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Editor's Note: While the transcript captures the essence of the question and answer session, voice inflection and gestures often communicated a good portion of a speaker's intended message. Readers of this transcript are thus encouraged to go to the recording if any portion of the exchange seems unclear. Time markers in the transcript make it easy to locate any particular segment.]

[1:25:52] Dr. David Thelen: So, lots to talk about. Questions, comments…

[1:25:58] Angie Sirna: I'm Angie Sirna, I'm a PhD student; I am in the class with Dr. Thelen. I have a question for both Ellen and Barbara, and it comes from our class discussion about how museums create a feedback loop so that what is coming from the public gets taken in by the institution, and then you can make changes from there.

[1:26:24] Barbara Franco: I think that audience research, and staying with it—it's not just doing it one time, but constantly being able to go back. There's lots of different ways, and any kind of research is [driven by] what question you want to answer. So, a lot of times museums will say "Well, we did audience research." Well, you need to figure out—it's not just a questionnaire, "I liked it, I didn't like it," that sort of thing. To really get deeper, you have to really think, like any other research project, about what it is you want to learn. And if you really think about your museum as a learning laboratory, to say, "What is it you want to find out from people?" I mentioned before, when we were doing exhibits in Minnesota, we wanted to know whether people thought there was one official narrative of history—turned out they didn't. Another example of that was, we were working on an exhibit on Minnesota families, and we started calling it "Minnesota [Communities]." Well, we went out and talked to the Latino community, we talked to the Black community, we talked to some of the other ethnic groups in Minnesota, and they had a very negative reaction to "Minnesota Communities" because they assumed they were not included in "Minnesota Communities." So we dropped "Minnesota," and it was just called "Communities." That was a kind of, information to learn, which was very valuable, and to be able to put right into it. The other thing we did a lot of in Minnesota was prototyping. I mentioned about experiments and temporary [exhibits], well if you're going to do an interactive, we did mockups, we put them out on the floor, we took them outside the museum and tested them with other places. Especially if you're doing a permanent exhibition, or something that's

going to be long-term, the idea of spending some money on that kind of up-front research and testing is really money well spent, rather than getting something done and then saying, "Oh, well we don't have the money to fix it now, so we'll just have to live with it," which really happens oftentimes. So I would say, thinking about [audience research] as a continuous study is really the best way to do that. There are other places now—I mean social media is the talk-back board of, you know, our dreams. If you're really following what people are saying about you, that's a great way to find out, and that's what they're telling their friends—we never could listen in on that before. Now we can. So it's not just one way; there's lots of different ways.

[1:29:29] Ellen Rosenthal: I'm just going to be—I can't do anything else but be honest. So in the best of times at Conner Prairie we actually had a staff member—it's expensive—who was out on the grounds all the time, and who talked to people and would present narrative as well as doing surveys, and that information was in every staff room, it went to the executive team, and it was responded to. We all discussed. And then the recession hit [2008], and the position was cut, we thought temporarily, and we filled in with secret shoppers and online testing. So [with] secret shoppers you can hire someone to come in every week, and then that information was shared with the public. I have to put in a pitch for AASLH [American Association for State and Local History], which [does] "Visitors Count." You can participate at very low cost in their program, where you actually survey, and it's compared in a broader scope. We do that now to sort of get a general handle on how we are doing, and how we look in comparison to similar organizations, and that is shared with all staff. I think it has to be not just the top level, but continuous. In my ideal world, I would love someone on staff who can . . . go out and talk to people. I try and do it as much as I can, but when times are tough, as they are now, and everybody is stretched . . . it is hard. And it has to be a priority. It actually helps to have someone on staff who is a real champion, who reminds everybody, who—right now it is more piecemeal than I would like, but the important thing is that—in fact, if it isn't shared with our frontline staff they complain about it, because they want that feedback, they want to know how they are doing. Does that answer your question?

[1:31:55]- Dr.David Thelen: Other questions, comments?

