

ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: STANDARDS OF RESTORATION IN MUSEUMS THAT USE
ARCHITECTURE IN THEIR INTERPRETIVE PROGRAMS

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This thesis examines standards of restoration in museums and historic sites that use historic architecture in their interpretive programs. While no longer on the vanguard of historic preservation, much of the public's first conscious encounter with historic preservation is in these places. Guided by personal whim and institutional politics instead of exhaustive documentation and sound scholarship, the restorations featured in many of these museums vary widely in their quality and authenticity from institution to institution. Yet an unsuspecting public accepts these restorations as the truth.

This thesis is organized into four parts. Chapter II examines the history of the development of the historic house museum and the open-air museum while paying particular attention to the restoration standards that developed along with them. The relevance of this chapter lies in the fact that many of those seminal standards still exist in one form or another in contemporary standards of restoration.

The next three chapters consist of case studies designed to examine the actual restorations and the circumstances surrounding them. Chapter III studies the influence of personal restoration philosophies of strong-willed clients and managing architects on the restoration of historic house museums. As standards and philosophies changed over the years, these early efforts became the subjects of re-restorations undertaken with yet a new set of standards.

Many open-air museums use living history interpretation to fulfill their educational mission. This interactive type of program often relegates the historic building to that of a stage set for the historic drama enacted in its rooms and yards. Chapter IV examines the impact of interpretation on the restoration of these case studies' historic buildings.

The National Park Service prefers to preserve instead of restore its historic buildings, but in rare instances it undertakes a restoration. While a NPS restoration might not be superior to those of other organizations, it is subject to management guidelines designed to prevent many of the excesses illustrated in the previous chapters.

As Americans continue to visit and dwell upon the nation's historic house museums and open-air museums, those responsible for presenting historical and architectural truth may wish to dwell upon the admonition issued by the Advisory Board on National parks, Historic Sites, Buildings and Monuments in 1928: "In attempting to reconcile these claims and motives, the ultimate guide must be the tact and judgment of the men in charge."