The Pamunkey Indian Museum: Collaboration, Display, and the Creation of a Tribal Museum

Rachel Elaine Bowen

College of William & Mary - Arts & Sciences

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.wm.edu/etd

Part of the American Studies Commons, Indigenous Studies Commons, and the Museum Studies Commons

Recommended Citation
https://dx.doi.org/doi:10.21220/s2-xvs3-7w88

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses, Dissertations, & Master Projects at W&M ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations, Theses, and Masters Projects by an authorized administrator of W&M ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@wm.edu.
The Pamunkey Indian Museum: Collaboration, Display, and the Creation of a Tribal Museum

Rachel Elaine Bowen
Williamsburg, VA

B.A. Religion, Davidson College, 2001

A Thesis presented to the Graduate Faculty of the College of William and Mary in Candidacy for the Degree of Master of Arts

Department of Anthropology

The College of William and Mary
January, 2014
This Thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Rachel Elaine Bowen

Approved by the Committee, November, 2013

Committee Chair
Research Assistant Professor Danielle Moretti-Langholtz,
Department of Anthropology
The College of William & Mary

Assistant Professor Jonathan Glasser, Department of Anthropology
The College of William & Mary

Associate Professor Martin Gallivan, Department of Anthropology
The College of William & Mary
Research approved by

Protection of Human Subjects Committee

Protocol number(s): PHSC-2012-06-14-7989-dmoret

Date(s) of approval: June 28, 2012
ABSTRACT

The Pamunkey Indians are a community whose history is not well known by the general American public, despite having an integral role in the success of Virginia's early colonists. For centuries this Virginia Indian community has made continued efforts to publicize both their community’s important place in Virginia history, and their continued presence in the commonwealth. These efforts manifested in the 1970s with the creation of the Pamunkey Indian Museum, the first professional tribal museum in Virginia. In this paper I trace the Pamunkey history of displaying community culture and history and their many instances of collaboration with non-Pamunkey scholars in order to increase public education about their community. The history and role of the Pamunkey Indian Museum is explored in detail through compilation of oral history interviews and examination of literature on tribal museums. I consider the role of museums and the objects they safeguard in facilitating transmission of memories, knowledge, and stories, and argue the importance of these processes to the continued Pamunkey goals of community and public education.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1. Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2. The Reservation Landscape</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3. Memories of a Museum</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4. Reflections and Hopes for the Future</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 5. Conclusions</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In the process of exploring the history of the Pamunkey Indian Museum, I have been fortunate to have my research supported by a number of generous individuals. Ashley Atkins-Spivey, current Director of the Pamunkey Indian Museum, has been incredibly helpful in orienting me not only to the museum itself, but to the Pamunkey community as well. She has performed introductions to key individuals and given insights into community politics and relationships which have allowed me to reach out to community members in an educated and conscientious manner. Warren Cook, former Assistant Chief and 30 year director of the Pamunkey Indian Museum invited me into his home and shared time, materials, and memories of a project which encompassed a great part of his life and energy. Current Chief Kevin Brown has also been generous with his time, memories, and with introductions and contact information. Joyce Krigsvold, member of the Pamunkey Pottery and Craft Guild shared with me her own motivations for having given so much of her time to this establishment. Mary Ellen Hodges, an archaeologist for Virginia’s Department of Historic Resources, offered an outsider’s perspective of what was going on within the Pamunkey community at the time the museum was being created. Professor Errett Callahan, Ph.D., was overwhelmingly generous with his home and his reflections, and sent me away with boxes and boxes of personal notes and research materials from his work on the Pamunkey Indian Museum as well as the living Indian Village. Professor Callahan also provided me with several striking black and white photographs of both the living Indian Village and of the museum (including individual exhibits) at the time they first opened formally to the public. These kind individuals acted as consultants throughout my research and all agreed to allow me to use their real names and to quote from video or audio-taped recordings of our conversations about the museum.

I would also like to thank my committee members for their support and guidance through this research project. Martin Gallivan offered insightful and helpful comments on structure and organization of the paper. Jonathan Glasser’s detailed feedback on grammar and style made the paper much more reader friendly and our many unplanned meetings provided much needed moral support throughout the field work and writing processes. Danielle Moretti-Langholtz provided essential guidance throughout the entire thesis process and helped me navigate the challenges of a collaborative project, as well as providing the patience and encouragement needed to make the paper something I could truly be proud of.
# LIST OF FIGURES

1. Pamunkey Indian Baptist Church, 2013. Photo by author 27
2. Pamunkey Pottery School, 2013. Photo by author 27
3. Replica of original Pamunkey Trading Post, 2013. Photo by author 28
4. Pamunkey Schoolhouse, 2013. Photo by author 28
5. Pamunkey Indian Museum, 2013. Photo by author 29
6. Pocahontas Players, circa 1899. Photo from the Smithsonian Institute Archives 32
7. Yehakin under construction, circa 1978. Photo courtesy of Errett Callahan 39
8. Completed yehakin, circa 1978. Photo courtesy of Errett Callahan 40
10. View of gift shop from museum entrance. Photo courtesy of Errett Callahan, 1980 46
11. Museum gift shop in 2013. Photo by author 46
12. Orientation display panel. Photo courtesy of Errett Callahan, 1980 47
13. Orientation panel with photo montage in 2013. Photo by author 47
14. Display of Pamunkey in paleolithic era. Photo courtesy of Errett Callahan, 1980 49
15. Paleolithic display in 2013. Photo by author 49
16. Lithic technology display. Photo courtesy of Errett Callahan, 1980 50
17. Lithic technology display in 2013. Photo by author 50
18. Early Woodland era display. Photo courtesy of Errett Callahan, 1980
19. Early Woodland era display in 2013. Photo by author
20. Middle Woodland era display. Photo courtesy of Errett Callahan, 1980
21. Middle Woodland era display in 2013. Photo by author
22. Late Woodland era display. Photo courtesy of Errett Callahan, 1980
23. Late Woodland era display in 2013. Photo by author
24. Contact period displays. Photo courtesy of Errett Callahan, 1980
25. Contact period displays in 2013. Photo by author
26. Pamunkey technology. Photo courtesy of Errett Callahan, 1980
27. Pamunkey technology display in 2013. Photo by author
28. Pamunkey ceramics through time. Photo courtesy of Errett Callahan, 1980
29. Pamunkey ceramics display in 2013. Photo by author
30. Displays of regalia. Photo courtesy of Errett Callahan, 1980
31. Regalia displays in 2013. Photo by author
Chapter 1: Introduction

Since 1980 the Pamunkey Indian Museum has served its community as a source of knowledge and education, a means of connecting with the past, and a place in which to safeguard and learn from objects and traditions from the past. In many ways a modernized vision of a generations-old tradition of protecting and displaying cultural artifacts and knowledge, the Pamunkey Indian Museum also allows the Pamunkey to assist in educating non-Pamunkey about their history and culture. The museum and the objects it houses represent and invoke memories of times past and help community members understand and relate to their ancestors’ past. This tribal museum gives the community who created it a place within which they can represent themselves as they wish to be seen and understood, and assists with cultural preservation and revitalization. Over the years a number of individuals have given time, energy, and family heirlooms to the museum, acts that demonstrates that the Pamunkey Indian Museum has in many ways become, “the heart of the reservation,” (Kevin Brown, personal communication December 1, 2012).

Although it is unique in its form and content, the creation of the Pamunkey Indian Museum was in fact just one in a series of actions taken by the Pamunkey community in an effort to both reassert and maintain their place in Virginia and U.S. history. This paper seeks to trace these actions and place the museum in the greater context of Pamunkey effort toward education and visibility – both within their own community and among non-tribal members as well. Theories of a tribal museum’s
influence on memory, knowledge, and storytelling are considered, as well as an exploration of the role tribal museums play within their respective communities. Individuals involved in the Pamunkey Indian Museum’s creation and maintenance were consulted, as well as historical documents relevant to the Pamunkey people and their unique museum.

**Theoretical Perspectives**

Paula Findlen (2000) describes a museum as “a house of knowledge,” while Susan Crane (2000) refers to a museum as a “storehouse of memory.” Basso (1996), Halbwachs (1980) and Wilson (2000) discuss the ability of places, including built spaces like museums, to anchor memories and provide living community members access to those anchored memories. Terdiman (1985) even suggests that material objects themselves have memories. Other scholars focus on such memories as inspiration for stories and story-telling, suggesting that either the objects can act as props that enable storytelling (Gurian 2004:271), or that the objects themselves have stories of their own, which they carry through the years and share in their own ways (Benjamin 1968:220; Gosden & Marshall 1999:169; Lippert 2013:432). This paper will argue that these approaches to museums and the objects they house are all applicable to the Pamunkey Indian Museum, and serve to help the museum in its efforts to preserve the Pamunkey place in Virginia and U.S. history by safeguarding cultural relics and the memories, knowledge, and stories they embody.
Also relevant to this project is understanding the role tribal museums play within their respective communities. Handler (1985) and Hoerig (2010) argue that it is important for Native American communities to have designated public spaces, such as museums, where they can represent themselves to the world in a manner of their own choosing. This need for self-representation can be understood in some instances as a reaction to what was often a problematic display of Native peoples in non-tribal museums, even quite recently. However, other scholars, such as Mithlo (2004) and Clifford (1990) caution us not to focus exclusively on reactive motivations for tribal museums, pointing out that many Native American communities have long histories of collecting and displaying cultural relics. They suggest that in many cases tribal museums are created primarily for the communities that are displayed within them, as places for cultural preservation, perpetuation, pedagogy, and revitalization (Abrams 2003:7). Tribal museums also often include a sense that locality is important (Clifford 1990:229), as many museums on reservations incorporate the area’s landscape into the museum displays.

Methodology

This research seeks to explore historical and cultural questions regarding the Pamunkey Indian community. I have chosen to pursue this project using anthropological methodologies and drawing on ethnohistorical practices that incorporate a variety of resources for historical and cultural information. I have investigated written accounts and documents where available and appropriate, in order
to gain a general understanding of Pamunkey history and the history of the Pamunkey Indian Museum. Among these written resources were included scholarly writings and published histories. Although these published resources provide a great deal of historical and cultural information about the Pamunkey, it is important to recognize their potential shortcomings. The earliest known historical writings which include information about the Pamunkey were written in the early seventeenth century by English colonists in Virginia (including Captain John Smith). Due to language and cultural differences it is possible that the information these documents contain is either incomplete or incorrect. Prior to 1607 we must rely primarily on archaeological discoveries and oral tradition for historical information. Even after Virginia was colonized by the English there are still gaps in the historical record and there are periods of years and even decades from which there is no published historical information about the Pamunkey people. Thus while written historical documents were relied on for this project for background information, it is necessary to point out that these published documents do not offer a complete account of Pamunkey history.

In researching the history of the Pamunkey Indian Museum specifically, a number of additional documents were found to be of relevance as well. Brochures made by the Pamunkey Museum offered insights into how the museum was being advertised to outside visitors in the early 1980s, in 1985, and then again in the mid-1990s. A brochure advertising the Pamunkey Indian Village, which was created by Errett Callahan in 1978, provides insight into his interests and goals for the museum and Indian Village. Correspondence between Pamunkey and non-Pamunkey individuals allowed a
glimpse into the collaborative efforts of those involved. Correspondence between non-Pamunkey individuals regarding the museum offered an outsider’s perspective on how the museum development process was unfolding. Personal notes and reflections written by Errett Callahan throughout the museum development also shed light on the nature of the collaboration, as well as explaining where and how the information displayed in the museum was obtained and organized. Articles in local newspapers and magazines offer impressions of how the Pamunkey Indian Museum and community were perceived by outsiders at various points in time.

Equally, if not more central to this project’s investigations, were the interviews conducted with individuals who were or are involved directly with the Pamunkey Indian Museum, whether during its creation and early days or at present. Those interviewed include members of the Pamunkey tribe and non-Pamunkey individuals who were involved with the tribe through a variety of projects. Warren Cook spearheaded the museum’s creation and served as its first director. Errett Callahan was the archaeologist who worked closely with the tribe for several years, providing historical information and arranging the museum displays. During my research Ashley Atkins-Spivey served as director of the museum and Kevin Brown served as Chief of the Pamunkey Indian Tribe. These latter two individuals were also part of the tribe’s museum committee, along with Joyce Krigsvold, who is a member of the Pamunkey Pottery Guild and who has worked and volunteered at the museum for over 20 years. Mary Ellen Hodges is an archaeologist who worked with the tribe doing excavations on the reservation around the time of the museum’s creation. Together these individuals offer a picture of the
museum’s life, from its early creation to the present day, and provide us with insights into not only why the museum was first created, but what its presence on the reservation has brought to the community it represents. To ensure that interviews and the Pamunkey community perspective were relayed accurately, all Pamunkey consultants were given the opportunity to comment on this paper while in draft form, and their feedback has been incorporated into the final product.

Ethnohistory

Beginning in the 1950s, scholars such as Stanley Pargellis, Anthony F.C. Wallace, William N. Fenton, Dwight L. Smith, and Erminie Wheeler-Voegelin, began recognizing the limitations of the fields of history and anthropology, when approached separately, in terms of offering a complete picture of Native American culture and history (Jennings 1980:88-89). They chose instead to combine methodologies from history and anthropology and began holding conferences to discuss the potential of a new approach, which was eventually termed ethnohistory (Fixico 1998:87). The attendants of these American Indian Ethnohistoric Conferences, some of which later were renamed the American Society for Ethnohistory, sought to combine the use of written documents with direct observation and interaction with living subjects in order to offer a fuller picture and broader understanding of Native American histories and cultures (Fixico 1998:87-88). However, despite this early interest, it was not until the 1970s and 1980s that ethnohistory as a field really began to be incorporated into mainstream history and anthropology.
Since the late 1980s and 1990s, Native and non-Native scholars alike have become more vocal and more determined in their efforts to redefine methodologies for the writing of Native history. These individuals emphasize the need to take a more inclusive Ethnohistoric approach to writing Indian histories. Their writings describe the value of treating oral histories as sources of historical and cultural information on par with written documents (Vansina 1985:199, Wilson 1997:111, and Wilson 1998:25). They also point out the potential for exploitation of Indian communities by scholars who do not consult with those community members regarding the purpose and products of their research (Miller 1998:111). For these scholars, such habits have resulted in the “belief in some indigenous communities that researchers are simply intent on...‘stealing’ knowledge” (Smith 2012:178). These scholars urge anthropologists and historians alike to visit Native peoples in their homelands (Fixico 1998:90) to ask permission of Native groups before studying them (Deloria 1988:95), to follow Native protocols regarding research methods and topics (Champagne 1998:183), to offer opportunities for the community to offer feedback on the project while it is still in progress (Wilson 1998:25), and to find ways to give back to the community of focus when the project is complete (Deloria 1988:95).

Since 1990 and the passing of NAGPRA (Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act) academics have generally become more accepting of the notion that consulting living Native sources is imperative to gaining a more complete and more objective understanding of historical documents. There is growing recognition of the fact that writings and interpretations of the past can have direct influences on
individuals alive today, and of the need for ethical reciprocity and the creation of partnerships with communities (Lefler & Gleach 1997:2). The late Vine Deloria reminds us that consulting living Native Americans is vital to making scholars recognize the potential implications of their work on descendant communities and challenges scholars to consider what effect their work will have on the lives of living people (Deloria 1988:99). Scholars are gradually recognizing that they will be held accountable for their work and will be expected to share information and findings with the communities who are their subjects, including “mak[ing] collected oral histories available to future generations,” (Lefler & Gleach 1997:3). It is now suggested that “most anthropologists, Native and non-Native, agree that the time has come for a more humble and socially responsible approach to anthropological fieldwork” (Lefler & Gleach 1997:2).

