Occupied Philadelphia

An Experiment in Urban Living History

Tyler Rudd Putman

ABSTRACT: This article explores the aims and delivery of a living history event conducted in a contemporary urban environment. It reports on a pilot program, "Occupied Philadelphia," delivered in October 2017 by the Museum of the American Revolution in downtown Philadelphia. This program re-created events and incidents from the fall of 1777 and included a walking tour with three main stops highlighting the lives of everyday Philadelphians and British soldiers. Occupied Philadelphia provided a framework for volunteer interpreters to engage in a form of "guerilla interpretation," taking public history into unexpected places as a means of inspiring historical empathy and encouraging the public to make connections between the past and present.

KEY WORDS: living history, walking tours, guerilla interpretation, Philadelphia, American Revolution

How do we instill historical empathy for people in the past we are used to deriding or forgetting? What if you came face-to-face with one of them? Living history interpretation—costumed programs using first- or third-person speaking techniques—can evoke the mindsets and experiences not just of famous people (long the subject of theatrical performances) but also of everyday people—old and young, male and female, free and enslaved, specific and generic—in a particular historical moment. On October 14–15, 2017, the Museum of the American Revolution took its educational programming beyond its walls and into the streets of the Old City neighborhood of Philadelphia in an event called "Occupied Philadelphia," the first incarnation of an annual living history program.[1] Occupied Philadelphia re-created the early fall of 1777, when the British Army captured the capital of the United States and occupied—or, depending on your perspective, liberated—the city, displacing Congress and perhaps a third of the city's (more revolutionary-leaning) inhabitants.

1 Since Occupied Philadelphia 2017, the Museum has conducted several smaller living history events besides costumed programs offered on a daily basis. Occupied Philadelphia recurred on October 20–21, 2018, this time in collaboration with City Tavern Restaurant and the Carpenters' Company of the City and County of Philadelphia and their site, Carpenters' Hall.

THE PUBLIC HISTORIAN, Vol. 41, No. 3, pp. 31–48 (August 2019). ISSN: 0272-3433, electronic ISSN 1533-8576. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1525/tph.2019.41.3.31.

The Museum of the American Revolution opened on April 18, 2017, in a new building on the former site of a National Park Service visitor center at Third and Chestnut Streets in Philadelphia. Inside, original objects, films, immersive environments, and hands-on activity areas bring to life the people and stories of the late eighteenth century and connect guests to the story of the Revolution's ongoing history and relevance.[2] Even before the museum opened, staff anticipated that costumed living history programs would be part of the galleries and form the core of outreach efforts. Occupied Philadelphia began as the idea of R. Scott Stephenson, then the museum's Vice President for Collections, Exhibitions, and Programs (now CEO). The fall of 2017 marked the 240th anniversary of the events it would re-create, and Stephenson proposed that the museum use that anniversary as the basis for an outdoor living history program in the historic neighborhood of the museum, the same neighborhood that was at the heart of the eighteenth-century city. As the museum's Gallery Interpretation Manager, I oversee daily educational programs inside and outside of the museum's core exhibits, adult and family guided tours, hands-on activity spaces, and living history programming including events such as Occupied Philadelphia. The planning for this program began in June 2017 and involved interdepartmental and inter-site meetings and collaborations, especially between education, curatorial, guest services, advancement, and marketing specialists.

The goals of this program, as the museum's team of curators and educators determined them in the summer of 2017, would be several. First, Occupied Philadelphia would help forward the intellectual and physical position of the museum as a hub for the exploration of Revolutionary sites in the city and the region. To do so, we would surprise people with a story they might not have heard—the period of the war when Philadelphia, the birthplace of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, was under British control. Second, the program would help humanize the British Army, making its soldiers seem less like the caricatured storm troopers of Hollywood movies and television dramas and breathing life back into what were once sympathetic, real people. The museum works to inspire this sort of historical empathy in all our guests, asking them to find pieces of themselves in Revolutionary soldiers, statesmen, women, children, Native Americans, enslaved people, and others. In hindsight and in the patriotic American narrative, many people see the events of 1777–78 as a British military *occupation*. But for thousands of Philadelphians of the time, the arrival of the British was a *liberation* from, in the words of a contemporaneous British recruitment broadside, "the arbitrary Usurpations of a tyrannical Congress."[3] The museum wanted to encourage visitors and passersby to imagine the possibility of that viewpoint and to make connections

2 For a review of the museum, see George W. Boudreau, "Review: The Museum of the American Revolution, Philadelphia, PA," *The Public Historian* 40, no. 1 (February 2018): 131–36.

3 This quotation comes from a 1777 recruiting broadside for the First Battalion of Pennsylvania Loyalists. See *Early American Imprints, Series 1: Evans*, document no. 15352, http://www.readex.com/content/early-american-imprints-series-i-evans-1639-1800.

between the experience of occupation in history and more contemporary sieges and occupations.

