responses were varied, but in essence they all indicated similar values. Personal museum owners alone are responsible for making the decisions regarding their collections. These are highly personal decisions and what owners want to see happen to their collections may not necessarily happen. And anything that does happen to the collections after the owners die will change the shape, form, and meaning of the collections, and the owners' absence in essence will precipitate the end of their personal museum. As stated earlier, personal museums are dependent upon owner interpretations and explanations. The information they can provide is special and helps to create and shape the personal museum experience.

Clarence Mirk has been thinking about the fate of his collection for many years. Mirk, now in his seventies, is unmarried and has no children. He has willed his miniature reproductions to his brother. He came to this solution after sources had informed him that by donating the reproductions to a museum the models run the risk of being

shelved in storage rooms without ever being displayed.

If you will it to a museum, there's always the factor there, will they show it? They may put it in a storeroom for fifty years because they don't have the money to show it, or the space. This thresher machine takes a little space so they probably wouldn't have space for that. And then people say 'what is that?'¹³ You don't want to see something in cold storage.

The fate of Ed Henkelman's collection of stuffed and mounted fish and animals will probably fall to family members. Henkelman is not concerned with the future of his collection. He believes that the objects will be disposed of by local authorities. This belief coincides with his story about the confiscation of many of his pieces by local authorities, but it also reaffirms his own conception of himself as a local character.

Chuck Trudelle, owner of Trudelle's Buckhorn Tavern, would like to see the collection and the tavern sold. He does not want his daughter Sandy to spend her life managing a tavern. In Trudelle's younger days the tavern consumed much of his time, limiting his ability to be with his family. While discussing the fate of the collection Trudelle talks about the fate of another local museum bar-- The Railroad Bar. For several years The Railroad Bar existed a few doors away from Trudelle's tavern. It was well-known throughout the region and attracted many visitors. According to Trudelle, an outsider bought the bar and sold the pieces, closing down the business. Trudelle and his friends talk about Spooner's plan to buy back the collection and install it in the same space, but to make it

a museum and not a bar.

Art Moe talks about getting out of the restaurant business. He is not specific as to what that decision may mean for his collection of chainsaw carvings that decorate the front lawn of his restaurant. Thor's Kitchen is a successful business and the carvings are a major part of the ambiance of the restaurant. For the restaurant to continue as Thor's Kitchen the carvings would probably be maintained. Moe's notoriety, however, makes the carvings valuable art objects and it is likely that their sale could bring in a substantial amount of money.

Adolph Vandertie has been in negotiations several museums and museum-type organizations regarding the future of his collection. His first such dealings were with the chain of Ripley's Believe or Not Museums. Ripley's representatives had visited Vandertie and viewed the collection. They then offered him a substantial amount of money for the entire collection and explained to him their intended display design. During my visit to Vandertie's museum he read from the first letter they wrote to him including their first offer.

To begin with, a collection such as yours, it's very difficult for us to determine what the value of the collection is to you. I know you have spent many years working on your marvelous whittling and to you I'm sure the collection is priceless. With this in mind the only way I can place a price on the collection is to view it from a strictly exhibit expense point of view. I'm prepared to pay _____ for your collection of tramp art and your wood whittling with the understanding that you would retain between one hundred and one hundred and fifty pieces for your own personal collection. Those items to be

mutually agreed to by yourself and Ripleys. So that you understand how we intend to use your collection, it is our intention to exhibit a sizable portion of your collection at various museums. Along with each of those displays would be a life-size wax figure of yourself that we would have sculpted by one of the world's foremost wax artists. The figure would be dressed in hobo dress, and we would not only tell the story of your wood whittling, but of tramp art and hoboes. The display would be entitled 'The Adolph Vandertie Collection,' and would be displayed in a manner of prominence wherever it appeared.¹⁴

Although negotiations with Ripley's continued for several months Vandertie was concerned about their plans to divide the collection among their fifteen museums. To Vandertie, one of the most significant aspects of his collection is that it is the largest such collection in the world of both whittled objects and, especially, tramp art. Dividing the collection would diminish that significance. Ripley's last letter to him, in hopes that they may somehow compromise on the issue, stated that they would now be willing to accept a portion of the collection for "The Adolph Vandertie Showcase," a condensed version of their earlier design plans.