These supporters of ethnohistoric approaches to writing about Indian histories and cultures do not question the ability of non-Native scholars to contribute writings and information that can benefit Native communities. They merely stress that it does not happen without effort. Mihesuah points out that in many cases “Indians appreciate accurate historical and anthropological works that focus on their histories and cultures” (Mihesuah 1998:8), explaining that “if a tribe has no tribal historian, it generally will rely partially on studies written by outsiders” (Mihesuah 1998:8). The key is to make sure that these studies are balanced and include Native voices and perspectives. Fixico offers several guidelines for pursuing ethical research on Indians communities, which, aside from strategies also mentioned by others above, include avoiding negative or derogatory terminology, avoiding suppressing Indians, and researching and examining
all types of evidence available, including non-written data (Fixico 1998:91). He does, however, caution that as with any community, Native Americans do not necessarily all share the same opinions or perspectives on different events, and thus when including Native sources, “it bears repeating that a single Indian voice is impractical” (Fixico 1998:94).

Working with Oral Histories

Although oral histories have in recent years become more generally accepted as valid and reliable sources of historical information, it is still important to recognize the challenges and potential problems inherent in using oral history sources. Vansina (1985) and Abrams (2009), both emphasize the fact that memory, on which oral history relies, is inherently subjective. Being based in personal experience, it includes emotions and perception, and must not be misrepresented as objective fact (Abrams 2009:7). Memories are not static or purely factual recollections, but are reworked in the context of one’s own experience and politics and are thus also representations of culture (Abrams 2009:7). A person’s recollections of a given event are colored by that person’s whole lifetime of experiences, including events before and after the particular historical moment in question, and feelings and political or social situations along the way can influence how each event is remembered (a critique which can be addressed to a number of written sources as well). Some scholars suggest this occurrence can at times be beneficial, as oral histories can then tell us not just what happened, but also “what people thought happened or how they have internalized and interpreted what
happened” (Grele 1991:245). These ideas of what a person thought happened can also be influenced by ideas or expectations of what they thought should have or probably happened. Memory, it seems, often “selects certain features and interprets them according to expectation, previous knowledge, and the logic of ‘what must have happened’,” (Vansina 1985:5).

When working with oral histories, it is important to recall that what a person remembers is affected by that person’s own interests and needs (Ritchie 2003:32). What is of interest to the interviewer may not be of interest to the person being interviewed, and thus details the interviewer considers important or relevant may not have been noted by the interviewee. Individuals’ narratives often reflect current attitudes onto the past (Abrams 2009:85 and Winograd 1994:246), for example, arguments or disagreements from the past may be remembered as less heated or significant than they actually were if those involved are reconciled in the present.

Chronology can also be a challenge when using oral history sources, as people tend not to remember things based on an absolute calendar, but rather as a relative sequence of events and situations (Vansina 1985:173). Thus it is frequently not possible to determine a specific date for an event in the past based solely on one individual’s recollections. However, especially when comparing multiple accounts from different individuals, it is generally possible to arrive at a relative chronology of events (Vansina 1985:158-159).

A key difference between written and oral sources of historical information that it is imperative to consider is the tension and anxiety that can be present in an interview session. If the interviewer and interviewee do not have a long-standing previous
relationship, there may be questions of trust and reliability. It is common for informants to “wonder as to what uses their testimony will be put” (Vansina 1985:111). This is especially the case in situations in which other community members are aware of the interviewee’s participation in the project. In small or close-knit communities, in particular, “informants must take into account what the reactions of their fellow countrymen may be” (Vansina 1985:110). Interviewers must also be cautious about interrupting answers or stories, the tone of questions asked, and the atmosphere of the interview in general. Too many interjections from the person conducting the interview can influence the informant to respond in different ways or focus on different parts of the story than he or she may have naturally done (Abrams 2009:29). This should be avoided because, as Vansina points out, “even when they do wander off the topic...unexpected links with the topics discussed may turn up, and most unasked for information comes from such diversions” (Vansina 1985:60).

Despite the challenges of working with oral history sources, they can nevertheless be extremely valuable sources of historical information. Not only do they provide more material than can be gleaned from the written record alone, but they also can give insights into culture and tradition by offering an insider’s perspective on events and situations (Vansina 1985:197). Written documents sometimes offer just one perspective or account of past events, whereas oral histories can often provide multiple perspectives of the same situation and offer up a fuller, more nuanced picture of the past. Written documents can reflect personal biases that may affect which events are documented and how they are described. Oral histories, while still influenced by
personal biases, can also offer “insights into the interplay between the self and society, between past and present, and between individual experience and the generalized account” (Abrams 2009:81). Therefore, despite their unique nature, it is becoming more widely accepted that oral histories should be considered as equally valid sources of history, for as Vansina reminds us, “both are messages from the past to the present” (Vansina 1985:199).

Organization

The project described in this paper seeks to both document the history of the Pamunkey Indian Museum, and to place the museum within a broader context of Pamunkey efforts toward public recognition and preserving their place in U.S. and Virginia history. Chapter Two offers a brief historical background of the Pamunkey people and their reservation. This is not a comprehensive history of the Pamunkey, but is intended merely to orient the reader and focuses on Pamunkey history as it is deemed most relevant to the creation of the Pamunkey Indian Museum and understanding its role within the community. Chapter Three describes the development and maintenance of the museum, as explained through the individuals interviewed, and offers insights into how and why the museum has become so central to its community. Chapter Four explores various goals the community has for the museum’s future. Chapter Five summarizes the project and its conclusions. In order to minimize disruptions to the narrative flow, quotations and references from personal communications will be cited in full the first time referenced in each chapter, but subsequent references to the same
communication will include only the subject’s last name, the initials p.c. to reference a personal communication, and the year in which the communication took place. All references to personal communication signify face-to-face or phone conversations. Written correspondence or personal notes are designated as such.
Chapter 2: The Reservation Landscape

The Pamunkey Museum is one of the newest community buildings on a piece of land that has a long been inhabited by the Pamunkey people. Some parts of this area’s history are integral to the story of the creation and development of the United States as a nation, and thus there are a few incidences in Virginia Indian history that are widely known. These are the stories told by Captain John Smith of the first English colony in Virginia, at Jamestown, stories which describe Powhatan, a powerful Pamunkey Chief who controlled a paramount chiefdom of Indian tribes in Virginia and who held John Smith captive early in the colony’s settlement (Barbour 1986:53-61, Gleach 1997:3). These stories also describe Pocahontas, Powhatan’s daughter, whose intervention supposedly spared Smith’s life (Gleach 1997:109, Rountree 2005:76), and who later married an Englishman (Gleach 1997:3, Rountree 2005:166) and travelled to England (Rountree 2005:176). As familiar as these historic images are, most Americans know little to nothing of Pamunkey history, culture, and life since those first pivotal interactions with Europeans. A tendency of scholars to focus on early Virginia Indian history has resulted in a lack of recent historical information (Waugaman & Moretti-Langholtz 2000:vi). Even in their home state of Virginia, few non-Native Americans are aware of the existence of the Pamunkey Indian Reservation, which has been a sacred land and home to Pamunkey people since long before the stories of John Smith.

This lack of public education was one of the reasons the Pamunkey people chose to create their museum and reassert their place in Virginia history. Public school
curriculums across the country, including in Virginia, offer very limited information on Virginia Indians and their role in U.S. history. One result is that even individuals of native descent often have to make a conscious effort to learn about Virginia Indians outside of public school settings. The Pamunkey Indian Museum was built in part to fill this community and public need.

What follows is by no means a comprehensive history of the Pamunkey people. Rather, this chapter is intended to give a brief and general overview in order to orient a reader who is unfamiliar with the Pamunkey story. Included are incidences and topics considered to be relevant to the creation of the Pamunkey Indian Museum and which make evident the Pamunkeys’ continuous efforts to retain their place in Virginia history and the United States’ national historical narrative as well.

The Pamunkey and the English Colonists

Although archaeological evidence shows human habitation of the Pamunkey Reservation and surrounding areas from as early as 8000 B.C. (Norrisley 1980:25), it was not until the English settled in Jamestown in 1607 that written information became available about the Pamunkey people. The Pamunkey were at that time one of thirty-two tribes making up the Powhatan confederacy that provided assistance to the struggling young colony, assistance which included providing food to the colonists in exchange for trade goods (Gleach 1997:6, 22). During the first few decades of contact, the relationship between the Powhatan and the English colonists consisted primarily of trade, but was interrupted periodically by bouts of violence, usually resulting from
efforts of one side or the other to shift relations in their own favor (Gleach 1997:6). As a response to one of their more intensive periods of warfare in which Pamunkey chief Opechancanough attempted (for the second time since the colonists’ arrival) to expel the English from Pamunkey homelands, in 1646, the English colonists appealed to the Powhatan people to sign a treaty to ensure future peace between their people (Gleach 1997:174-178). Under the terms of this treaty, certain areas of land, including the acreage that is the Pamunkey Reservation today, were marked out for exclusively Indian control, as opposed to other areas of land that were acknowledged to be under English authority (Gleach 1997:178-181, McCartney 1981:12-13).

This treaty represented the first time that any specific territory of Virginia was designated in a formal document as either under or not under Indian authority. However, despite the English government’s recognition of these separate spaces, the reality was that as ambitious colonists claimed land for growing tobacco and other profitable crops; they frequently encroached on Indian designated territories, blurring boundaries in the process (Rountree 1990:92). This led the Pamunkey and other Virginia Indians to appeal repeatedly to the English governor to have their treaty terms enforced. In 1676 Bacon’s Rebellion led to an increase in violence toward Indians, including those, like the Pamunkey, who were then on peaceful terms with the English. In fact the Pamunkey were at that time active allies of the colony and had on a number of occasions even provided military assistance on behalf of the colonists (Gleach 1997:188-189).
After many months of violence, the peace between the English and the Pamunkey, along with several other Powhatan tribes, was reconfirmed in the 1677 Treaty of Middle Plantation (Gleach 1997:195-197; McCartney 1981:20; Rountree 1990:101). Under the terms of this treaty, the Pamunkey recognized the sovereignty of the King of England and accepted his protection of certain lands designated as the Indians’ homelands. This protection was given in return for a tribute (referred to in the treaty as a quit rent, or tax), to be offered annually to the Governor of Virginia, and included hunting and fishing rights in other lands adjacent or near to the Pamunkey’s specified territories (Gleach 1997:195-197; McCartney 1981:20; Rountree 1990:101). Over 300 years later, the Pamunkey still uphold this treaty with a tribute of game to the governor of Virginia every November.

**The Pamunkey and the Commonwealth**

Eighteenth-century historians, including Thomas Jefferson, frequently discount Pamunkey and other Indian presences in Virginia, thus giving the impression of much smaller Indian populations than truly existed in that time (Gleach 1997:203). Virginia Indians were, it would seem, mostly quiet and law-abiding during this time, thereby not inspiring mention in written documents other than for their repeated requests for protection of their land rights (Rountree 1990:166). During the eighteenth century, the Pamunkey frequently experienced pressure from neighboring settlers who would disregard the terms of the treaty and settle and clear land that was legally Pamunkey property. This encroachment reduced the Indians’ resources for hunting and trapping.
(Rountree 1990:164-5). The Pamunkey also commonly suffered pressure to sell or lease their land to settlers, so that after the American Revolution, the new Commonwealth of Virginia declared that only the Virginia General Assembly had the right to purchase land from Virginia Indians, and in 1792, another law was passed “stating that the land of tributary Indians was deemed inalienable...and that Indians and their property were now to be protected by the commonwealth” (Rountree 1990:165).

In the early nineteenth century, racial tensions and antagonisms created challenges for the Pamunkey people’s retention of their homelands, and resulted in changes in the reservation landscape. Some white citizens challenged the Pamunkey people’s right to maintain use of their reserved lands, claiming that they were no longer “pure” Indians but now had African blood, making their treaty with Virginia no longer relevant. In 1843 one group even petitioned to have all Indians, Pamunkey included, removed from Virginia (Rountree 1990:194). The petition ultimately failed, but nevertheless resulted in a great deal of anxiety for the Pamunkey over maintaining their land rights, and created a desire to distance themselves from African Americans in order to prevent future threats to their land claims. This threat to Pamunkey land based on challenges over their identity may have been one of the motivations for their later efforts to remind the public of their presence in Virginia and their unquestionable history and identity as Indians (Feest 1990:55).

A few decades later segregation led to changes in the reservation landscape with the addition of several community buildings. When the Colosse Baptist Church, the church attended by most Pamunkey individuals living on the reservation, became
segregated and no longer served individuals who were not white, the Pamunkey responded by building their own church on the Pamunkey reservation (Rountree 1990:200). Thus in 1865 the Pamunkey Indian Baptist church was established, and today is the oldest Indian church still in use in Virginia (Rountree 1990:200).

Obtaining education was also challenging for the Pamunkey, particularly during times of segregation. Indian children were then not permitted to attend white schools, but as a result of their previous difficulties related to racial identification, the Pamunkey were hesitant to have their children attend black schools. These concerns resulted in the construction of a school on the reservation in the 1870s (Rountree 1990:200-1). As the Pamunkey maneuvered a changing and challenging social and political world, ethnographic accounts from the late nineteenth century document approximately 100 Pamunkey individuals then living on their reservation, individuals who still relied on their homelands for subsistence, taking continual advantage of (and educating their youth in) hunting, trapping, fishing, and farming, just as they had when the English colonists first encountered them in these lands (Rountree 1990:203).

In the late eighteenth century several Pamunkey individuals, including then Chief George Major Cook and Terrill Bradby began attempts at increasing public knowledge about Virginia Indians and their place in Virginia history. They gave speeches about the Pamunkey situation, performed demonstrations of Pamunkey traditions, and even formed a travelling show which would perform dances and reenact historic scenes, in particular the story of Pocahontas’ rescue of John Smith (Feest 1990:55; Gleach 2002: 10; Rountree 1990:210). These acts were in great likelihood intended to remind and
inform the general public, as well as their own community and youth, about the
important role the Pamunkey people played in the creation and development of the
United States (Feest 1990:55). They were likely also efforts to distinguish themselves as
unquestionably Indian, thereby separating themselves from African Americans in a time
of segregation and bigotry (Feest 1990:55; Gleach 2002:10). Around this time Chief
Cook also opened his own home to visitors, and allowed tribal and non-tribal members
alike to view his own personal collection of Pamunkey artifacts, in an effort to increase
education about his people (Brewster 1985:4).

Twentieth Century Challenges

In 1924 Virginia passed the Racial Integrity Act, which had significant
consequences for all Virginia Indians. According to this legislation, the commonwealth
of Virginia then recognized only two races: white and colored. Any person with more
than 1/16 Indian blood, or even “one drop” of African blood was considered colored
licenses, and other legal documents were required to designate a person as one of these
two races – being Indian was not a legal option (Green 1987:18-19; Moretti-Langholtz
1998:89-101, 314-315). In later years this act would cause a great deal of confusion for
genealogists, as the same individual might be designated as different races on different
documents at different points in her life. At the time, however, it also caused a number
of legal and social challenges for the Pamunkey as they fought for the enforcement of
their treaty rights, rights which depended on their status as Indians (Green 1987:19; Rountree 1990:225).