[1:31:58] Dr. Amy Sayward: I am not a public historian; I'm a regular, old historian and a user of museums. And actually, it's kind of interesting to connect some of the theory that you were talking about to some of my experiences. I actually had the honor to visit the Robben Island World Heritage Center in South African—cried the entire time. But one of the things that struck me in reflecting on it later, all of the docents there are former political prisoners of Robben Island, and so as they are telling the story of the place and of Africa, but also these terribly personal histories—you know "as the door closes," he was recalling what was said to him on the day that that door was closed, and when his father applied to come visit with him and was shot the day that he applied. One of the things it led me to wonder is, what is this museum going be like fifty years from now when that generation has passed away? And how do you maintain—obviously it changes over time, but having had that experience, it's the type of thing you want

everyone to have a similar type of experience. But what happens with museums as generations change and when you have the opportunity to have people who lived those historical experiences and then those people obviously go away as the museum changes over time?

[1:33:38] Barbara Franco: Well, I'm working right now in a museum that's based on events in 1863, so we have no living, although there are living re-enactors, but no living people. And I would say that—the exhibit is called "Voices of Duty and Devotion," and it is based very much on personal accounts and quotes from people from that time. And I have to tell you that stories and narrative are extremely powerful. Now, there is nothing that is going to replace the power of having a survivor or someone who has been through that, tell you that story, but those stories have power well beyond. The emotional kind of responses that we're seeing in the museum as people are going through for preview tours, is really based on the stories, and some of them are read, with voices, some of them are just on-the-wall reading, but the story itself has power. And so I think that narrative is a very strong and potent way to communicate.

[1:35:00] Ellen Rosenthal: I had a boss once, and I'll quote him, his name is Richard Rabinowitz, who's been a powerful voice in this field. He used to always talk about "furnishing the imagination." So, I have always found that although the narrative that comes directly from the person is the most powerful, particularly for adults. Now I'm going to tell you for adults—I think it is much more difficult when you're talking about family audiences together—that that kind of narrative is the most powerful kind of interpretation you can have. I remember years ago going to the Edison Homestead in New Jersey and they had a tape recording of his daughter . . . the guard carried this tape-player through the house and you heard her voice—she was long dead, but her voice saying—"I can remember when papa," or whatever she called him, "when dad came home and we would always hide under the piano," and we would turn and see the piano, "and then we would jump out at him." But her storytelling, combined with that place is just—or if you've gone to the Eastern State Penitentiary [in Philadelphia], which uses the same kind of narrative, so I agree, there's just nothing more powerful.

[1:36:43] Jaryn Abdallah: I work at two very small museums, and they both really need to implement some of these changes, but I'm at the very bottom. Is there any advice you can give me, any way I can present this?

[1:36:57] Ellen Rosenthal: We talked about this at lunch, and we decided that you shouldn't let hierarchy stand in your way. I mean, we didn't talk about <u>you</u>, although "you" is symbolic. I've always gotten ideas into my head and then figured out how to accomplish them. At Pittsburgh, I decided we needed to do more audience research and set out getting the funding and then getting it done. I was a chief curator, it wasn't in my—so I'm not saying you can do this, but I think to help your CEO, or whoever you're working for, solve problems. And what are their biggest problems? Probably visitation and fundraising. If you can, point out to them what they can do to solve some of these problems. My concern at Conner Prairie is certainly with the learning and the impact, [but] it so happened it also dramatically increased our attendance.

[1:38:16] Barbara Franco: We were talking about history organizations, and particularly museums in general being risk-averse and how do you create change. I think there's two ways. I've seen institutions that are changed by sweeping change that is revolutionary, and then there is incremental change. I think sometimes finding partners to do things can be interesting. You know, making an offer people can't refuse, and bringing some new resource through a project can sometimes be a way to implement some new ideas. It wouldn't be okay to just do it on your own, but if you've got someone else that's interested, or you can partner with another organization to do something. So, maybe there's a way you can do theater in your place. Well, to say, "How would we put together a theater program?" But somebody does theater somewhere in your community, and to find a partnership where someone might say, "Well, that would be really interesting for us to do." And partnerships attract money, so sometimes there's ways to—it's not always a direct route, sometimes you have to zig and zag to find a way to get it done.