Vandertie had wanted the collection to go to the Railroad Museum in Green Bay, a small locally owned tourist museum of railroad history and memorabilia. Vandertie feels that because of the hoboes' association with the railroad, The Railroad Museum would be an appropriate place for the collection. At one time the museum appeared interested in obtaining and displaying the collection. It has since changed administrators and communication between Vandertie and the museum has broken off. He is presently considering

donating a small portion of the collection to the Wisconsin Folk Museum in Mount Horeb, but otherwise Vandertie and his wife have decided to keep the museum where it is--at home.

Rich Riemenschneider's collection of duck decoys is quite valuable to collectors. He has invested a great deal of money in his collection, as well as time. After he dies his remaining family members will retain the collection for ten years, at which time they will be free to sell it piece by piece or as an entire collection. Riemenschneider seems unconcerned with preserving the collection as the Duck Hunter's Hall of Fame. He is more concerned that his survivors are able to profit from the collection once he is dead.

Byron Buckeridge is currently contacting art museums in the hopes that they may wish to exhibit his collection of concretions.

The barn display is my museum, but I have always thought that the Chippewas should be doing what I've been doing, and that the museum should be in Odanah. I have been told, however, that they believe concretions are sacred. My goal is to have a show at a top ranking art museum.

I plan to write several museums this year and try to arrange a show--one which in my opinion would be as popular as the King Tut Treasures. If all of them turn me down, that is, if my best collection is not accepted for exhibit, in my lifetime, it never will be seen. I have the spot picked out where it will be buried. This is my ultimatum to the art world.¹⁵

Buckeridge's solution is perhaps the most beautiful for it is a complicated decision made through personal association and devotion to his collection. The belief that in the future someone may come across the collection and

appreciate it for the beauty of the forms, much as he does, is perhaps Buckeridge's dream.

Although owners' solutions to the problems of collection maintenance and futures vary, they are all significant. It is important that owners make these decisions even if the decisions are eccentric or indifferent to the fate of the collections. Owners should be allowed and encouraged to designate the futures of their collections, and family and community members must be expected to respect these decisions.

Notes for Chapter V

1. Byron Buckeridge, "The World's 100 Most Beautiful Concretions," videotape, (Saxon, Wisconsin, 1987).
2. Buckeridge, Nature's Sculpture.
3. Vandertie, "The Romance and History of Whittling and Collecting Tramp Art."
4. Erving Goffman, The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1959), p. 106.
5. Goffman, p. 107.
6. Goffman, p. 112.
7. Goffman, p. 123.
8. Dean MacCannell, The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class, (New York: Schocken Books, 1976).
9. MacCannell, p. 106.
10. MacCannell, p. 101.
11. Goffman, p. 112.
12. Betty Belanus, "The Personal Museum: An Important Local Resource," Material Culture, (spring, 1986) p. 29.
13. Clarence Mirk interviewed by Mary Zwolinski, Wauwatosa, Wisconsin, August 1987.
14. Adolph Vandertie interviewed by Mary Zwolinski, Green Bay, Wisconsin, August 1987.
15. Letter to Mary Zwolinski from Byron Buckeridge, August 1987.

CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION

Many of the collections that are found in personal museums are specifically oriented to a particular time, event, group of people, or regional activity. Their interpretations can be easily extracted by many people familiar with the objects and their functions in community and regional lives and societies. But the true experience of a personal museum involves more personal interpretations. It requires the personal and intimate knowledge of collection owners. The experience includes a tour of a more personal and private world and involves interactions on more personal levels. For this experience to occur we must rely on individuals who have emotional associations with the collections, individuals who understand the objects and can relate their existence and significance to their own personal worlds. The experience requires more intimate forms of communication between collection owners and museum visitors. This experience provides visitors with extra knowledge, knowledge that goes beyond the roles of the objects and includes the lives of the collectors.