Despite these social and legal challenges, in 1932 the Pamunkey gained state assistance in opening a Pottery school, an effort intended to revitalize the community’s pottery-making practices and direct them in a manner that might be more lucrative for the community (Atkins-Spivey 2009:18; Blumer 1985:11). Although pottery had been made by Pamunkey people for several hundred years, the Pottery School introduced new styles and new techniques intended both to make ceramics that were more appealing to tourists, and to decrease the amount of time and effort required to make each piece (Atkins-Spivey 2009:19; Blumer 1985:12-13). With the establishment of the Pottery School came also the creation of the Pamunkey Pottery Guild, a group of predominantly female artists, who worked together “to regulate prices and help with the marketing of the wares,” (Blumer 1985:11). While Pamunkey women prior to the establishment of the Pottery Guild had mainly sold their pottery and crafts from their homes, the establishment of the Pamunkey Pottery Guild was accompanied by the creation of the Trading Post, a small cabin built on the reservation, with the assistance of the Works Progress Administration, for the express purpose of serving as a location for members of the Pottery Guild to display and sell their wares (Blumer 1985:14).

The middle of the twentieth century saw great changes for the Pamunkey in terms of education. Up until the 1940s, education for Virginia Indians was still a problematic issue. Although the Pamunkey did have a school on their reservation, as did the Mattaponi on their reservation approximately ten miles away, neither of these
schools offered high school level courses. The Pamunkey petitioned the federal government for assistance, but were told that the federal government had no treaty with Virginia Indians (their treaty had been made with the governor of Virginia while it was still an English colony) and this was thus a state matter (Rountree 1990:235-236). In 1945, the Office of Indian Affairs finally took notice of the inadequacies of education for Indians in Virginia, and later that year it was determined that Virginia Indian children could attend high school at Indian boarding schools at Cherokee, in North Carolina, Bacone, in Oklahoma, Haskell, in Kansas, or Flandreau, in South Dakota (Rountree 1990:236; Ashley Spivey, personal communication May 7, 2013). In 1951, low attendance caused the school on the Pamunkey reservation to close and those Pamunkey children still in grade school were bused to the school at the Mattaponi reservation instead (Rountree 1990:240). In 1958, high school courses were added to the school at Mattaponi, and in 1966, it was finally determined that Virginia Indians could attend public schools in their local school systems (Rountree 1990:240-242). Although this greatly improved Indian access to education in Virginia, their own people’s history was not included in those public school curricula, leaving great gaps in knowledge for Indians and non-Indians alike.

Moving Back into Public View

In the 1970s, the Pamunkey, along with several other Virginia Indian tribes, began to take increased advantage of federal programs for funding opportunities. In particular, the Comprehensive Employment Training Act (CETA) Native American Grant
was employed to provide craft classes and help revitalize various artistic traditions (Atkins 2009:22, Rountree 1990:248). The Pamunkey also began making strides toward becoming more visible within the state, and the Pamunkey Tribe’s Overall Economic Development Plan of May 1976 describes a goal of increasing tourism on the reservation (Pamunkey Tribe 1976:13). Around the same time this Economic Development Plan was agreed upon, the Pamunkey began working with archaeologist Errett Callahan to create a replica of a contact-period Indian village within the reservation. Once the Indian village was underway, they also solicited Callahan’s assistance for the creation of a museum that would work with the Indian village to tell the story of Pamunkey history for the Pamunkey community, as well as helping to attract tourists to the reservation. This museum would serve to supplement the education of native and non-native individuals alike, as public schools at the time still offered very minimal information about Virginia Indian history.

In 1979, Warren Cook, a Pamunkey Indian and son of then Chief Tecumseh Deerfoot Cook, spearheaded a petition for the Pamunkey Reservation to have their reservation included in both the Virginia Historic Landmarks Registry and the National Registry of Historic Places (Norrissey 1980:25). Cook even sought out assistance from the Virginia Research Center for Archaeology (now a part of the Virginia Department for Historic Resources), whose staff performed archaeological surveys on the reservation as part of this endeavor (Norrissey 1980:25). In 1979, the same Warren Cook became supervisor for all CETA monies in Virginia, as well as the governor’s advisor on Indian Affairs (Rountree 1990:249). One of the CETA grants he supervised was used for the
Powhatan Artisan’s Project. This project, led by Cook himself, worked with a number of Powhatan tribes, including the Pamunkey, and consisted of two years of classes on traditional Native American pottery techniques and sought to preserve and even recapture some of the pre-Pottery School ceramic traditions that had been or were being slowly forgotten with lack of practice (Atkins 2009:22). The same grant also provided instruction on museum maintenance, interpretation, and management, and helped with the creation of the Pamunkey Indian Museum (Norrisey 1980:27). On October 11, 1980, the Pamunkey Indian Museum opened its doors to the public (Sauder 1980: F-11).

The Pamunkey Reservation Today

Their yearly treaty tribute to the governor of Virginia, while perhaps the most publicly visible Pamunkey action, is not the only Pamunkey tradition which has continued over the last more than three hundred years. Today, while living like any other American community, the Pamunkey continue to honor and maintain many practices in keeping with those employed by their ancestors. The community is still led by a tribal council and chief who are elected in their traditional manner (Kyle 1995:56). The Pamunkey River is still a treasured source of life for the community, with a tradition of fishing and protecting their river resources that has evolved into a very successful shad hatchery (Kyle 1995:51-52). Pottery is still an honored craft practiced by individuals in the community, frequently using clay still dug from the reservation (Blumer 1985:9).
The landscape of the reservation is an important part of Pamunkey identity and history. Included within its territory are burial places of prominent leaders, including the well-known Powhatan (Blumer 1985:6). The wetlands, woods, and river have long been a source of subsistence for Pamunkey people, and trapping, hunting, and fishing still supplement some individuals’ diets even into the present (Kyle 1995:51). These resources also continue to provide the tribe with game for their yearly tribute, which can consist of deer, turkey, and/or fish.

The railroad tracks that run through the reservation are a reminder of the effects of modernity and how life has changed over the centuries (Blumer 1985:14). They also serve as a reminder of Pamunkey experiences with injustice and justice alike. The tracks were first laid in 1855, across 22 acres of the Pamunkey reservation, without permission from the Pamunkey and with no compensation to the Pamunkey for this unsolicited and unwanted use of their land (Rountree 1990:250). Yet in 1975 the Pamunkey began a suit against the Southern Railroad Company which in 1979 resulted in reparations of $100,000 being paid to the Pamunkey for the location of these tracks. The terms of their settlement also required that the railroad continue regular rent payments for use of that land in the future, and determined that if the railroad should at any point discontinue use of the tracks, the land will be returned to Pamunkey use (Rountree 1990:253). The complications around the railroad tracks are also a reminder of the Pamunkeys’ continuous struggle with the issue of sovereignty. Although they are currently recognized by the Commonwealth of Virginia, they have not yet been awarded federal recognition of their tribal status. At the time of this writing a petition for federal
acknowledgement is under consideration and it is hoped that if/when it is accepted the Pamunkey will gain access to additional federal resources which should have both social and economic benefits for the community.

Various buildings on the reservation also represent different shifts in lifestyle and community relations over the years. The Pamunkey Indian Baptist Church (see figure 1), which was established in 1865 remains still an important part of the community’s spiritual life (Blumer 1985:6). The Pottery School (see figure 2) has been in use since it first opened in 1932 (Blumer 1985:11). A small log cabin near the reservation entrance (see figure 3) is a reminder of the old Trading Post, which was also built in the early 1930’s in connection with the Pottery School and was once a location for the sale of Pamunkey wares to reservation visitors (Blumer 1985:14). The old schoolhouse (see figure 4), which held classes for Pamunkey students for several decades in the late nineteenth through the mid-twentieth centuries, is a reminder of the Pamunkeys’ changing educational experiences and opportunities over the centuries (Blumer 1985:7, 14). There is also a mix of different style homes, some agricultural fields, and a number of fishing cabins along the river, next to the Pamunkey Fish Hatchery. The hatchery, which was first opened in 1918, was upgraded in 1992 (Pamunkey Tribe:4), and continues to be an important way for the Pamunkey to both give back to the river that provides so much to their lives and to ensure that the shad population remains a healthy and reliable resource for the future (Kyle 1995:51-52).
Figure 1: Pamunkey Indian Baptist Church, 2013. Photo by author

Figure 2: Pamunkey Pottery School, 2013. Photo by author
The Pottery School, the Trading Post, and the old schoolhouse have a closely connected history, as all have been integral to the continued Pamunkey tradition of pottery making. Examples of Pamunkey pottery have been found in the archaeological
record dating back several hundred years (Atkins 2009:11; Blumer 1985:8) and in 1932 the Pamunkey formalized this tradition, albeit with some stylistic and methodological changes, with the development of the Pottery School and the establishment of the Pamunkey Pottery Guild (Blumer 1985:11) and Trading Post. In 1959 the log cabin had deteriorated and the Trading Post was moved into the old schoolhouse, which had by then ceased to be used for educational purposes (Blumer 1985:14). Then in 1980, when the Pamunkey Indian Museum opened its doors, the Pottery Guild left the Trading Post/schoolhouse and moved their crafts into the museum’s gift shop, agreeing to take on the responsibility to keep the museum open to visitors on a regular basis. The members of the Pottery Guild have continued to honor this responsibility to this day (Joyce Krigsvold, personal communication February 23, 2013).
The Pamunkey Indian Museum (see figure 5) is located beside the Old
Schoolhouse and the Pottery School, in what has traditionally been a complex of
community gathering. While the museum itself may seem to be a new addition to
reservation life, it in fact represents a much older tradition of honoring and
safeguarding Pamunkey history. Long before a building was built for this purpose,
Pamunkey tribal members and Chiefs had a tradition of collecting and displaying
Pamunkey artifacts and heirlooms in their own homes, with the intended purpose of
sharing Pamunkey history and culture with tribal members and non-tribal members
alike (Kevin Brown, personal communication December 1, 2012 and Brewster 1985:4-5).
It is this last tradition of safeguarding and displaying Pamunkey history that the rest of
this paper seeks to explore, as well as the decision and process of creating a formal
Pamunkey Indian Museum and the tribal members’ continuing efforts to maintain that
museum over more than thirty years.
Chapter 3: Memories of a Museum

A Tradition of Display

The Pamunkey community has a long tradition of collecting and preserving artifacts and heirlooms from their collective past. The reservation in King William has been the Pamunkey homeland for hundreds and possibly thousands of years. One result of this long presence on this particular site is an abundance of artifacts of varying ages that have been found throughout the reservation and collected by community members and visitors for generations (Kevin Brown, personal communication December 1, 2012 and Warren Cook, personal communication October 13, 2012). These artifacts, combined with heirlooms passed down within and across families, have led to a number of rather substantial private collections among the Pamunkey (Cook, p.c. 2012).

Another tradition among the Pamunkey is that of welcoming others, from within and without the community, to view these personal collections and to learn from them about Pamunkey history and culture. Community members alive today remember stories of former Chief George Major Cook who kept a “Relic Room” where he displayed and cared for the numerous artifacts and heirlooms that he had acquired both on his own and as donations from others, including individuals both within and outside of the community (Brown, p.c. 2012, Cook p.c., Joyce Krigsvold, personal communication February 23 2013). Chief George Major Cook’s collection was apparently quite sizable and when he passed away his collection was inherited by his son, Tecumseh Cook, who eventually became Chief himself (Cook, p.c. 2012). For many years there was a
passenger train which would travel through the reservation and stop at Lester Manor, the station just outside it. Passengers would often disembark and visit the reservation, purchasing Pamunkey crafts at the Trading Post, and visiting the Chief’s house and Relic Room as a sort of tourist destination, an occurrence which continued until passenger trains no longer stopped at Lestor Manor (Blumer 1985: 14).

Although the Pamunkey have always been glad to let interested outsiders come to them for cultural information, there have been periods when their efforts at educating non-tribal members about their presence and history in Virginia have been much more prominent. In the late 19th century, the Pamunkey created a travelling show (see figure 6) which would perform traditional dances as well as a reenactment of the story of Pocahontas’ rescue of John Smith (Bradby 2008:122; Gleach 2000:10; Rountree 1990:202). Often referred to as “The Pocahontas Players,” they were officially titled “Powhatan’s Pamunkey Indian Braves” (Bradby 2008:116) and documentary evidence suggests they were performing as early as 1881, performances which continued for approximately 30 years (Bradby 2008:122-123; Rountree 1990:202). While the Pocahontas Players performed primarily on the Pamunkey reservation and in coastal Virginia towns and cities (Bradby 2008:123), they did perform at larger public events when possible. They performed at the Yorktown Centennial celebration in 1881 (Rountree 1990:202), and the Jamestown Tercentennial Exposition in 1907 (Bradby 2008:123; Gleach 2000:10). While the reenactment of the rescue of John Smith by Pocahontas was apparently the most popular and most noted of their performances,
other items on their playbill included: Green Corn Dance, Pamunkey Indian Marriage, Snake Dance, and War Dance (Bradby 2008:120).

Besides the travelling performances of the Pocahontas Players, the Pamunkey sought out public attention and public education in a number of other ways. In 1893 they sent a member of their community, William Terrill Bradby, to the Chicago World’s Fair, to represent their people and way of life (Rountree 1990:202). The same year they also gave a gift of Pamunkey artifacts to the U.S. National Museum (Rountree 1990:202). In 1898 the tribe made efforts to have Bradby represent the Pamunkey community at the Omaha Exposition, and in 1899 they sought assistance from the Governor of Virginia to have Bradby and/or the Pocahontas Players represent the tribe.
at the Paris Exhibition, although neither of these instances proved successful (Feest 1990: 57; Rountree 1990:210).

By 1915 the Pocahontas-Smith Rescue play had apparently become a regular part of a public celebration – the Forefather’s Festival – which was held each spring on the Pamunkey Reservation (Feest 1990:58). In the late 1930s and early 1940s the Pamunkey participated in an annual pageant to celebrate the first meeting of the English colonists with the leader, Powhatan (Feest 1990:58). The pageant was put on by a non-native organization, the Powhatan Hill Memorial Association, and included just one native performance, the Snake Dance (one of the dances from the Pamunkey Player’s repertoire decades earlier), but the Pamunkey were once again willing to publicize their community’s presence and culture in any venue available (Feest 1990:58).

The annual presentation of the Pamunkey treaty tribute to the Governor of Virginia has always been a very public and visible act by the Pamunkey community (Gleach 2002:11), often prompting local press to write news articles about the community and their history of tribute. And over the years the Pamunkey have worked with a number of prominent anthropologists, including James Mooney from the Bureau of Indian Affairs, starting in 1889, and Frank Speck in the early 1920s, all evidence of their willingness and interest in educating others about their history and culture (Rountree 1990:202).
A New Sort of “Relic Room”

In the 1970s Warren Cook, son of Chief Tecumseh Cook, pushed the community and council to look into creating a more permanent home in which to preserve and display his family’s collection. Cook had noticed that the size of the collection was unfortunately decreasing, not just from a lack of professional preservation techniques, but also, sadly, through theft. Some items had been lost years earlier, when the blind widow of Chief George Major Cook continued allowing visitors into her late husband’s relic room, not realizing her trust and lack of sight were being taken advantage of (Brown, p.c. 2012). How and when the later items were lost is not entirely clear, but according to Cook, by the time the remaining Cook family collection was donated to the Pamunkey Indian Museum in the late 1970s, the collection was barely one third of what it once encompassed (Cook, p.c. 2012). Thus the museum was looked forward to by many as a place in which to safeguard their family collections for future generations.