[1:39:37] Ellen Rosenthal: I guess the other word is, this is sort of very trendy, but "lean in." If you've read Sheryl Sandburg recently, I think there is really some wisdom in being willing to be confident in what you know and to bring that to the table. I never got fired, [but] I probably came close to it.

[1:40:12]-David Thelen: But you guys are confident, and you come off as having done all these things. How do you sort of start? I don't know if anyone is having this kind of problem, just getting started in doing this.

[1:40:27] Barbara Franco: A good place to start might be the French Resistance. What can you do underground? What can you do behind the scenes? Be subversive.

[1:40:50] Ellen Rosenthal: I think you've got to have a passion. I was really taken with a passion for visitor research. I really felt driven. I spent two and a half years working for a history consulting firm, and I was just astounded by how little museums were connected to their public. And I felt a passion about it. I wanted to learn as much as I could, and I felt driven. So I guess . . . it's gotta come out of, for you. It's got to not be change for change's sake, but change <u>you</u> believe in, that you think will make a difference. That sounds corny, but there were other things I could have done that I just didn't feel as passionate about.

[1:41:46] Ginna Foster Cannon: Ellen you talked about how the budget is now ten million dollars. How has that correlated with the increase in audience? Is there a direct correlation, or is it partnering with such things as the orchestra, or getting grant money, or the Earlham [College] money?

[1:42:08] Ellen Rosenthal: Earlham. So yeah, for administrators this is going to be interesting; for the rest of you, you can check your email. So . . . Conner Prairie has only been independent for six years. And before that time we were largely reliant on our endowment, the return on our endowment, which was controlled by another entity that controlled us. Now, since we've been independent, we've been trying to wean ourselves off of the endowment because that puts you in

a very vulnerable position should the stock market fall like it did in 2008. So, the increase in our attendance has been dramatic, and has helped tremendously, but it has not offset the drop in what we would have gotten from the endowment. So . . . our budget is ten million, our endowment fell from $116 million to $72 million. And we are still feeling the impact of that because of the way it's calculated. So we have increased earned income dramatically through increase[s] in attendance, and we're driving up fundraising as well, but not fast enough to offset the drop in the endowment. So those two lines unfortunately met at a crucial point. In about 2008, we'd only been independent for two years. This is much too long an answer, but it's sort of the crucial formula if you're going to run a museum, or an archive, or anything, of balancing out those factors. Does that explain it?

[1:44:11] Ginna Foster Cannon: It does, but I'm also wondering about partnerships. Has working with the Symphony [Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra] contributed money or just raised your profile; bring more people in the door?

[1:44:22] Ellen Rosenthal: So Conner Prairie has a thirty-year partnership with the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra; we're their summer home. Right now . . . we're a partnership, but we mainly just receive rent. We net about $250,000 a year, which is a good fall-back position. This is, quite frankly, a long answer because we are just as well . . . we'll talk about it. The partnership has been great for us because everybody in the community, and we did market research—Conner Prairie is better known than the Pacers [Indianapolis Pacers], believe it or not, or was. Does everybody know who the Pacers are? A basketball team. But it's not clear in people's minds whether we're the symphony or whether we're the museum. The fact that we've grown attendance shows that we're making tremendous progress in that, but the partnership has kind of been a double-edged sword.

[1: 45:20] Ginna Foster Cannon: What about the gift shop, does that bring in much money, sort of the "selling of history" quite literally.

[1:45:25] Ellen Rosenthal: You know, I'd be interested to hear Barbara talk about the gift shop, which we now talk about as "cultural merchandising." Because it's part of memory making. Really, seriously, it's part of the whole "shtick." Our gift shop does not do tremendously well, and that's in part because we are very locally based, our attendance is very locally based. Tourists spend a lot more at museums than people do who are going there three times a year, where they get used to saying "no" to their kids, "you can't buy something every time we go." So it does okay, but it does not contribute very much to the bottom line.