As personal museum owners die or become unable to perform their tasks as curators and docents, personal museums run the risk of fading into obscurity. When this

happens, personal museums disappear from the lives of community people; and what might have been a very unique and special experience fades with the museum. Once this occurs it will be impossible for us to go back and recapture what we may have missed. If we are to use personal museums, as what Belanus has called "important local resources," we must do it while owners are well and active within their collections. But even present participation will not keep personal museums in our lives forever. I do believe, however, that there are ways we can experience the museums while they are still museums. There are ways of documenting the museums and their collections so that when owners are gone we will retain tangible evidence of their existence and we will possess vivid memories of the experiences that they offered.

The first step in experiencing and visiting personal museums is perhaps the most difficult. Because they are individualistic efforts, and because many owners view their collections as natural extensions of their lives, they do not advertise or make public announcements about their museums. The media can be instrumental in uncovering personal museums. Local or regional newspapers often highlight personal museums and their owners in human interest type stories. Too often, however, they present owners as eccentric individuals by ridiculing their collections and collecting activities.

I recently saw a segment on a local news station that focused on a collection of outhouses and the woman who

collected them. Throughout the interview the collector talked about the significant roles these buildings played in the lives of the people who owned them. She talked about their history and development and the ways they were constructed. She was knowledgeable in the historical changes regarding society's perception of the buildings. Her knowledge was informative and presented a highly researched interest, not only in the buildings, but in the ways they were utilized and perceived of by generations of people. The interview concluded with the reporter asking the woman if her friends thought she was crazy, and, if indeed she was. Rather than focusing on this woman as a collector of material culture or a local historian the reporter instead was concerned with her sanity, and the woman was publicly reduced to being a local eccentric.

Instead of representing owners and collectors as odd or eccentric we should discuss the local significance of the collections. We should view owners as they are--individuals with an expertise in specific aspects of local culture.

I believe that once the information regarding local personal museums is made public the community can begin to utilize the basic function of personal museums as educational tools for understanding local history and culture. Teachers could use owners' knowledge and collections as an alternative or an addition to traditional classroom text oriented instruction. Field trips could be taken to visit personal museums. Most owners are

enthusiastic about discussing their collections. They look forward to visitors who come to learn about what the collections are and why they are important to the community. Students would be an excellent audience in this regard. The owners could discuss and display the collections in ways that would appeal to students as well as provide important aspects of learning. The personal interaction between students and owners broadens the learning experience. Field trips are regularly made to public museums. Students often come away from these excursions over-saturated with information or exhausted by the formality of the experience. A field trip to a personal museum could provide for a relaxed and more interesting and natural experience. It could foster children's own ability to become collectors themselves or authorities on specific aspects of their communities.

Teachers could also employ personal museums as a form of hands on learning. With owners' consent, schoolchildren could do oral histories of collectors and undertake forms of documentation of collections. Owners could also be encouraged to travel to classrooms with objects from their collections. Classroom visits could be of educational benefit to students while providing owners with a chance to get out into their communities and take their knowledge with them, thus building their self-esteem.

I also believe that other local groups could make excursions to personal museums. Senior citizen groups, local historical society groups and the like could all

benefit, not only from the information that owners could provide, but also from the experience of visiting the museums. Many older people could relate directly through experiences of their own to the objects and messages contained in the museums, such as steam engine reproductions and solitary activities such as whittling and carving.

Local museums could expand their own collections and archives with objects or documentary forms of personal museum collections. Since these collections present views of local life, past and present, they could expand the collections of small local museums; collections that may be small because of limited funds. And owners could hold workshops in local museums, demonstrating their crafts or offering historical information and locally familiar and entertaining stories.