Once plans were underway for a museum in which to preserve and honor their culture and history, those involved in spearheading the movement put out a call to the community to donate artifacts and heirlooms to add to the museum’s collection and help them in their goal to tell the story of their people’s past (Cook, p.c. 2012). There were a few community members with rather sizable collections who had stipulations about how they wanted their donated items displayed. Concerned that such restrictions would ultimately hinder the museum’s efforts at relaying a clear and cohesive theme and storyline, several of these potential donations were declined (Cook, p.c. 2012). However, many individuals did contribute to the museum’s collection. Collectors from
within and without the community responded to the museum’s requests, with even
non-Pamunkey individuals from West Point, including some described as “relic hunters,”
also contributing their finds (Brown, p.c. 2012). Artifacts from recent archaeological
excavations performed on the reservation were contributed, and some specific items
were sought and donated from other museums or historical organizations in the area
(Mary Ellen Hodges, personal communication February 16, 2013).

One of the motivations for the establishment of the Pamunkey Indian Museum
was to have a place in which to safeguard and display community heirlooms. However
it was also intended in great part to share Pamunkey history with community members
and visitors alike. Maurice Halbwachs describes the role places and spaces have in
anchoring memories and providing community members access to those shared
memories. He states that “each group cuts up space in order to compose...a fixed
framework within which to enclose and retrieve its remembrances” (Halbwachs
1980:156). Shared physical surroundings “bear ours and others’ imprint” (Halbwachs
1980:129) and thus facilitate the process of collective remembering. Bjørnar Olsen
writes about the ability of objects to enable remembrances, pointing out that “things
are...essential to...memory practices” (Olsen 2010:125). Olsen stresses the very
physicality of objects as essential in that they don’t just remind us of the past – things in
effect are the past. He points out that “[a]s durable matter, things make the past
present and tangible” (Olsen 2010:108).

The emphasis placed by both Cook and Brown on the desire of the community to
have a building in which to both display and safeguard cultural artifacts supports this
vision of the museum as a place in which to anchor memories and provide community access to shared memories. Spivey mentioned the power of the displayed regalia to help her feel connected to past family members. “What I love about it [the museum] are the things that people from my family actually wore and made...for some reason that’s more tangible for me” (Ashley Atkins-Spivey, personal communication August 7, 2012). Susan Crane argues that “[m]emory is an act...which may well be triggered in response to objects” (Crane 2000:2). The Pamunkey Indian Museum enables community members to access and engage with objects from the past. This helps make the past more real and present to living community members, thus strengthening the community’s sense of shared history and shared memories.

A Fruitful Collaboration

One day in the mid-1970s, Warren Cook knocked on a door on Rockaway Street in Richmond, Virginia (Errett Callahan, personal communication July 21, 2012). He was selling property in Nags Head, North Carolina and had knocked on many doors for the same purpose. Each person who answered was offered a free meal in exchange for attending a seminar about the properties for (Callahan p.c. 2012; Cook p.c. 2012). This particular door was opened by Errett Callahan, a student of archaeology and anthropology with interests in indigenous technologies and Indian history and culture. In the course of their initial conversation, Cook noticed a spattering of stone flakes and arrowheads around Callahan’s front stoop (Callahan, p.c. 2012). He inquired as to their presence, and when he heard of Callahan’s interests in early Indian cultures he informed
a disbelieving Callahan as to his own background as the son of a living Indian Chief (Callahan, p.c. 2012). The two men soon recognized a shared interest in regaining knowledge about past Indian technologies and culture, and a mutual desire to capture and safeguard that information so that present and future generations could benefit from it. Cook quickly invited Callahan to the Pamunkey Indian Reservation to work with the community in various capacities, giving demonstrations of lithic technologies, and working on mutually beneficial projects (Callahan, p.c. 2012). Neither man could have had any idea at that moment what this chance encounter would mean for both their futures, but after just a few years they had collaborated on a number of historical research projects, the most notable being the development and opening of the Pamunkey Indian Museum. This collaboration represented the first of its kind in Virginia, in which a Native community solicited the assistance of a non-native archaeologist in order to learn new information about the Native community’s past, and proved to be a fruitful collaboration as well. Without the mutual support and potential for opportunities that Cook and Callahan offered one another, not to mention the challenges these two strong and determined characters posed for each other along the way, it is hard to imagine that either man could have accomplished the significant and lasting works that they did. Great stores of knowledge about past Pamunkey life ways and technologies may not have come to light in the same way, and there might not have been the opportunity to build such a home in which to display Pamunkey culture and artistry.
At the time of their meeting, Errett Callahan was teaching courses at Virginia Commonwealth University while working on a doctorate dissertation on “primitive technology” at Catholic University (Callahan, p.c. 2012). After his serendipitous meeting with Warren Cook led to a relationship with the Pamunkey community, Callahan began building a village of longhouses, called yehakins, on the reservation, as an experiment in indigenous technology (Callahan, p.c. 2012). His goal was to reconstruct an Indian village as described by early historic documents (see figures 7 and 8), using the same tools and materials that would have been available to Pamunkey people at the time of European contact in Virginia (Callahan, p.c. 2012). Callahan was meticulous and methodical in his work, and by the time the museum was ready to open in 1980, it included a large number of replicas from Callahan’s projects, including arrowheads, knives, baskets, pots, etc., all made in what were quite possibly the same manner as the historic and pre-historic artifacts Callahan and his students aimed to replicate (Callahan, p.c. 2012, and Cook, p.c. 2012).

Figure 7: Yehakin under construction, circa 1978. Photo courtesy of Errett Callahan
Originally, the Indian village Callahan had begun constructing was meant to be part of the museum complex— a sort of outdoor “living” exhibit, intended to supplement the indoor displays with three dimensional examples of past Pamunkey homes and perhaps offering live demonstrations of past Pamunkey technologies and lifeways. As Cook put it, “what we were thinking back at first was...have an indoor and outdoor museum” (Cook, p.c. 2012). Unfortunately, the village required significant maintenance to keep out bugs and pests, and to keep the yehakins in good condition (Callahan, p.c. 2012). A lack of funding for staff and supplies led to a gradual deterioration of the village, and just a few years after the museum opened, this outdoor component was closed and taken down for safety reasons. According to Chief Brown, “eventually it just deteriorated to the point where...we had to take it down ‘cause it was dangerous” (Brown, p.c. 2012).
In the late 1970s, while Callahan was using experimental archaeology and working to discover ancient techniques of tool making and yehakin construction, Warren Cook and other members of the Pamunkey community were attempting to relearn ancient pottery techniques. Pottery making had long been a tradition among Pamunkey people, but since the 1932 opening of the Pottery School, new styles and techniques had come to dominate Pamunkey pottery production, allowing certain older techniques to be forgotten with lack of use (Atkins 2009:3-4 and Blumer 1985:9, 11,13,15). In 1979 Cook received a CETA grant for community education and cultural revitalization (Atkins 2009:22). The grant was meant in large part to help the Pamunkey recover and revitalize ancient pottery techniques, but also included some training in conservation and museum work to help with cultural preservation (Cook, p.c. 2012). This program was an integral part of the community’s decision to go forward with their efforts to establish a museum and led them to apply for grants to build a space in which to house the many cultural treasures they still possessed.

Although the Indian village did not survive as long as he had hoped, Callahan left a lasting legacy through the museum he helped create. While Cook was the individual within the tribe who was most responsible for the museum’s creation, as he was the one who applied for grants and solicited donations, working to provide both a building and the items to display within it, Callahan was the individual most responsible for the content and final products that were the exhibits within the museum, content which was truly “state of the art” for the time. As Cook described their collaborative efforts toward the museum, “I helped, but you know the thrust of it was him [Callahan]” (Cook,
An anthropologist with many skills and interests, some of Callahan’s varied previous experience involved work in museum settings, and thus Cook turned to Callahan, asking him to combine his expertise in Virginia Indian history with his work in museums and share these skills with the Pamunkey community in order to assist them in creating a museum about their people’s past. As Callahan succinctly put it, “They said...we need exhibits – Callahan, you create some exhibits” (Callahan, p.c. 2012), and he obliged.

Creating the museum was a slow process that took over two years to complete. Along the way a number of individuals from within and without the community assisted in various capacities besides donating artifacts, heirlooms, and crafts. Grover Miles, assisted by his son Gary Miles and Kevin Brown, was responsible for building the display cases per Callahan’s design specifications, and a number of Pamunkey youth were part of Callahan’s field school that created replicas for use in the museum (Brown, p.c. 2012; Callahan, p.c. 2012; Ashley Atkins-Spivey, personal communication May 7, 2013). Ceilia Reed from the VRCA was instrumental in mounting the displays Callahan had designed when his dissertation work required him to take time away from the museum, and personal correspondence between the two anthropologists shows thoughtful debate and discussion of content and design on both their parts (Errett Callahan, personal correspondence May 10, 1980; May 24, 1980; June 19, 1980; July 8, 1980; July 27, 1980; and Ceilia Reed, personal correspondence April 1, 1980; May 11, 1980; May 22, 1980; June 30, 1980; August 26, 1980).
Cook and Callahan also attempted to solicit feedback from community members about what they would like to see in a museum and what message they hoped it would relay. They sent out questionnaires to the community multiple times, but were repeatedly disappointed by the lack of response they received (Cook, p.c. 2012). Cook hypothesized that “people were very reluctant to say what they really wanted, or they didn’t know what they wanted,” (Cook, p.c. 2012). They were, however, slightly more successful in gaining community feedback in person, and found more response when they offered suggestions and asked for reactions to specific ideas (Cook, p.c. 2012).

In terms of historical content, Cook left most of the research and decisions up to Callahan, but Cook offered feedback along the way (Callahan, p.c. 2012). They collaborated on the theme of the museum and agreed that they wanted to tell the story of the Pamunkey people by focusing on their way of life, and chose to do so by organizing the information in each display according to “the people,...their natural environment, settlement, and subsistence,” (Cook, p.c. 2012). They wanted not just to show examples of tools and technologies that were used by past Pamunkey, but also to explain how those things were made and used in everyday life in order to give a picture of daily life in the past (Cook, p.c. 2012). It was important to both men that the museum had cohesion and a clear organization and that all exhibits and artifacts contribute to telling visitors their story. This goal even influenced the style of the museum building itself (see figure 9). In the end, the community decided on an architectural design inspired by the yehakins so that the museum’s roof was constructed to resemble the
shape of the roofs of the yehakins being built in the Indian Village exhibit outside (JaBAR Construction Company 1979:29).

Figure 9: Pamunkey Indian Museum in 1980. Photo courtesy of Errett Callahan

Although both men today remember one another and their work together quite fondly, there is evidence that their collaboration was at times more challenging than either described in their interviews. Correspondence and personal notes from the time of museum development suggest that in the process of exhibit design and arrangement, there were indeed moments of disagreement (Errett Callahan, personal notes, September 4, 1979). The museum’s repeated financial struggles also led to concerns over finances and timely reimbursement for time and expenses put toward the museum (Errett Callahan, personal correspondence, February 27, 1980). However, it is also clear that both Cook and Callahan saw the ultimate goals of the museum as motivation to work through their differences, and in the end each man seems to have gained even greater respect for the other through recognition of each other’s determination,
character, and desire for an authentic and high-quality museum. Although funding issues continue to be a challenge for the museum, Cook and Callahan’s relationship has long since gotten past them. Thirty years later the two men remember each other fondly and have only positive things to say about one another (Callahan, p.c. 2012, and Cook, p.c. 2012).

A House of Knowledge

After over two years of hard work and detailed organization, the Pamunkey Indian Museum celebrated its grand opening on October 11, 1980. Upon entering the front door of the museum, one was immediately surrounded by displays of ceramics and other crafts made by Pamunkey artists (see figure 10). This entry room was the gift shop and was intended to highlight contemporary Pamunkey craft traditions and included photographs on the walls picturing Pamunkey individuals creating their wares. Members of the Pamunkey Pottery Guild sold tickets for admission and answered questions (Krigsvold, p.c. 2013). Walking from the gift shop into the main exhibit hall, one encountered a display intended to orient the visitor to the Pamunkey reservation and community and explain the layout of the museum (See figure 12). After viewing the orientation display, the exhibit proceeded to the left with panels on Pamunkey ancestors during the paleolithic era, or ice age (figure 14). From there the displays took the visitor through the early, middle and later archaic periods (figure 16), highlighting the vast array of tools and weapons available in these various time periods through impressive skills manipulating stone.
Figure 10: View of gift shop from museum entrance. The pottery for sale was made by Pamunkey potters. At the time of opening the gift shop carried almost exclusively items made by Pamunkey artisans. Photo courtesy of Errett Callahan, 1980.

Figure 11: Museum gift shop in 2013. While it still carries ceramics and other crafts made by Pamunkey artists, visitor demand has prompted the gift shop to expand its offerings to include items that are less fragile and less expensive, as well as items which are more stereotypically “Indian” such as dream-catchers, gourds, and dolls of Indian children in traditional Indian garb. Photo by author.
Figure 12: Orientation display panel. Photo courtesy of Errett Callahan, 1980

Figure 13: Orientation panel in 2013. The museum committee decided several years ago that they would like to include more information about the contemporary Pamunkey community and determined this first panel was the best location for a photo montage. Photo by author
The lithic technologies were mainly demonstrated with replicas that were made by Callahan and his students and volunteers as part of the living Indian village. Although historically accurate regarding Pamunkey technologies through time, many of these early exhibits reflect more of contemporary anthropological themes than specific Pamunkey history. As in many museums, issues of scholarly interest to the creators are often reflected in the exhibits they create, and as environmental and experimental archaeology were popularly debated at the time of the museum’s creation, many of the exhibits reflect this academic focus. At the time of the museum’s opening these exhibits were impressive even more for their academic significance to archaeological understanding in general than for their connection to Pamunkey history in particular.

From these displays of early lithics the visitor was then educated about Pamunkey life through the Woodland period, and up through contact with Europeans, with a great deal of information about technology and ceramics as they were produced and used by the Pamunkey through different time periods. There were also several displays of regalia, ceramics, and other crafts from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The Pamunkey-published brochure, “The Pamunkey Tradition: Documenting the Past,” describes the museum experience nicely.

To walk through the museum is to walk through time. Beginning with the Ice Age, you are made familiar with “The People” (what they looked like, their ornaments and their personal existence); “Their Natural Environment” (the land they inhabited, and how it looked); “Their Settlement” (the dwelling places of the people); and “Their Subsistence” (the tools they used and how they survived). These four themes reappear in each of the archaeological time frames shown until you reach the present. The four themes are color-coded blue, green, yellow, and red respectively to assist you in following them as you move from case to case.