[1:46:16] Barbara Franco: I'd say most museus shops, if they break even, that's good. There are some places, I think art museums do well. It depends. Again, if you're a tourist area, depending on what the subject matter is. But it's interesting, because I've also come to the same conclusion that shops are not just an add-on, and they're not just about shameless selling of history, but they are really something, that if you listen to visitors, it's something they want. It's the first thing the

bus group asks when they get off the bus, "Where is the shop?" And so, in meeting visitor expectations, it is an experience that visitors expect from a museum. So, even if you don't make money, you have to have it, because it would be seen as something that wasn't there. Let me tell you a funny story. When we were opening the new Minnesota History Center, there were two spaces in the lobby. One was set aside for the museum shop, and the other was going to be a members' lounge. But the museum shop was really a little smaller than what was needed, and I said, "You need to take both those spaces and get rid of the members' lounge." If you have a public place, now it is a membership organization, but that's exactly the wrong messaging. If you're trying to get new people to come that haven't been there, the last thing you want to have in your lobby is "members' lounge." This says "This is for some people, and not for others." Not the message that you want. And I said, "Shop says 'come on in, everybody is welcome.' If you've got a dollar, you're just as welcome as the next person." In many ways our shops are . . . in many ways, the most open and welcoming place that we have. Because people know how to shop, they're very comfortable with that, they know how to do that, and it makes them feel at ease, again to feel "Okay, this is an experience that isn't foreign to something, museums are something that is close to my experience." So, I see museums shops as a piece of that, of really reaching out to our visitors. Whether they make money or not, really, they should break even.

[1:48:47] Ellen Rosenthal: I actually have another interesting thing, this wasn't the question you asked, but [it is] about shops. I'm just going to tell you something. About three years ago Conner Prairie joined with the Indianapolis Children's Museum on the Access Program, which is a special program that gives a special membership. For a dollar, anybody on public assistance in the state of Indiana can come in. We served about 20,000 people last year. I now get complaints from people who fall in the middle, who feel that we should be doing something to allow the middle class—I don't know why, it's just an interesting question, particularly about the camp that feel that our prices are now too high, and that we're leaving out the middle class. I don't know why I'm bringing that up, I just think, in terms of shopping, it's an interesting question.

[1:49:43] David Thelen: Actually, I'd like to turn that question around to anyone in the audience. Some of you are from The Hermitage, Stones River, I don't know where. What's your experience with museum shops?

[1:49:57] Howard Kittell, The Hermitage: Actually, our store does generate profit. [I'm] from the Hermitage. It does generate profit into our operating fund. Now that's been recent. It used to generate revenue, [then] it didn't for about four or five years, and we've had a turn-around just in the last year, year and a half. So it's important in a variety of ways.

[1:50:22] Ellen Rosenthal: Our shop generates some income, but it's not a cash cow.

[1:50:29] Ali Tonn, Country Music Hall of Fame: I'm from the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum, and I don't work for our store, but it has been a point of pride lately that it is a very profitable store. But I think it is part of that "memory making" that you are talking about, that a

lot of the visitors, especially international visitors, are wanting to take memories home with them, either related to the museum itself, or related to Nashville, or related to some other country music-specific experience that they had. And I've shopped in your store recently, at the Hermitage, and I gave you some of my money on a book, so thank you.

[1:51:07] Ellen Rosenthal: I want to tell you—has anybody been to the Guinness Factory, which is a museum in Dublin? Oooh, a great look at an adult museum, an interactive adult museum, really interactive, because with your admission, you get a free pint. And I've never seen a busier shop.

[1:51:34] Katie Wilson [Bradley Academy]: I'm with Bradley Academy Museum, here in Murfreesboro, and we do have a gift shop, but ours is more historical. They [visitors] like to take something about the history of the museum. It's mostly African American history that we portray with little books, also post cards. We did have a professor from Mississippi say we probably cannot pay for the big items, but if we had postcards that would go a long way. So we do have a lot of postcards about the history of the museum.