As a folklorist I believe that the roles we play in the lives of personal museum owners could be important. Owners are usually unaware of how to pass on the information their museums contain. Local museums may also be unaware of how to utilize the personal museums in their areas. Folklorists could work as liasons between owners and local museums by offering suggestions on how they could work together and benefit each other. Folklorists could offer suggestions on how owners' knowledge and collections could be parlayed into interesting workshops that could be held in the local museums. Local museums could rely on folklorists for help in documenting and archiving personal museum collections--

documentation that could at the very least retain the memory of the collections. And folklorists could work with personal museum owners in deciding what will become of their collections when they are no longer able to maintain them. Rather than making these decisions for owners, folklorists could offer suggestions and help to see that owners' wishes, whenever possible, are carried out.

In her article "Ethnomuseology and its Problems" Maria Znamierowska-Prufferowa describes the tasks of ethnographic museums as

...to take into consideration the geographical and demographic milieu, the history of a region or a group and the material culture as well as the old and present oral, musical and dance folklore.¹

They are, as she states,

...direct historical and social sources pertaining to folk culture. They are either in the form of remnants or of various records of the activity of man as a producer of certain objects and at the same time a receiver and carrier of a given tradition.²

I argue that personal museums are true and viable sources of these aspects of culture, and that owners are the collectors, creators and sources of the folk knowledge of their communities. As opposed to folk museums that strive to display and interpret what becomes second hand and objective knowledge by an outsider of a particular folk group's life, personal museums and their owners offer first hand, experienced knowledge of this information. Personal museums not only offer us information on local history, aesthetics, and various types of folklore, but they give us clear statement regarding what community members themselves

feel is of value and worth preserving. They provide hands on knowledge of a region's way of life and concerns and in doing so offer visitors a chance to see a particular aspect of a particular world directly, through the eyes of individuals that live in and shape that world.

Personal museums need and deserve our attention now. As society becomes more technologically oriented, the old and more basic ways of doing things and making things run the risk of disappearing, taking with them ways of life that at one time seemed so permanent. Time has become a consumer commodity. The idea of spending one or two years in developing a highly crafted object simply to experience the process of creation is impractical. As a society we are beginning to sacrifice quality for quickness. This is evident in the food we eat, the services we expect, and the objects we purchase. As we replace and discard the old things in our lives we run the risk of losing track of the quality of objects that we once felt so strongly about. Our notions of what is significant and worth saving and preserving in our lives is changing.

I believe that those people who devote a large segment of their lives to the creation, collection, and preservation of locally or culturally significant and informational objects are attempting to maintain those changing ways. A visit to a personal museum takes time. Personal interactions are unavoidable. The time and energy it takes to partake in the personal museum experience is great, but I

feel the rewards are worth the effort and the involvement. Owners are people dedicated to the understanding of the ways their objects interact with their lives as members of their communities. They are people interested in sharing this information with others.

Personal museums are important community repositories. Although the information that museum owners present through their collections may not always be factual, and their interpretations sometimes inaccurate, their collections are none the less important. The type of information that researchers of community life might go in search of may not always be found in personal museums. The information the museums contain may be, however, significant to local community members or groups. Alan Jabbour has stated:

Collecting, documenting, and presenting folk cultures are not the exclusive preserve of outside researchers; rather they are activities participated in by outsiders and insiders alike. For the outsider, they are activities in pursuit of information and points of view. For the insider, they represent important statements about what is culturally significant in the community-- what ought to be preserved and reflected upon now and in the future.³

This examination of grassroots and community self-documentation provides us with firsthand information on what community members feel is culturally significant. Personal museums are one important method of displaying that information.

As I stated earlier, we all collect things at one time in our lives. I believe that those collections that move beyond simple and unorganized arrangements of objects

deserve notice. Although they are created from individualized visions and values, they carry important messages regarding our lives as members of specific communities and cultures.

Notes for Chapter VI

1. Maria Znamierowska-Prufferowa, "Ethnomuseology and its Problems," Ethnologia Europea, 1970, p. 203.
2. Ibid
3. Alan Jabbour, "Keeping Track of Culture: Grassroots Conservation," in Passing Time and Tradition: Contemporary Iowa Folk Art, pp. 149-159, edited by Steven Ohrn, (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1984).

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