[Brewster 1985:5]
Figure 14: Display of Pamunkey in paleolithic era. An in depth study of paleolithic era subsistence practices. Photo courtesy of Errett Callahan, 1980

Figure 15: Paleolithic era display in 2013. Photo by author
Figure 16: Lithic Technologies. Much of the technology displayed in this exhibit included new research of great significance to archaeology as a field at the time of the museum’s opening. Photo courtesy of Errett Callahan, 1980

Figure 17: Display of Lithic Technologies in 2013. Although this exhibit offers great insights into past technologies, it does not necessarily have a Pamunkey specific relevance. Visitors to the museum today might question its inclusion in this particular museum or wonder what it tells us about the Pamunkey story. Photo by author
Figure 18: Early Woodland era display. Photo courtesy of Errett Callahan, 1980

Figure 19: Early Woodland era display in 2013. Photo by author
Figure 20: Middle Woodland era display. Photo courtesy of Errett Callahan, 1980

Figure 21: Middle Woodland era display in 2013. Photo by author
Figure 22: Late Woodland era display. Photo courtesy of Errett Callahan, 1980

Figure 23: Late Woodland era display in 2013. Photo by author
Figure 24: Contact period displays. These displays describe the Pamunkey way of life at the time of British arrival in Virginia, and offer insights into some of the ways the Pamunkey aided the survival of the first colonists in Virginia. Photo courtesy of Errett Callahan, 1980

Figure 25: Contact period displays in 2013. Photo by author
Figure 26: Pamunkey technology. Photo courtesy of Errett Callahan, 1980

Figure 27: Pamunkey technology display in 2013. Photo by author
Figure 28: Pamunkey ceramics through time. Since the museum opened, Pamunkey potters have often looked to this display for inspiration in their own ceramic work and many are proud to see their own or their family members’ craftwork included in the display. Photo courtesy of Errett Callahan, 1980

Figure 29: Pamunkey ceramics display in 2013. Photo by author
Figure 30: Displays of regalia. Several Pamunkey individuals have pointed to these displays as their favorite in the museum. They say that seeing items that were worn by actual Pamunkey individuals helps them feel connected to their ancestors. The beadwork on the regalia has also been studied by contemporary Pamunkey artisans in efforts to relearn past beading techniques. Photo courtesy of Errett Callahan, 1980

Figure 31: Pamunkey regalia displays in 2013. Although the regalia remain a favorite display for many visitors, poor mounting techniques and bright lighting have caused some of these items to fade and wear unevenly. It is hoped that future funding will allow for updated mounting and proper lighting to minimize future damage. Photo by author
The Grand Opening of the Pamunkey Indian Museum was well attended. There were speeches from Warren Cook, Errett Callahan, and a representative from the office of the Governor of Virginia (Brown, p.c. 2012), and the press who were there gave the museum great reviews (Cook, p.c. 2012). A reviewer from the Smithsonian apparently once called it “the finest small museum...that they’d seen” (Cook, p.c. 2012). One early visitor to the museum, an archaeologist who studied Virginia Indians, offered her impression that “it was really the most complex display of Native American cultural history... almost anywhere, and is still today, in terms of focusing on Virginia (Hodges, p.c. 2013). Local press advertised the museum opening, and recognizing its educational significance, emphasized that the Pamunkey Indian Museum contained the “treasure of knowledge – the knowledge of the tribe’s own past and heritage” (Sauder 1980: F-11).

Looking at the history and evolution of museums throughout the world, knowledge has long had a close association with museums and collecting. During the Renaissance, European scholars associated collecting and displaying objects with both knowledge and memory. According to Paula Findlen (2000), Italian scholars in particular sought to make knowledge tangible and visible, ideally in object form, for as she put it, “[o]ne had to see to remember, and remember to know” (Findlen 2000:162). With the abundance of new scientific and philosophical knowledge that was being learned and discussed, finding ways to organize and remember all of this knowledge was imperative. Collecting objects aided in one’s ability to remember, and was thus seen by many “as a solution to the problem of knowledge” (Findlen 2000:164). Individuals who acquired collections were regarded as “possessors of wisdom” (Findlen 2000:178) and respected
for being figures “who conserved culture by investing body and soul in the project of the museum” (Findlen 2000:177). A museum was therefore viewed as “a house of knowledge” (Findlen 2000:164).

In this light one can also view the Pamunkey Indian Museum as “a house of knowledge,” and those individuals who contributed to its creation as conservers of culture. Not only do the thoroughly researched exhibits within it offer a vast amount of historical and cultural information about early Pamunkey life, but the artifacts and objects displayed represent more tangible expressions of technical knowledge. The Pamunkey community has, at various points in its history, made strategic decisions aimed at community survival, some of which resulted in changes in cultural traditions (Ashley Atkins-Spivey, personal communication May 7, 2013). Choices on which artifacts to preserve in personal collections and which traditions or techniques to teach to future generations affected the types of knowledge remembered by the community as a whole. If one regards changes in cultural traditions as a loss of historical or cultural knowledge, the collection of objects displayed within the Pamunkey Indian Museum, which provide examples of traditions which may have changed over time, can thus be understood as a solution to the Pamunkey community’s “problem of knowledge.”

In the introduction to her edited volume, Museums and Memory, Susan A. Crane supports Findlen’s description of a museum as “a house of knowledge.” She describes a museum’s role as akin to an archive, in that “it holds material manifestations of cultural and scientific production as records, articulated memories removed from the mental world and literally placed in the physical world” (Crane 2000:3). Crane suggests that
museums are “storehouses [or] repositories of memory” (Crane 2000:4), and that they thus serve to not only house but also to protect cultural and historical knowledge, something the newly opened Pamunkey Indian Museum did (and still does) indeed accomplish. Although the museum does contain some gaps in historical information, due mainly to gaps in the historical record, it also includes a great deal of information not previously available to the general public anywhere else. Ivan Karp argues that “as repositories of knowledge...museums educate beyond...ordinary educational and civic institutions,” (Karp 1992:5). By providing community members with the opportunity to examine and engage with items made by past generations, the museum allows for the chance to relearn knowledge that previous generations may have decided was, in their time, not a priority to pass on.

Telling a Story

Elaine Gurian argues that one of the main purposes of museums is to be a venue for telling stories. She suggests that the essence of a museum “is in being a place that stores memories” (Gurian 2004:270 author’s emphasis), and that it is not so much the museum as “the memories and stories told therein that are important” (Gurian 2004:270). Objects housed in museums act as props that assist in the communication of stories. This is so because “objects, in their tangibility, provide...an opportunity to debate the meaning and control of...memories,” (Gurian 2004:271). Warren Cook explained that one of the goals of the Pamunkey Indian Museum in its inception was to “tell the story” of the Pamunkey people and their past (Cook, p.c. 2012). He expressed
frustration with individuals who had refused to donate their personal collections to the museum unless the museum agreed to certain display criteria (Cook, p.c. 2012). According to Cook, those individuals just wanted their collections to be placed on display, but to Cook the museum “wasn’t for display, it was to tell a story” (Cook, p.c. 2012). He had explained to these individuals that the museum had a particular storyline in mind and that “we would use the artifacts that would tell the story” (Cook, p.c. 2012). Gurian echoes this concept when she argues that “which...objects to collect often then depends not upon the object itself but on an associated story that may render...them unique or important” (Gurian 2004:275).

In a related vein, Walter Benjamin describes objects as each having an “aura,” which represents its uniqueness and embodies its historical context (Benjamin 1968:220). Thus objects embody the experiences of those who created them as well as those who subsequently owned, used, or displayed the objects, along with the manner in which the objects were treated, whether revered or disregarded. Chris Gosden and Yvonne Marshall (1999) use the term “cultural biography” to describe this life history of objects, explaining that “as people and objects gather time, movement and change, they are constantly transformed, and these transformations of person and object are tied up with each other,” (Gosden & Marshall 1999:169). Dorothy Lippert also draws on this idea of a cultural biography of objects, explaining that “through the life of an object, meaning and relationships may evolve...by the time an object comes to be in a museum collection, it has gone through many different identities,” (Lippert 2013:432). Historical objects, through their auras or cultural biographies, therefore carry with them their own
stories, connected with the people and events the objects have encountered their lives.

A museum can in this light be seen as a place to interact with objects in a personal way that allows the transmission of community stories. Or as Gurian put it, “it is the story told...and the ability of social groups to experience it together that provide the essential ingredients of making a museum important” (Gurian 2004:282). The Pamunkey Indian Museum can therefore be understood as a location in which Pamunkey community members can share and remember stories of their people’s past and present.

**Museum Audience**

Callahan and Cook both maintained it was important that the museum they were creating be first and foremost for the Pamunkey community (Callahan, p.c. 2012; Cook, p.c. 2012). While outside visitors were considered as well, the primary audience of the Pamunkey Indian Museum was the Pamunkey community themselves. Local Indian history was not taught with great specificity in public schools of the time, meaning it was up to the community to teach each other and their future generations about their people’s past. Cook suggested that, “people think Native people know their history but they don’t...we don’t know anything but what we read” (Cook, p.c. 2012). While much Pamunkey cultural knowledge has in fact been passed on in subtle and informal ways (Atkins-Spivey, p.c. 2013), the museum offered an opportunity to inform Pamunkey community members, in a more formal setting, about their own place in the larger national historical narrative, as well as providing them a place in which to safeguard, display, and commune with their own ancestors’ cultural treasures.
Linda L. Layne (1988) suggests that displays are ways of honoring the objects and people being represented. She argues that by displaying everyday objects of a community, a museum shows honor for their particular way of life, and that by displaying one’s own everyday objects one can show honor and pride for oneself and one’s own community (Layne 1988:32). At the same time, she also suggests that offering community focused historical displays can be a way for a community to reinsert themselves into a larger national narrative (Layne 1988:33). Layne points out that “one can get no honor or glory for a deed if one’s name is unknown” (Layne 1988:33). Ivan Karp (1992) similarly argues for the need of communities for public recognition and suggests that museums are embroiled in this struggle (Karp 1992:14). Karp asserts that this need for public recognition is part of the struggle over identity and states that communities, “often feel they live or die to the degree that they are accorded or denied social space,” (Karp 1992:14).

The Pamunkey people did indeed play a significant role in the founding of the Virginia colony and thus in United States history. The Pamunkey Indian Museum serves in great part to remind tribal and non-tribal members alike of the role the Pamunkey people have played in broader American history, a goal that was likely also a motivation for the public performances of the Pocahontas Players in the late 19th century (Bradby 2008:122-123). The Pamunkey have for centuries taken advantage of what social space they had access to, be it in national historical celebrations, local community events, or in homes and now a museum on their own reservation. They have used these social spaces to fill their need for public recognition and remind themselves and others of their
place in history, through cultural and historical displays. And by including everyday objects in their historical displays, the museum honors past Pamunkey individuals for their everyday deeds and way of life as well.

It is in fact those everyday objects displayed in the Pamunkey Indian Museum which often evoke the strongest responses from community members. More than one community member I spoke to emphasized that their favorite artifacts on display in the museum include the regalia and clothing items that were worn by previous Chiefs and family members and that help them feel connected to previous generations of Pamunkey (Ashley Atkins-Spivey, personal communication August 7, 2012 and Brown, p.c. 2012). Others look to the examples of ancient pottery as learning tools for current potters to emulate or gain inspiration from (Krigsvold, p.c. 2013), or the lithics cases that help demonstrate their ancestors’ ways of life (Cook, p.c. 2012). Regardless of which specific artifact or display is their personal favorite, these community members all find personal connections in the Pamunkey Museum, which have implications in their present-day lives.

The museum’s focus on community as audience also influenced the language used in creating displays. While many museums at that time apparently aimed to keep their text and information at around a sixth-grade level of difficulty and understanding (Cook, p.c. 2012), Cook and Callahan decided instead to assume a higher level of understanding and include more information and text than other museums might have done. Cook explained that they aimed for a twelfth-grade level of content, while still being sure to explain concepts or terminology that might have been unfamiliar to the
average lay person (Cook, p.c. 2012). Callahan reiterated that he tried to explain things in a way “so that Daisy [an elderly tribal member] would be able to understand it” (Callahan, p.c. 2012). And while Cook concedes that in hindsight they may have included too much text in some displays, he stressed the goal of community education and the desire to relay to the Pamunkey people their own history (Cook, p.c. 2012). Callahan also emphasized a desire “to focus the museum...so the people who’re living there on the reservation now can understand these time periods and their relation to them” (Callahan, p.c. 2012).

Although the community members were the intended primary audience, the tribe did have hopes that the museum would attract outside visitors to the reservation. In 1976, the Pamunkey Indian Tribe’s Overall Economic Development Plan included among its goals that of creating a museum to improve tourism on the reservation (Pamunkey Indian Tribe 1976:13). The tribal leaders sought to attract groups from local schools to the museum, as well as tourists and visitors interested in Virginia and U.S. history. Thus Callahan and Cook were also conscious of what messages they wanted outside visitors to come away with.

The Role of Tribal Museums

In many respects the story of the Pamunkey Indian Museum echoes those of other tribal museums throughout North America. Although a few began as early as the late 19th century, tribal museums became increasingly common starting in the 1960s and 1970s. Karl Hoerig ascribes this rise in tribal museums as “part of the movement
toward tribal self-determination that took hold starting in the 1960s” (Hoerig 2010:67). According to Hoerig, this movement was part of the social activism of the 1960s and the passage of civil rights legislation, which included the American Indian Civil Rights Act in 1968 (Hoerig 2010:67). Tribal museums can offer alternative representations to the stereotypical and anachronistic images of Native Americans so often portrayed in dominant society museums (Bowechop and Erikson 2005:264). They are museums intended to be “for Indian people and not just about them” (Hoerig 2010:70).

Native American tribal groups have likely had a number of reasons for creating museums, including the affirmation of the group’s existence and presence. The objects housed inside tribal museums can be understood as becoming symbols of group identity (Layne 1989:34). Richard Handler points out that the ability of objects to epitomize collective identity is rarely disputed and suggests that cultural property is “both representative and constitutive of cultural identity” (Handler 1985:211). In explaining the rise of tribal museums in the United States, some scholars argue that “people have the sovereign right to represent themselves,” (Ames 2006:173). It is suggested that just displaying objects in a museum is not enough – to be truly understood and meaningful, objects must be displayed in their natural context, and the native communities, the people who created those artifacts (or whose ancestors did) are the best qualified to do this (Handler 1985:193; Hoerig 2010:65).

In a slightly different approach toward understanding the role and purpose of tribal museums, in her article, Red Man’s Burden, Nancy Marie Mithlo encourages museum scholars to recognize that not all tribal museums are created out of a sense of
opposition or reaction to stereotypes or mainstream portrayals of Native North Americans. In her discussions with the director of the U’mista Cultural Center in Alert Bay, Canada, Mithlo found that despite having a purported goal of educating non-tribal members about the history and culture of the Kwakwaka’wakw (Kwakiutl), the director confessed to having no memory of non-natives being considered at all while the center was being planned (Mithlo 2004:753). This suggests, as Mithlo argues, that in many cases tribal museums are in fact created without any real reference to outsiders, but simply to serve community needs. James Clifford echoes this position when he points out that “in other crucial aspects they are not museums at all: they are continuations of indigenous traditions of storytelling, collection, and display” (Clifford 1990:215), traditions that did indeed exist within the Pamunkey community long before they built their museum (Brown, p.c. 2012).