[1:52:13] Dr. Rebecca Conard: Switching topics, back to, Barbara, you had talked about civic engagement as being something a number of museums and historic sites kind of started going down that path and then really backed off, and I wondered, when you talked about what comes next in transformative experiences, it seems to me that means bringing that same idea back around, but possibly from a slightly different angle, so I wondered if you would expound on that a little bit.

[1:52:53] Barbara Franco: I think that that was . . . but again it has been episodic. And so people will do a project, and then say, "That was very interesting, and we learned a lot from it." But the number of museums that are actually carrying that out are few and far between. One of the museums that has been working on that, and really probably has made that their mission to some extent, is the Lower East Side Tenement Museum. The whole idea of taking that emotional experience that you have and saying, "Oh, this like my grandfather," and then taking that into a discussion and a dialogue about recent immigrants that are right outside the door on the street and helping people to make those connections, and sort of continuing the conversation. They are probably the best example, and again as one of the models, like Conner Prairie, has really reached out to that, their way of engaging visitors, the Tenement Museum has also been training people. It's very labor intensive, though. They have the same issue of—you don't have volunteers doing this kind of facilitation and dialogue. It takes training. You really have to use staff that are regular and that have had the training and are willing to do that. So, it is labor intensive, and it is a question of cost for some museums to be able to do that. But I think that places that are trying it are interested in pursuing that. And I think that one of the things that we need to look more at, and we were talking about this before, is not only looking at American museums, but looking at international museums. I think that some of the places in the world where there are difficult issues people that are dealing with, there are new democracies, there are

all kinds of civic questions that are going on, to look at how museums in those countries are dealing with those issues. And I think we have a lot to learn by looking around the world, and not just at our own examples. So I think maybe worldwide it's more, and we now have to catch-up again.

[1:55:37] Lecia McBee: Hello, my name is Lecia McBee, and I'm from Bradley Academy Museum here in Murfreesboro. I wanted to know from Miss Ellen and Miss Barbara, and even [from] some of the colleagues here, what type of other products you have in your gift shops, or cultural merchandising centers, that have sold really well, and what do you think that the future is going to bring as far as product merchandising? I know it's going to probably be a lot of holograms and computerized this and that, but what do you see that, you know, kids, adults, the family in general, will grow from, that would help?

[1:56:13] Barbara Franco: When I was at the state, the Pennsylvania Historical Museum Commission, we were getting ready for the Civil War 150th anniversary, and we wanted to do some merchandising, etc., around the 150th. And we worked with a woman who does merchandising for museums shops, and one of the things that she taught us was that you're not really selling merchandise, you're selling a story. So, what she said is, "Whatever this is, what is the story that goes with that?" So you can take a very ordinary object, but if there is a story that goes with it, and that it tells, you can attach that story, and then it is distinctive to your museum, and is special. One of the things that we did was to, during the Civil War, [because] with the embargo the Confederates did not have coffee, but the Union troops did. So we created a little package of Wide Awake Coffee and told the story about coffee, and the supplies, and how they used to trade coffee and tobacco across the lines. So here's something, a pound of coffee, but it has a story, and now that has some meaning for people. So think about merchandising not just as what sells, it's the story that sells, that's what you need to think about, and if you can attach it to a story that's in your museum, people are going to find that. And I think every museum finds that if there is an interpreter that's making something, people are more likely to [purchase that item], because it's a story that they're going to take back with them.