The Pamunkey Indian Museum in some ways straddles these two lines of argument. Conversations with individuals involved with the museum seemed more often to highlight the benefits the museum has for the community and the educational opportunities it provides for tribal members, as well as placing it as part of a long tradition of collecting and displaying cultural artifacts (Atkins-Spivey, p.c. 2012; Brown, p.c. 2012, Cook p.c. 2012). However, official tribal and museum documents from the time of establishment do highlight tourism and public education as important functions of the museum and at least one current museum worker/volunteer expressed that the opportunity to educate non-community members about her people’s history was one of her favorite parts of working there (Krigsvold, p.c. 2013; Pamunkey Indian Tribe
1976:13). The fact that a non-native anthropologist was a collaborator in the museum creation no doubt also ensured that the general public was considered thoughtfully in exhibit development. However, when Ceilia Reed pointed out that some of the language and idioms used in the display texts might be confusing to international visitors (Ceilia Reed, personal correspondence, June 30, 1980), Callahan reminded her that the museum was focused primarily on reaching the tribe and local community and requested that idioms and metaphors be left in the displays despite their potential for confusing international audiences (Errett Callahan, personal correspondence July 8, 1980). This would suggest that while increased tourism was indeed a community goal, the museum was created first and foremost for local education.

In a survey of 74 tribal museums, conducted by the American Association for State and Local History from 2000-2002, when asked the most important functions of their museums, respondents described the most important functions of their museums as “cultural preservation, perpetuation, and revitalization” (Abrams 2003:7). Tribal museums are by and large embraced as places for teaching the community about their culture and as repositories for cultural materials, in addition to being spaces for public education of non-tribal members, especially those in the local community, (Abrams 2003:7). Tribal museums differ from dominant-society museums in creating spaces where Native communities can give voice to their own perspectives on their history and culture. They reinforce community values, and allow community members to explore and validate their past and traditions (Nason 1994:492). Gurian suggests that “the evidence of history has something central to do with the spirit, will, pride, identity, and
civility of people” (Gurian 2004:269), and goes on to explain that “[t]his...understanding is what motivates cultural and ethnic communities to create their own museums in order to tell their stories, in their own way, to themselves and to others” (Gurian 2004:270).

The Navajo Tribal Museum, despite having been established almost two full decades prior to the Pamunkey Indian Museum, nevertheless shares a remarkably similar story in regard to its inception, its role within the community, the challenges it faced in its first few decades, and the goals it aspired to. Established in 1961, the Navajo Tribal Museum was also conceived in great part as a means of safeguarding and preserving Navajo material culture for the benefit of the Navajo community, for they too had experienced a great loss of cultural artifacts due in part to unscrupulous archaeologists and relic hunters (Hartman & Doyel 1982:241-242). Early exhibits in the museum displayed Navajo culture, focusing in particular on their early history, European contact, and arts and crafts (Hartman & Doyel 1982:242). The Navajo Tribal Museum quickly took on a “role in the community as an educational center” (Hartman & Doyel 1982:242), and also provided information for the non-Navajo public regarding Navajo people and their culture and history. Like the Pamunkey Museum, the Navajo Tribal Museum also struggled early on with poor storage and preservation facilities, which led to resolutions to improve the museum’s curatorial and educational capabilities (Hartman & Doyel 1982:246). It also formed a mutually beneficial relationship with the Navajo Arts and Crafts Guild, which eventually included providing a space within the
The museum building “where Navajo artists and craftspeople show and sell their works” (Hartman & Doyel 1982:248).

Still other tribal museums echo parts of the Pamunkey Indian Museum’s story. The Museum at Warm Springs on the Warm Springs Reservation in Oregon was built in part “to help preserve and strengthen our cultural traditions” (Clements 2000:68). According to Janice Clements, a member of the museum’s board of directors, the Warm Springs museum was built with the community’s children in mind, in hopes that those “young people can go to the museum, learn about themselves, and follow in the ways of their people” (Clements 2000:68). The Mille Lacs Indian Museum on the Mille Lacs Indian Reservation in Minnesota also stresses one of the museum’s main services to the community as that of “[c]arrying culture through education” (Wedll 2000:93). Like the Pamunkey Indian Museum, this museum also strives to present “exhibitions in which [community] members...are able to explore their own history while presenting it to others,” (Wedll 2000:97). The Mille Lacs Band members share Pamunkey Indian Museum director Spivey’s goal of demonstrating to outsiders that their communities are not simply stories from the past, but are living, growing, vibrant communities with rich cultural heritage (Clements 2000:97 and Spivey, p.c.).

Financial Struggles and the Pamunkey Pottery and Craft Guild

The desire to attract tourism and increase the museum’s visitorship was an integral factor in a decision that ultimately had very long-term benefits for the museum’s longevity - the decision to move the reservation’s Trading Post into the
museum’s gift shop (Brown, p.c. 2012). The Trading Post was essentially a gift and craft shop run by the Pamunkey Pottery Guild, a group of women who had long worked to keep the tradition of pottery alive in the Pamunkey community (Blumer 1985:14). Since the 1930s, women of the Pottery Guild would volunteer their time to staff the Trading Post six days a week, and used it as a setting in which to display and sell their crafts and wares (Brown, p.c. 2012). When faced with the question of who would work in the new museum to keep it open and welcome visitors, take admission fees, and answer questions, the tribal council and Pottery Guild came to an agreement. They decided to relocate the Trading Post inside the new museum so that the women of the Pottery Guild could staff the museum while at the same time having the opportunity to display and sell their crafts inside the museum’s gift shop, where all the visitors could see them. Additionally, this move meant that the reservation’s old schoolhouse, which was at the time housing the trading post, would be available for other purposes, and has since been restored as an additional exhibit for visitors coming to view the museum (Brown, p.c. 2012).

Involving the women of the pottery guild in the daily running of the museum turned out to be a critical decision that may be the main reason the museum has survived until today. Low admission fees, poor revenue streams, lack of publicity, and a remote location have all contributed to consistently low income to the museum. Chief Brown pointed out that “the little money we get from admission...it doesn’t even pay the electric bill” (Brown, p.c. 2012). And while there used to be more money coming in through the gift shop/Trading Post, in recent years there had been a decrease in visits.
from schools and tour buses, which have negatively affected the Trading post sales as well as admission rates (Brown, p.c. 2012). These recurring financial struggles have meant that over the years the museum has relied in great part on the volunteer efforts of the Pottery Guild for its day to day opening. According to Chief Brown, “We couldn’t have kept the museum open without...the women of the Pottery Guild” (Brown, p.c. 2012).

The Heart of the Reservation

Through it’s more than thirty years of existence, the Pamunkey Indian museum has come to serve a number of roles within and for the community. Primarily it is a source of education for Pamunkey members regarding their people’s history and culture. For some this fills a gap left by public schools whose curriculum merely brushes over Virginia Indians, or gives a perhaps biased or one-sided view of American history, in which Indians are relegated to a very small place in initial settlement of the continent. Some Pamunkey individuals also found it hard to get stories and history from their family members. Director Spivey explains that “it was like pulling teeth trying to get anything from my grandfather” (Ashley Atkins-Spivey, personal communication August 7, 2012) so the museum helped her learn about previous generations of her family. Brown points out that over the years the museum has “inspired some young people to get...back into Indian culture and...learn more about it” (Brown, p.c. 2012).

In recent years the museum has also provided more explicit and active forms of cultural education through a number of cultural revitalization programs that have taken
place in the museum's community room. These include classes on basketry, bead work, and the Algonquin language (Brown, p.c. 2012, and Cook, p.c. 2012). Community members point out the practical benefits of having old regalia and artifacts on display in the museum next door to these classes. Spivey explains that being able to examine the beadwork used on these artifacts has enabled her and her mother to replicate those patterns and techniques, thus preserving a tradition that might otherwise have been forgotten (Atkins-Spivey, p.c. 2012).

Besides education, Chief Brown suggests the museum has also given the community a shared source of pride (Brown, p.c. 2012). By demonstrating the significant role their people played in American history, and also by giving evidence to their people's strong will to endure and survive in an antagonistic country, the museum provides a source of validation and shared significance to the Pamunkey community. As a child, Atkins-Spivey enjoyed bringing her friends to see the museum because "it was a place of pride for me" (Atkins-Spivey, p.c. 2012). Not only was she proud to have a professional museum about her community, but displayed within the museum were heirlooms from her own family, and she appreciated being able to not only view these herself, but to share them with her friends in a way that demonstrated their historical significance (Spivey, p.c.).

For some individuals, that sense of pride likely also comes from having a community-endorsed space in which to display and sell their artwork. With some pieces on display as part of museum exhibits and others available for purchase in the museum’s gift shop, the Pamunkey Indian Museum is a place that supports and
celebrates community artists. According to Atkins-Spivey, “A lot of people go there just for the artwork...it’s a place that generates and supports Pamunkey people to make things” (Atkins-Spivey, p.c. 2012). Pottery guild members who work in the museum sometimes take advantage of down time between visitors to work on their crafts while at the museum (Krigsvold, p.c. 2013). They can use displays of ancient or recent pottery as inspiration, or as reminders of certain techniques. Thus for local Pamunkey artisans, the museum also “keeps certain kinds of traditions like pottery making alive” (Atkins-Spivey, p.c. 2012).

The Pamunkey Indian Museum has also come to serve the community as a central gathering space. Chief Brown described a conversation he once had with former Chief Bill Miles, during which they discussed the fact that “the church, back in the fifties and sixties used to be like the heart of the reservation” (Brown, p.c. 2012). Since the museum opened in 1980, “he [Chief Miles] believed that the museum sort of took that place” (Brown, p.c. 2012). The community activity and focus has moved from the church to the museum. This is now the central space where community meetings are held and individuals gather for community events, including some church-sponsored events (Bradby 2008: 68). And with the pottery school next door and a new Wellness Center hopefully in the works to be built beside it, the museum looks to remain an integral part of reservation life for Pamunkey. As Chief Brown put it, “the church used to be the [community] gathering space,” (Brown, p.c. 2012) but since its opening, “the fire has shifted to the museum” (Brown, p.c. 2012).
Chapter 4: Reflections and Hopes for the Future

Looking back at the museum and its creation, those involved have a variety of thoughts and suggestions for possible future improvement. Callahan assured me that he is fully satisfied with how the museum turned out and his only regrets are that there has not been as much regular maintenance of display cases and artifacts as he had hoped (Errett Callahan, personal communication July 21, 2012). But when asked if he would change anything or do anything differently given additional resources and time, he stated that “it came out pretty much the way I’d envisioned it, and...when I left it I was satisfied with the way it turned out” (Callahan, p.c. 2012). The members of the Pamunkey community that I spoke to seemed to be slightly more critical of the museum, but also seemed to have numerous ideas for how the museum might be improved for future visitors. Most are happy with how the museum displays the Pamunkey ancient past, but they seem to agree that the museum is lacking in recent history (Kevin Brown, personal communication December 1, 2013; Warren Cook, personal communication October 13, 2012; Ashley Atkins-Spivey, personal communication, August 7, 2012). Perhaps due to Callahan’s prehistoric interests, and perhaps due to Cook’s interest in learning more about the everyday lives and the technologies (including pottery) of the pre-contact Pamunkey, or perhaps due to their desire to highlight the important role the Pamunkey played in the survival of the Virginia colony, there is a decided emphasis on these prehistoric and early contact periods in the museum’s content. There is a relative lack of information about Pamunkey lives and
history from the seventeenth century until the present, and most particularly from the last 75-100 years, which current community members would like to see rectified. As an important source of historical information for the community and visitors, the community wants to be sure the museum is as accurate and in depth as possible. And as successful as the museum has been at helping living Pamunkey feel connected to their ancestors, they want to ensure these family connections remain for all generations of Pamunkey. As current director Ashley Atkins-Spivey put it, “we want to see our grandparents in the museum” (Ashley Spivey, personal communication March 17, 2012).

Exhibit Improvement

Improved maintenance of exhibits and displays was a concern of Chief Kevin Brown regarding the museum’s future. He echoed Callahan’s concerns that poorly maintained displays gave a bad impression of the museum, and expressed hopes that in the future the museum would acquire the resources needed to perform proper and more permanent reparations (Brown, p.c. 2012). Brown explained that after the lengthy process of building and setting up the museum, in the final push to get things up and ready in time for their projected opening, some short cuts were taken. He gave the example of lettering and artifacts in several displays that were attached using hot glue – a quick, easy and inexpensive method of mounting (Brown, p.c. 2012). Unfortunately, after several years the hot glue began to wear out and gradually letters and artifacts began to fall down from displays. According to Brown, if one is in the museum when it is quiet, “you can sit here and listen and things just start falling” (Brown, p.c. 2012).
According to Brown the hot glue has been replaced periodically, but it really is a short-term solution, and the museum is hoping to find a more permanent way to mount the displays. Other maintenance problems Brown is concerned about include infestations of mice and pests, and problems of UV lighting that has faded fabrics and colors in exhibits (Brown, p.c. 2012). Brown hopes to find funding opportunities in the future that will allow for better training of museum staff in preservation and mounting techniques, and will provide space, storage, and materials to aid in those preservation and maintenance efforts.

Another criticism of the museum was that some of the exhibits included too much text, or as Cook put it, “we were saying too much” (Cook, p.c. 2012). While he is proud of the amount of information relayed in their small museum, he acknowledges that museum visitors do not necessarily want to spend their whole time reading. He points out the challenges of trying to condense relevant information into smaller and more succinct labels, but recognizes that it is a necessary element when trying to hold visitors’ interests (Cook, p.c. 2012). Cook explained that several years after the museum opened, the community brought in some museum consultants to help them assess their exhibits, and one of the few changes made at the time was to edit many of the longer texts to make them less overwhelming to visitors (Cook, p.c. 2012).

Besides shortening texts, another suggestion several tribal members had for the museum’s future improvement was to include more interactive exhibits that will appeal to younger visitors, including local school groups (Brown, p.c. 2012; Ashley Spivey, personal communication August 7, 2012). For much of its existence, the museum has
been an attraction for both school field trips (local teachers recognized the wealth of information in the museum) and for visitors on bus tours around the area (the reservation is less than an hour from the historic triangle of Williamsburg, Jamestown, and Yorktown). Unfortunately, the rise in fuel costs in recent years, along with school budget cuts, has caused a significant decrease in museum attendance (Brown, p.c. 2012). Spivey and Brown both hope that by creating a more interactive environment and perhaps also offering a few temporary exhibits that change periodically, the Pamunkey Indian Museum will be able to give visitors more reasons to find room in their budgets for a visit to this unique establishment. The remote location of the reservation continues to be a challenge for potential visitors, but it is hoped that increased publicity and better road signs will lead to an increase in visitors, and the museum committee is currently considering ways to improve the museum’s public outreach.

Cook is optimistic that including new technologies in the museum will also help improve its ability to tell the story of his people. In the fall of 2012, just a few weeks prior to his interview, Cook had visited a tribal museum on the Cherokee reservation and was very impressed by their use of films, holograms, and voice recordings. He was particularly struck by one hologram of an Indian man who apparently walked around in full regalia and would “tell a story about the plants and the animals...legends and things” (Cook, p.c. 2012). Cook was also impressed with a sound exhibit that demonstrated the different letters in the Cherokee alphabet while lighting up a board to indicate which letter was being spoken (Cook, p.c. 2012). Cook mentioned that the Pamunkey
community is currently involved in efforts at language revitalization, so it is possible that in the future there will be Algonquin language exhibits included in the Pamunkey Indian Museum as well (Cook, p.c. 2012).