[1:58:06] Ellen Rosenthal: Well, yes, I will tell you that our store people always say, "We <u>wish</u> we could go out on the grounds and sell pottery right where the potter is working, and we could sell nails right where the blacksmith is working, and that we could sell costumes right in the <u>middle</u> of Prairie Town." So we sell all those things, but not right in the middle. We've actually have experimented with selling on the grounds . . . but they don't like it. The mothers are already schlepping too much stuff around, they're carrying too much, so they don't want to carry even more. So we have experimented with that. But we have gone to some interesting lengths. We have a whole line of—I'll say this for The Hermitage too, for your shop, in case you're interested. We have a whole line of children's reproduction nineteenth century clothes that we make in partnership with the penitentiary system. We had a press conference—I never thought I would be on the same podium with the head of the Indiana state penitentiary system. I just have to tell you, their motto is—it's called Penn Products—and their motto is "Made With

Conviction." So, the costume elements sell really well, the hats, the bonnets, the things that kids can put on, that is transformative and sort of helps them, the parents less so. School kids, price point is very important. So the lower price points really go out the door. And it varies on who your audience is, who you're going to sell to. More later, you can always contact us.

[2:00:27] Lecia McBee: And now that you say that, if you look at Jack Daniel's, it's not a museum, but they really do well in their gift shop because it's all based around Jack Daniel's.

[2:00:41] Kate Sproul [?], Nashville Zoo: I was going to touch a little bit on the gift shop thing. We're from the Nashville Zoo, but we all work at the historic farm section of the Nashville Zoo. So our gift shop, is of course, very zoo-centered and very limited on the items that pertain to the historic farm section. But one of the things we actually did, and it's been, this will be the eighth year that we've done it is, we've found original family recipes that we put into a cookbook. Like I said, we published it eight years ago, and we are still selling this cookbook in our gift shop, and it's actually bringing in money that goes directly to the house, for upkeep in the house. And we are still averaging about 120 cookbooks a year, so . . . at 15 bucks a pop, that's not too bad. It's an easy way, it was a lot of work at the beginning, but now it's a very easy way for us to generate a little bit of income.

[2:01:41] Ellen Rosenthal: While you're thinking about questions, I'll just blab for a second. I just wanted to tell you, speaking of meeting guests where they are, I'm missing it, but this year is second year we're having a program which is aimed—we have a young professional's council, so it's 21 to 40, and they have developed a program called " History On Tap." And it takes place this Friday, and it is aimed at young professionals, the grounds are open, and the interpreters love it because they get to deal just with adults. Craft brewers come in, and they talk about the history—we're going to have a panel, and talk about the history of brewing in Indiana. We have done no advertising, and we have already sold out, we sold out last week five hundred tickets, including 100 VIP tickets. Last year was the first year we did it, again no advertising, all social media, and we sold out, we tried three hundred, we sold those out, we had 75 more people show up. So, understanding your audience and meeting them, I thought, most of you are that demographic, if you happen to be in Indiana, you are welcome to come.

[2:03:11] Dr. Bren Martin: Speaking of demographics and transformative experiences, we are in the middle of a pretty profound demographic shift in this country, where in the decades ahead the ethnic, religious, racial, cultural makeup of the country is changing. How does that provide challenges for historic sites and museums to provide meaningful experiences for different groups that are going to have very different understandings of history and memory in the process.

[2:03:43] Barbara Franco: Well I think that that really does speak to asking about and finding out more about changing audiences. I think it's interesting, because it's easy to assume that new immigrants would not be, or new residents would not be interested in the history, and yet, if you go to a new place, you are often <u>very</u> interested in that history, and I think it would be a mistake

to assume that new Americans aren't interested in that history, sometimes they are more interested in that history than people who have lived there all their lives. So, I think it's just a question of saying, or asking them, what are the questions they have, what are the things that they need to know, how do they feel part of this, and how could their experiences also be acknowledged and brought into that story. So, finding common ground on those thematic things. There are many, many different ways of customs, of food ways, of different things of sharing. And again, saying that they bring new stories, and that's the new story that needs to be collected and shared, and I think, again, it's that idea of a social interaction, a safe place to find out about people who are not just like you, and to find out more about who they are and share those stories. So I would say it would be programming and exhibits that are really based in how to bring those things together. I think it's a great, a huge opportunity for museums, but one that we need to be thinking about explicitly, not just waiting for it to happen.

[2:05:38] Ellen Rosenthal: I think it's a great question, and it's sort of in the range of questions that keep me up at night, and which I think we have to move forward with, with really deliberate speed. We struggle with that at Conner Prairie because 1836 Indiana was very homogenous, and as I like to tell people, "It's not my history." I'm from New York. I'm not from a rural background. So a lot of people relate to it, but it makes me aware of how much harder we have to work to make the experience meaningful and relatable. I can't say we have all the answers yet, I can say we are actively thinking and talking about it. And as we have thought about the experience, it's not as a more open-ended experience, a more social experience. What we have found is that the audience has become much more diverse, because it . . . it becomes a quality time, a family bonding experience that goes beyond the specific content, and it becomes generalizable. Is that enough? No, I think we really have to do more, and I don't really want to get into it, but we are moving into another phase that will make us much more useful and interesting to broader audiences, as we speak.

[2:07:29] Caleb Knies, PhD graduate student: I have a question, I guess, with all the personal narratives, the focus on visitors, the increased focus on demographics and things, how do you guys find, that you're curators and on this side of it, are trying to hold to some objectivity, or I guess impartialness, to the story you're that you're trying to tell, without using personal, or an attached docent who lived through the experience, who thinks . . . slides it one way, and maybe not so much the other way, how to you bring it back to the middle ground?

[2:08:10] Ellen Rosenthal: Oh, I guess, we can speak together. I won't take long, and if I understand the question correctly—did I hear you say, "How do we preserve historic truth and authenticity while we're still using narrative?" I have to say, I think of our historians and our curators as our truth tellers, and our history meters. I count on them to make sure that our experience is trustworthy. So it can be open, it can be friendly, but it has to be historically correct. And that is their job. They are the watchers, and the keepers. And there's a difference between . . . being authentic and being didactic.

[2:09:27] Barbara Franco: Well, I'd go back to what I mentioned before, which was whether or not there was an official history, a narrative, and that the visitors understand there are multiple versions. It's interesting, because if you are telling difficult stories, or really trying to get people to look at something—we have to trust our visitors, to some extent, that they can take two different narratives and look at those as two different perspectives. Sometimes hearing it from a personal viewpoint, we're all pretty—people are socially aware and skilled. That's some of what our visitors bring with them, to be able to say, "Well, that's that person's opinion speaking." One of the things that's really interesting to me—maybe it was the 1990s—when was the moment when the voice of the narrator was just really jarring? So if you think about old movies or things, there was this "THE VOICE OF THE NARRATOR," and then at some point that just seemed so old-fashioned and so out of date. And I think museums are sort of experiencing a similar thing, which is that museum voice. How are you writing labels? What does that sound like? The tone of that voice. All of that is very, very important. I think about voice so much in putting an exhibit together, and I react to it when I go through an exhibit. So hearing multiple voices isn't a bad thing. People know how to deal with that; it's a conversation that's going on, back and forth. As a curator, you not putting out things that are completely inaccurate or wrong, but if it's someone's memory, it's their memory, that's what it was, whether every fact happened that way, and they remembered it absolutely correctly—maybe not, but that's still part of an account, or history. I think we just need to learn how to facilitate a conversation about how to bring these various voices together so that it does come to something more than just everybody for themselves, but that it adds up to something. But we [museums] don't always have to be the voice that tells that. We need to learn. It's kind of an artistry, being able to make that happen. Sometimes it's harder than just saying, "It's just easier to tell it." But how do you get those stories to come together into something meaningful. That's kind of the art of it, I think.

[2:12:28] Ellen Rosenthal: Well . . . in the Civil War exhibit [at Connor Prairie], which is presented both through first-person interpretation and through technology, through video projection, we actually chose four different narrators, not narrators, but we used real people and looked at their memoirs, and we chose them to be relatable to different members of the audience, and then we also had a lot of different voices expressing different viewpoints—a teenage girl that comes from an abolitionist family, and a freed slave who was talking about what it means to be in Indiana now, and his experiences of the event. I'm trying to remember what the other ones are, but we do trust the visitor to understand, as there is now, that there are multiple viewpoints . . . and to bring those together and to understand which viewpoint eventually came out. But that it's not just an omnipotent, omnipresent narrator.