The Reservation Landscape

Kevin Brown noted the absence of information in the museum regarding the Pamunkey Fish Hatchery, another site of importance on the reservation (Brown, p.c. 2012). The Pamunkey have been fishing on the Pamunkey River for centuries, and the 1677 Treaty of Middle Plantation guaranteed their rights to continue fishing this river indefinitely. Fish (herring and shad in particular) has long been a staple of Pamunkey diets (Pamunkey Tribe: 4), and in 1919 the Pamunkey community started an indoor hatchery to ensure the continued bounty of the annual spring shad runs (Kyle 1995:51). Although the shad population has decreased significantly in many area rivers, “[b]ecause of the tribe’s foresight, the Pamunkey River shad runs have remained the healthiest of any of the East coast rivers that are tributaries of the Chesapeake Bay” (Pamunkey Tribe:4). The Pamunkey are understandably proud of their mutually beneficial relationship with the Pamunkey River and wish to highlight their work in the hatchery and care of the river with a display in their museum (Brown, p.c. 2012).

Spivey and Cook would both also like to see the museum become part of a larger reservation landscape that visitors can explore to learn more about Pamunkey history and the ways the reservation itself has changed in reflection of changes in Pamunkey ways of life. Spivey describes hopes that the reservation might be seen “as an
interactive landscape that people can explore” (Atkins-Spivey, p.c. 2012). Her goal is for a sort of “museum complex,” with a variety of destinations on the reservation that are connected by walking trails, so that visitors “can really get an understanding of the place and not just what’s in the [museum] building” (Atkins-Spivey, p.c. 2012). Cook described some of the ways the reservation has changed over the years and expressed a similar hope that these changes in the larger reservation landscape can be captured and somehow included in the museum experience (Cook, p.c. 2012). He mentioned the differences even just since he was a child, when “everybody had barns, they had pigs, they had chickens, so they had chicken coops, you had hog pens, you had wood bins, you had corn cribs, you had smoke houses...and that was all around the house,” (Cook, p.c. 2012). Cook expressed concern that if those changes are not documented now, while people still remember them, future generations will not have any way of knowing what the reservation once looked like and how the Pamunkey lived during that particular time period (Cook, p.c. 2012).

A theme common in many local and tribal museums is an emphasis on locality and a sense that “here” matters (Clifford 1990:229). This is often particularly true in cases where tribal museums are located within a community’s ancestral homelands, as is the Pamunkey Indian Museum. Some of these museums even include displays about the reservation or local landscape, including information regarding the efforts and struggles of the community to retain and maintain rights to those homelands over centuries of outsider interest and encroachment. The Mille Lacs Indian Museum has exhibits about the history of the tribe’s treaties and negotiations with the U.S.
government that have ensured the community’s retention of their reservation lands
(Clements 2000:95). So, too, the Pamunkey are presently in the midst of adding an
exhibit in their own museum describing diplomatic relations with England, the treaty
signed in 1677 that guaranteed their rights to their ancestral homelands, and the annual
tribute they continue to offer to the Governor of Virginia in honor of that treaty (Joyce
Krigsvold, personal communication, February 23, 2012).

For many Native communities, ancestral homelands represent places that are
essential to community identity (Caro 2006:549). Thus as a site on a reservation, a tribal
museum’s building can itself take on greater significance, for in a way, “the museum
itself is an object on display” (Caro 2006:544). This perspective resonates very much in
regard to the Pamunkey Indian Museum, whose shape and design were inspired by the
shapes of the reed and bark yehakins that once dotted the reservation landscape, as
well as the greater Chesapeake tidewater region (JaBAR Construction Company
1979:29). This thoughtful design combined with the efforts now in effect to incorporate
the museum more fully into the greater reservation landscape, will suggest to visitors
that the museum is just one of many significant sites within a larger and very meaningful
place.

In his article, “Deconstructing Memory,” Richard Terdiman offers a concept of
“materials memory” in which objects and texts are capable of retaining memories about
the settings and processes involved in their own creations. As he explains, “knowledge
of social process does not disappear, but...seems rather to migrate into a different
place” (Terdiman 1985:20 author’s emphasis). Terdiman gives the analogy of the ability
of pants to keep a crease long after being ironed, or of plastic objects resuming their
original shape after being deformed (Terdiman 1985:20), as evidence of materials
memory. In this line of thinking, objects such as pots and regalia can be understood to
retain the memories of how, when, and by whom they were made, in a sense
“produc[ing] the past in the present” (Terdiman 1985:21).

Diana Drake Wilson draws heavily on Terdiman’s concept of “materials memory”
in her piece, “Realizing Memory, Transforming History,” suggesting that “[l]anguage,
thought, interactivity, and embodiment are all entailed in materials memory” (Wilson
2000:122). She suggests that for many Native Americans, materials memories are not
just present in objects or artifacts within a museum, but also exist in sites across the
landscape (Wilson 2000:130). Wilson explains that “American Indian material
documents of the past constitute a continent-wide palimpsest; some artifacts and
documents have been excavated and exhibited, but many are still in place” (Wilson
2000:130). This idea of the past as present in the broader landscape sheds some light
on why various Pamunkey individuals want their museum exhibits to expand in content
in order to include information about the reservation landscape and to document
changes in that landscape over time. The goal of integrating the museum into “the
broader reservation landscape,” (Atkins-Spivey, p.c. 2012) in order to expose and
educate visitors, Pamunkey and non-Pamunkey alike, regarding key sites on the
reservation and their meaning for the community may be related to this concept of
materials memory. The Pamunkey recognize their past as present not just within the
museum, embodied by the objects displayed therein, but also present and remembered
throughout the reservation landscape. This landscape serves to literally root the Pamunkey community in the land, and is proof of the community’s continuity through time, regardless of any cultural practices which may have changed over the centuries (Ashley Spivey, personal communication May 7, 2013). Atkins-Spivey describes the reservation landscape as “an embodiment of a continual process of being” which she hopes the museum can help visitors to understand more fully (Atkins-Spivey, p.c. 2013).

**Past Portrayals of Native Americans**

Atkins-Spivey also brought up concerns about how Virginia Indians have been portrayed in non-tribal museums, in a manner which she argues makes Indians seem “static, stuck in time” (Ashley Atkins-Spivey, personal communication August 7, 2012). She suggests that by focusing on specific moments of first contact between Europeans and Indians, non-tribal museums such as at Jamestown Settlement, often give just a snapshot of Indian life at one particular time and thus give the impression that this is the only true image of Indian life. Atkins-Spivey is concerned that such portrayals also leave out “the intricacies of...how native life was and how native...people experienced colonialism” (Atkins-Spivey, p.c. 2012). Although the Pamunkey Indian Museum was created primarily for a native audience, the particular interests of the museums creators (Callahan was studying early Indian technologies and Cook was interested in recapturing early Indian cultural knowledge) has resulted in a decided emphasis on early Pamunkey history. The sparse and incomplete nature of historical documents from the eighteenth and nineteenth century - with regard to Pamunkey history and culture – has also
contributed to noticeable gaps in the Pamunkey Indian Museum’s chronological
displays. Atkins-Spivey hopes to rectify this shortcoming with future renovations and is
optimistic that by including information and exhibits on more recent Pamunkey history,
the Pamunkey Indian Museum will in the future be able to help visitors understand “the
complexity of native life” (Atkins-Spivey, p.c. 2012), past and present.

Since the creation of ethnographic museums and displays in the mid-19th
century, museums have long displayed Native Americans in a manner that emphasized
their difference from Euro-Americans in a negative manner. The theory of cultural
evolution which dominated anthropological thought in the late nineteenth century
suggested that humans were ranked on an evolutionary scale from savagery to
civilization with Native Americans among the groups ranked as savages and uncivilized,
compared to European cultures who were considered the most civilized (Hinsley
1981:134, Chapman 1985:31). Early anthropological museums often reflected this
evolutionary ranking of cultures, using objects and artifacts from different Native
American groups to show the technological “progress” that led to European and Euro-
American practices and technologies of the time (Chapman 1985:31). Although most
museums eventually changed their organizational systems so that all objects from a
single Native community were exhibited together to give a more holistic impression of
each community depicted, displays on Native Americans were still kept very distinct
from Euro-American exhibits (Jacknis 1985:79). Many museums created separate
sections for “American” history and fine art and displayed Native American objects in
sections or even separate buildings which were designated for natural history or ethnography, (Hinsley 1981:68).

Although this particular theory of cultural evolution has long been rejected by scholars, until quite recently many museum displays still suggested an evolutionary ranking of cultures in their museum displays and organization. In his article, “American Nationality and Ethnicity in the Depicted Past,” Michael Blakey points out the Eurocentric attitudes expressed by museums in the 1970s and 1980s through their exhibiting techniques. “A powerful evolutionary ranking by race immerses the viewer” (Blakey 1990:39) of these exhibits when Native American history is displayed in separate locations from “American” history (Blakey 1990:41), implying that the two are separate and unrelated. According to Blakey, “white and non-white prehistory are exhibited in separate contexts, obscuring the exploitative nature of their relationship” (Blakey 1990:39). Ivan Karp, in Other Cultures in Museum Perspective, similarly argues that the separation of ethnographic displays of non-Western cultures into natural history museums tends to both exoticize and assimilate Native American cultures at the same time (Karp 1991:377). Kenneth Hudson argues that many museums don’t give viewers contemporary images of non-Western cultures, but instead emphasize what are considered “traditional” images of the culture. Thus many exhibits give the impression that “the habits and customs of people...are very similar in many respects to what one would have found in the same area a hundred years ago” (Hudson 1991:459). This shortcoming in exhibits gives the illusion that non-Western groups only exist in one specific “traditional” form, which can lead to the mistaken impression that the groups
represented no longer exist. Blakey reiterates this critique at the Natural History Museum, arguing that “the ethnographic exhibitions do not show societies developing over time; they are static, locked within a timeless ethnographic present” (Blakey 1990:41).

Although such concerns do not appear to have been central motivations in the creation of the Pamunkey Museum, current museum director Spivey did suggest that such misleading portrayals of Virginia Indians in mainstream museums were part of her motivation for renovating the Pamunkey museum (Atkins-Spivey, p.c. 2012). Displays focusing on the last 100 years should be particularly helpful in dispelling misconceptions that Virginia Indians no longer exist, or that they have lost their “Indianness.” Educating visitors about the significance of the reservation itself and explaining the various changes in landscape and land use on the reservation through time should also prove helpful in creating a broader awareness of what it means to be Pamunkey today. Gurian points out that museums offer “collective evidence that we were here” (Gurian 283). The Pamunkey community wants their museum to clarify to visitors that the Pamunkey were not only here in prehistoric times, but were here in the recent past and are here still today. It is expected that the new displays will accomplish just that.

A Tradition of Collaboration

As part of their long battle to keep hold of their place in U.S. history and maintain public recognition of their community, the Pamunkey have a pattern of taking advantage of whatever resources are available to them, particularly when those
resources come in the form of interested scholars. When the performance of the Pocahontas Players at the 1881 Yorktown Centennial celebration provoked interest from the Smithsonian Institution, the Pamunkey community welcomed James Mooney, from the Bureau of Indian Affairs (Rountree 1990:202). The Chief at the time was one of a number of Virginia residents to answer Mooney’s 1889 questionnaire asking for information about Indians in Virginia. Over the next several years Mooney and two other anthropologists, Albert Gatschet and John Garland Pollard, visited the Pamunkey community, recording a great deal of information about the community, including demographics, cultural practices, subsistence practices, political organization, legal system and laws, and history (Gleach 2002:13; Rountree 1990:203). Mooney apparently even made a point of noting the Pamunkey’s pride at being descendants of Powhatan’s warriors (Gleach 2003:13).

In 1914 the Pamunkey had their first visit from anthropologist Frank Speck, who would continue to work with the community for many years. Speck also recorded cultural and historical information about the community and seems to have become involved with the community more intimately than previous scholars (Gleach 2002:13). Speck worked with Pamunkey leaders to encourage other Virginia Indian communities to organize formally in the early 1920s, and when the 1924 Racial Integrity Act threatened the Pamunkeys’ identities as Indians, they community contacted Speck to seek his assistance and advice in their struggle to remain “Indian” in the public’s eyes (Rountree 1990:224).
Decades later, when Warren Cook happened upon archaeologist/anthropologist Errett Callahan, the community made full use of this new relationship. With Callahan’s assistance and guidance, the community was able to safeguard and even rediscover a great deal of Pamunkey history and cultural knowledge. From Callahan’s field schools exploring Virginia Indian technology, to the living Indian village project, to the development of the Pamunkey Indian Museum, Callahan proved to be an invaluable friend and collaborator for the Pamunkey community. His efforts helped ensure that generations to come would have a source of education about Pamunkey history and culture.

When Callahan’s dissertation deadlines threatened to delay the projected opening for the museum, the tribe sought additional assistance from Ceilia Reed of the Virginia Research Center for Archaeology (Kevin Brown, personal communication September 6, 2013; Callahan p.c. 2012)). Also affiliated with the College of William and Mary, Reed and the William and Mary students she recruited provided a much needed source of fresh energy and enthusiasm, and Reed proved integral to the Pamunkey Indian Museum’s ability to open within its desired timeframe (Brown, p.c. 2013). Reed collaborated with both Callahan and the tribe to ensure that the displays Callahan had designed were indeed mounted and prepared in a professional and timely manner (Brown, p.c. 2013; Reed, personal correspondence, April1, 1980; May 11, 1980; May 22, 1980; June 30, 1980; August 26, 1980), and helped the museum to open its doors to the public as quickly as possible.
In recent years the tribe has once again reached out to local anthropologists for assistance with the community’s continued goals for increased visibility within their state and nation. As part of their efforts to make the many proposed improvements to the Pamunkey Indian Museum, the museum committee has been working in collaboration with Dr. Danielle Moretti-Langholtz, anthropologist and Director of the American Indian Resource Center at the College of William and Mary, and Dr. Buck Woodard, Director of the American Indian Initiative for the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. The tribe has also welcomed the assistance of several of Dr. Moretti-Langholtz’s graduate and undergraduate students at the college. Students have proposed design ideas for new and more interactive displays, as well as lesson plans and activities for visiting school groups. With Dr. Moretti-Langholtz’s and Dr. Woodard’s assistance, there is a new exhibit room currently under construction exploring the history of diplomacy between the Pamunkey and England, with a focus on the treaties of 1646 and 1677 and the annual tribute offered to the governor of Virginia (Krigsvold, p.c. 2013; Ashley Spivey, personal communication May 7, 2013). A number of ideas for improved marketing and publicity for the museum have come out of this most recent collaboration. Eager to improve their valued museum and increase their community’s visibility, the Pamunkey are once again actively taking advantage of all resources within their grasp.
The Pamunkey and the NMAI

In recent decades, there has been a move in many museums toward becoming more multi-cultural, including the display of multiple perspectives in exhibits and increased collaboration with communities in order to give them influence over the way they are portrayed in exhibits (Lavine & Karp 1991:6). This move is exemplified by the Smithsonian Institute’s establishment of the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) in 2004. The NMAI was created with the explicit intention of including Native American perspectives and insights in the creation and arrangement of the museum’s exhibits. According to the museum’s first director, W. Richard West, Jr., “the leadership and staff felt, from the very beginning, that we should turn to the Native communities themselves in defining the institution’s mission and direction” (West 2004:11). The museum would be, in a sense, a place where Native Americans from a variety of different regions and different tribes could all have the public recognition Karp argues every community needs (Karp 1992:14) and a place in which to explain their own versions of their peoples’ histories and try to maintain their places in the history of the United States.

The Pamunkey community, despite (at the time of this writing) not having yet obtained official federal recognition, is nevertheless represented in the NMAI. This inclusion is both significant and intriguing and certainly provokes the question of why the NMAI chose to include this community in particular out of the eleven tribes currently recognized by the commonwealth of Virginia. Did their own museum aid in drawing attention to the Pamunkey people as this national museum project was
underway? Was it perhaps their history of working collaboratively with anthropologists on historical and cultural projects that made them appealing to the NMAI? Also relevant is the question of what exactly the Pamunkey collaboration with the NMAI involved, and whether they are satisfied with the way their exhibit turned out.

Sonya Atalay, an Ashinaabeg woman who critiqued the NMAI expresses disappointment in the lack of portrayal of struggle in the exhibits, feeling this took away from the efforts of resistance by Native individuals and communities. Other Native scholars agree with Atalay’s criticisms. While acknowledging the NMAI’s importance as a symbol of recognition for Indian people, James Lujan also confesses to finding the museum’s lack of conflict and adversity to be unsatisfying, (Lujan 2005:511). Like Atalay, Lujan argues that “[a]dversity...is a key ingredient to fully appreciating the resiliency and strength of spirit that helped most tribes overcome their dark days...to survive and even thrive” (Lujan 2005:511). Lujan expresses concern that the lack of adversity and struggle portrayed in the NMAI takes away the historical context of this resilient spirit. He suggests that the NMAI is quite obviously aimed toward a non-native audience and points to the overarching message of the museum, “we’re still here,” as evidence of that. As Lujan points out, Native people are already well aware of this fact, and thus the NMAI is really “a museum of the Indian and by the Indian, it’s just not necessarily a museum for the Indian” (Lujan 2005:516). Lujan notes that this message of “we’re still here” also carries the implication that they might not have been, an implication that invokes questions of struggle and adversity, resilience and survival,
once again ending in dissatisfaction with a museum that does not answer the very questions it provokes.

While most did not offer opinions on the NMAI as a whole, the Pamunkey individuals consulted for this project did seem to have generally positive impressions of the NMAI’s exhibit on the Pamunkey. As with all NMAI exhibits, the Pamunkey exhibit was created in consultation with members of the tribe. The NMAI sent several representatives to the Pamunkey reservation a few years before the museum opened in 2004 to collaborate with the community there. The Pamunkey community created a committee, with Warren Cook as the chairman, who then met with the NMAI representatives several times throughout the next several years (Warren Cook, personal communication, October 13, 2012). According to one individual who was on the Pamunkey’s committee, the NMAI consultants would come “about once a month...and get our input on how we want to do things” (Joyce Krigsvold, personal communication, February 23, 2012).

Besides asking for Pamunkey community input for their exhibit, the NMAI also looked to the community to provide items for display. They purchased a few items, and collected a variety of donations from individuals, including photographs, pottery, and other crafts (Kevin Brown, personal communication December 1, 2012 and Krigsvold, p.c. 2013). The exhibit also includes video clips taken from some of the videos produced by the Pamunkey Museum, which demonstrate traditional fishing, trapping, hunting, and pottery making techniques. The exhibit includes narrations, photographs, crafts, and demonstrations from contemporary Pamunkey tribal members and thus helps
reinforce to visitors the fact that this is a community that is still living and vibrant. This present-day focus - something that many Pamunkey Indians think is missing from their own museum – was appealing to several individuals interviewed (Krigsvold, p.c. 2013; Ashley Atkins-Spivey, personal communication, August 7, 2012). The NMAI exhibit is “very much about the reality of contemporary Pamunkey...and that's what I love” (Atkins-Spivey, p.c. 2012). Atkins-Spivey also believes that the NMAI is successful in relaying its message of “we’re still here.” She suggests that while the national narrative in other contexts might still imply that native people are stuck in the past, “that’s...the message that I think NMAI successfully...squashes for people” (Atkins-Spivey, p.c. 2012).

Although most individuals consulted for this project were generally pleased with the Pamunkey exhibit at NMAI, a few did express criticisms that the exhibit goals were not carried out quite as well as they could have been. There were concerns that despite their long planning time, in the end the NMAI fell victim to the same time and resource constraints as so many others and may have rushed in some of their exhibits (including on the Pamunkey) in their efforts to complete the museum and open it in the time frame designated (Brown, p.c. 2012; Cook, p.c. 2012). Apparently the video on the Pamunkey River was not yet ready upon the museum opening, and one individual felt that in their rush to open, some of the goals and messages agreed upon by the community were overlooked (Cook, p.c. 2012). Still, all individuals consulted were in general pleased with the resulting exhibit and all were proud to have their community represented in a prominent, well-attended national museum (Brown, p.c. 2012; Cook, p.c. 2012; Krigsvold, p.c. 2013, Atkins-Spivey, p.c. 2012).
The NMAI apparently intended originally to make the Pamunkey exhibit a temporary or rotating exhibit, to be replaced after three years by that of another Virginia Indian tribe, followed by another, and so on, rotating through exhibits on a number of Virginia Indian tribes (Brown, p.c. 2012). Although it is unclear exactly why the Pamunkey were chosen to be the first Virginia Indian tribe represented in the NMAI, their history of collaboration with anthropologists and archaeologists in a previous museum development project was likely influential in their selection. Although this sort of collaborative project was, at the time of the NMAI's development, new to museology in general, the Pamunkey had been collaborating on historical and cultural projects for decades, thus making them an excellent candidate for this particular project. And for the Pamunkeys' part, this national museum provided a great opportunity to continue in their un-ceasing efforts toward public recognition.

State and Federal Recognition

State and Federal recognition of their tribal status are both issues with important consequences to the Pamunkey, and both can be challenging to understand. Although the Pamunkey tribe has had a recognized and honored diplomatic relationship with Virginia since the seventeenth century, complete with annual tribute offerings from the Pamunkey to Virginia’s governor, formal state recognition did not come until 1983 (Waugaman and Moretti-Langholtz 2000:xi). However, on Virginia’s official government website, it states the seventeenth century as the time that the Pamunkey received state recognition (Domenech), and at least one of the Pamunkey individuals I spoke with
agreed with this latter time frame, explaining that while several other tribes sought and received state recognition in the 1980s, the Pamunkey declined to participate in this endeavor because “we already had recognition,” (Cook, p.c. 2012).

An anecdote relayed by Mary Ellen Hodges, from Virginia’s Department of Historic Resources, exemplifies the somewhat unclear state of relations between the Pamunkey and the commonwealth during the 1970s. According to Hodges, on one of her early visits to the reservation, the local fire department was called out to the reservation in response to a fire (Mary Ellen Hodges, personal communication February 16, 2013). In their efforts to clear fields for garden space using early indigenous methods, Callahan and some of his volunteers had set a fire which had apparently grown out of their control. After helping to control the blaze, the local fire chief informed the Pamunkey community that if they wanted the individuals responsible for the fire to suffer any sort of punishments for their actions, the Pamunkey would be responsible for determining and enforcing those repercussions. Thus while the fire chief recognized the local fire department’s responsibilities to assist the Pamunkey community, he also recognized the Pamunkey community’s sovereignty in terms of determining legal ramifications for behaviors or crimes occurring within the reservation boundaries. Hodges described this event as her first experience with the contentious issue of sovereignty; an issue the Pamunkey community has been dealing with for centuries (Hodges, p.c. 2013).

Although somewhat clearer that the Pamunkey people’s history with state recognition, the Pamunkey tribe’s status with the federal government still offers some
points of potential confusion as well. Despite the fact that in the 1970s they were receiving funding for community projects from various federal agencies who apparently acknowledged their Indian heritage (Rountree 1990:249), the Pamunkey have not yet received official recognition from the United States Federal Government. They are, however, in the process of applying, and in their petition for federal acknowledgement, which at this writing is under consideration by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Pamunkey Indian Museum plays an important role in demonstrating the continuity of Pamunkey culture through time (Brown, p.c. 2012). Not only do the exhibits inside the museum display physical evidence of Pamunkey continued presence on the land and offer examples of material culture such as pottery from a variety of different time periods, the museum also serves as a focal point for cultural activities among the community today (Brown, p.c. 2012). The meeting room adjacent to the exhibit hall has been a community gathering place since the building’s completion and offers space for classes on beadwork, basket-making, and even language revitalization (Brown, p.c. 2012; Cook, p.c. 2012). Chief Brown is optimistic that the tribe will indeed soon achieve federal recognition and hopes that doing so will prove beneficial to the museum as well as the community in that “when we get federal recognition we think it’ll open the doors for...more grants and moneys for the museum and cultural center” (Brown, p.c. 2012).

Over the years, funding has been a recurring challenge for the museum, especially since the income from admission fees doesn’t cover the museum’s basic maintenance costs (Brown, p.c. 2012). There have been a few periods in the last thirty years when grants or government programs have provided funding for museum staff.
Just a few years after the museum opened, Kevin Brown was hired through the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA), which was an on-the-job training program for Native Americans, to work as the museum’s assistant director (Brown, p.c. 2012). In this position he was responsible for running the daily operations of the museum and also for conducting research for the museum. He also assisted in the production of a video about the museum that was then screened in the museum for visitors. Over the last few years, the Mattaponi-Pamunkey-Monacan Consortium has provided funding for one staff person to work at the museum during its hours of operation for part of the year (Krigsvold, p.c. 2013). But aside from these few and inconsistent sources of funding, the museum has relied almost exclusively on volunteers for its regular operations and maintenance. Ashley Atkins-Spivey, the museum’s current director, works entirely on a volunteer basis, as did her grandfather, Warren Cook, for the thirty years he held the director position. And the actual daily operation of the museum since its opening in 1980 has been conducted with very few exceptions by the women of the pottery guild, and until recently on a purely volunteer basis (Krigsvold, p.c. 2013). These women are the ones who literally open the doors and welcome visitors inside, and without their time and efforts, the museum would quite possibly have closed long ago.

It is hoped that federal recognition will increase financial resources for the museum and community, so that the museum will no longer have to rely on volunteers to keep running, and instead might become a source of regular paid employment for a number of community members. Community members could theoretically assist not only with the daily opening of the museum, but also with regular exhibit maintenance.
and artifact conservation. Among the grants they plan to apply for, Chief Brown also hopes to obtain money to build a new Wellness Center for the community, right next door to the museum. This center would contain fitness equipment and would become the location for all of the community’s health and nutrition workshops, leaving the meeting space in the museum open to focus solely on artifact preservation and cultural events (Brown, p.c. 2012).

While achieving federal recognition of their tribal status would most certainly provide the tribe with much needed economic and social assistance, it would also aid them in their now centuries long efforts toward public recognition and securing their place in Virginia history. After repeated challenges over their “Indianness” due to bigotry and racism, federal recognition would help to end potential threats to Pamunkey reservation land claims and formally acknowledge their peoples’ incessant and successful struggle for survival. Although their plans for museum renovations show that their efforts toward public education will likely continue well into the future, federal recognition will certainly aid them in their tradition of display and education.
Chapter 5: Conclusions

The Pamunkey people have for centuries maintained a tradition of sharing their peoples’ history through safeguarding and displaying cultural artifacts. These artifacts were recognized as a source of historical and cultural knowledge and as physical embodiments of connections to the past. For Pamunkey tribal members, these historical objects represented and invoked memories that connected them to their ancestors and their people’s past. For non-Pamunkey visitors, these objects provided a chance to learn more about Pamunkey history and culture. This Pamunkey tradition of display at times even extended to more prominent efforts at public outreach and public education, as the Pamunkey worked to preserve and highlight their place in Virginia and U.S. history.

In the late 1970s, the Pamunkey decided to modernize and formalize their traditions of display and education, in conjunction with a larger effort to increase their visibility within the state. Warren Cook was the Pamunkey individual most central to this effort, as he led cultural revitalization projects such as the Powhatan Artisan’s Project, petitioned to have the Pamunkey Reservation added to the National Register of Historic Places, served as the governor of Virginia’s advisor on Indian Affairs, and worked to create a museum in which to display his family’s collection of cultural relics. One outside observer who worked with the tribe on various projects during this time described Cook as “a real mover and shaker” (Mary Ellen Hodges, personal communication February 16, 2013), noting that he seemed to be the main liaison
between the Pamunkey and the various organizations and programs they were working with. Cook seems to have made full use of all resources available to his community including the expertise of archaeologist Errett Callahan, ensuring that the content of his community’s museum was as accurate and in-depth as possible, and that the increased visibility of his people would include representations that they could indeed be proud to display.

In their continued efforts to increase visibility, to preserve their place in American history, as well as to take advantage of all potential resources available to their community, the Pamunkey Indian Nation is currently in the process of applying for federal recognition of their tribal status. The museum and its renovations fit into the Pamunkey community’s larger efforts toward this goal. Handler explains that “[t]o meet the challenge of an outsider’s denial of national existence, nationalists must claim and specify the nation’s possessions” (Handler 1985:211). By demonstrating through the museum’s artifacts and exhibits their continued presence on the reservation land since prior to the reservation’s formal establishment in 1646, and by increasing public awareness of their presence and history, the Pamunkey community hopes that their museum will assist them in achieving federal recognition (Kevin Brown, personal communication, December 1, 2012).

From its beginnings as a room in the home of the community’s Chief and a product of generations of informal collecting, the Pamunkey Indian Museum has grown to be an integral part of the Pamunkey community. Museums are places where individuals “can congregate in a spirit of cross-generational inclusivity and inquiry into
the memory of our past” (Gurian 282). The Pamunkey Indian Museum educates and
gives pride to an entire community, while ensuring that Pamunkey history and culture
will continue to remain as “viable and enduring,” (Ashley Atkins-Spivey, personal
communication August 7, 2012) as it has always been.

This museum was in many ways as much the product of a chance encounter
between Warren Cook and Errett Callahan, two motivated and knowledgeable men, as
it was the product of hundreds of years of Pamunkey tradition of collection, display and
public education. This museum continues as a testament to the hard work and
motivation of these two dedicated men. It is a legacy that honors not just their own
efforts, but also the efforts of generations of Pamunkey people who have ensured that
their peoples’ cultural and historical knowledge and artifacts would be passed down to
future generations. As a place to educate present and future Pamunkey about their
own culture and history, a home in which to safeguard and display cultural artifacts, a
space to help recover past traditions and technologies, and a place in which to educate
the non-Pamunkey public about the Pamunkeys’ place in American history, it is not hard
to understand why the Pamunkey Indian Museum is now considered by many to be “the
heart of the reservation” (Brown, p.c., Joyce Krigsvold, personal communication,
February 23, 2012).
References Cited


Pamunkey Indian Tribe. *Come Visit*. Pamunkey Indian Tribe with assistance from the National Park Services.