[2:13:47] Abby Gautreau: I'm Abby Gautreau, I'm a PhD student here at MTSU. To kind of go back to that question, do you think, and this is probably more a comment than a question, but do you think that the transition towards using narrators and using voices from that time has been a way to sidestep historiographical issues that are political? I know with the Civil War you have this whole Lost Cause thing that goes on, that's not really based in facts, but it's based on

specific interpretation and manipulation, and if that's an effective way of using individual narrators to sort of sidestep that whole argument, do you think that that's also a technique that you can use when you have a museum that also deals in extremely political history, like civil rights history or apartheid history, where you're talking about very political events that have first person narration, but the way that you present that history. You know, people can respond very strongly to it, on a very emotional level, for reasons that are not necessarily based on the facts of history.

[2:14:50] Barbara Franco: Well, remember all the issues with the Smithsonian, about Enola Gay, these are kind of now, part of the . . . . I think one of the things that I've certainly learned with doing exhibits, and I'm sure Ellen has as well, that when you're really dealing with issues that are difficult, what people react <u>against</u> is the museum saying, "This is the right way." If there are two people that are not in agreement, and you put both of those out there, put them both out there, and let people see and judge them, and show there is a difference of opinion. But I think that what people in the public react against is the idea of the museum telling them what to think, as opposed to allowing them to look at primary sources in some ways, and make some decisions themselves. So one of the things I often use as a metaphor is a jigsaw puzzle. An exhibit is a lot like a jigsaw puzzle. If you can think of a completed jigsaw puzzle, how interesting is that? Probably the most boring thing you've ever seen, correct? Now take three pieces out and put them on the side, and most people will not be able to walk by without at least trying to put those pieces in. So sometimes we just have to give a little space for visitors to step into that, to put the last piece in—and trust that they'll figure it out. It's not that you leave all the pieces in disarray on the table, because that is way too difficult, and too hard to do, but put it partway and leave people a little room to come to those conclusions themselves. I think that's where engagement is really part of it, and that's where we have to let visitors be in charge.

[2:17:03] Ellen Rosenthal: So I will give you one particular example. In the Civil War exhibit, it's set in southern Indiana. Indiana is considered the most "southern" of the northern states. So there were people with very mixed sympathies and ideas. And our characters, this is projected characters who represent a range of townspeople, including the four characters that we focus on, who give probably four or five different points of view. And one of them is a townsperson who is more a "copperhead" than supporting the government. And he says—so [recently] I was in the presentation and watching it, and this guy comes on, I've seen it a thousand times—and he says, "Let the South keep their slaves. I don't want this war to happen." It turned out there was a mother and daughter, an African American mother and daughter behind me, and the daughter said "Mom!" She was very upset. And the mother said to her, not knowing who I was, "Dear, that's the way some people thought then." There was another character who said, "Father says we have to fight this war to free the slaves," and goes on. But it was clear from that one exchange that <u>that</u> mother knew that was just a point of view, that wasn't what we were saying.

[2:18:41] Dr. Amy Sayward: As the regular historian who started the conversation, I wanted to mention, you had used as a point of comparison that maybe history museums were a little behind

some science museums in thinking about this, one of the things I love about being in the History Department here is that we have such a strong public history faculty, because I think public history students and faculty tend to be ahead of us old fashioned history professors in thinking about how to teach history, and we are also beginning to think about, actively, teaching a course in the department about teaching historical thinking. And as we talk to students about how do you, even with a captive audience, how do you have them engage with history, really learn the history, care about it. I think we have a lot to learn from public historians, so I'm very thankful for this panel tonight.

[2:19:57] Dave Thelen: That sounds like a segue to thank our panelists for a wonderful session.

[Audience applause.]