The idea of re-creating a historical period or event in an urban and modern environment like downtown Philadelphia is not unique to the Museum of the American Revolution. Philadelphia is already home to many costumed programs, including both museum and for-profit experiences such as tours, Declaration readings, and historic house visits. Our aims were distinct in the sense that we wanted to re-create a very specific historical period (six weeks in the fall of 1777) on a large scale, in a format that connected several neighborhood sites, with a high degree of immersive accuracy. This program had equally substantial educational objectives that depended on many moving parts. As inspiration, we drew heavily on recent successful programs staged in Boston, Massachusetts, and Newport, Rhode Island. In Boston, volunteer interpreters have re-created the 1770 Massacre and other Revolutionary events.[4] In Newport, under the Newport Historical Society's Curator of Living History Elizabeth Sulock and the participation of a dedicated corps of authentic living historians, several events have restaged a Stamp Act riot, a British Naval impressment, and Newport's own 1777 British occupation.[5] The content and popularity of these events, along with a long history of outdoor living history performances at more traditional historic sites, gave us a sense of what was possible for Occupied Philadelphia and, even more importantly from a practical perspective, gave our prospective volunteer participants something to imagine when we started explaining and recruiting them for this event.[6]

4 Many living history events leave little documentary or virtual footprint. Information on these Boston programs can be found at "The 247th Commemoration of the Boston Massacre," Old State House website, http://www.bostonhistory.org/events/bostonmassacre; Revolution 250 Events website, https://revolution250.org/events/; "A Fifth of November Wagon Rolls Again," *Boston 1775* (blog), November 6, 2017, http://boston1775.blogspot.com/2017/11/a-fifth-of-november-wagon-rolls-again.html; and "The Devil and the Crown," Old State House website, http://www.bostonhistory.org/events/devil-crown.

5 For information and thoughts on Newport's programs, see "Newport Celebrates the 250th Anniversary of the Stamp Act Riots," The Public's Radio website, http://ripr.org/post/newport-celebrates-250th-anniversary-stamp-act-riots#stream/0; "The Stamp Act Protest of 2014," *Kitty Calash—Confessions of a Known Bonnet-Wearer* (blog), August 25, 2014, https://kittycalash.com/2014/08/25/the-stamp-act-protest-of-2014/; Elizabeth Sulock and Kirsten Hammerstrom: "Risky Business: Living History Events in Traditional Museums," *ALHFAM Bulletin* 46, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 5–10; Newport Historical Society website, http://newporthistory.org/events/event/naval-impressment-a-1765-reenactment-in-colonial-newport/; "Tavern on the Green," *Kitty Calash—Confessions of a Known Bonnet-Wearer* (blog), August 28, 2016, https://kittycalash.com/2016/08/28/tavern-on-the-green/; and Newport Historical Society website, http://newporthistory.org/events/event/the-1777-british-occupation-summer-living-history-event/.

6 The literature on living history interpretation, costumed performances, and the hobby of reenacting is interdisciplinary and substantial. For a variety of the most widely read commentaries on living history as a form of historical interpretation, see Jay Anderson, *Time Machines: The World of Living History* (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1984); Richard Handler and Eric Gable, *The New History in an Old Museum: Creating the Past at Colonial Williamsburg* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997); Scott Magelssen, *Living History Museums: Undoing History Through Performance* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2007); Laura L. Peers, *Playing Ourselves: Interpreting Native Histories at Historic Reconstructions* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2007); Stephen

We gathered some forty-five volunteers who met high standards for both historical authenticity and educational abilities.[7] Many of them had worked with us before as we prepared the films, photographs, and scenes that populate the museum. We wanted people whose personal "impressions" (the clothing, equipment, deportment, and appearance of a particular period that living historians assemble) were of the highest quality. Many reenactors and living historians, because of their priorities, knowledge base, or for other reasons, wear clothing and equipment that is less than accurate for their interpretive period. The Museum of the American Revolution is committed to portraying the late eighteenth century with assiduous devotion to detail—from the fit and construction of the clothing worn by actors in our films and our museum educators in daily programs to the foliage and snowfall shown in our tableaus, life-size re-creations of particular moments interspersed within the museum's exhibits. This attention is not persnickety antiquarianism. Our goal is to make the Revolution and its participants seem like real people who lived in an uncertain time, and to do so the museum's curatorial and education team ensures that clothing, for example, fits and looks like actual garments would have, not like a costume, because it allows visitors to imagine how the past was once reality.

Equally importantly, we wanted interpreters for Occupied Philadelphia who were not just interested in accuracy and their personal enjoyment of the event but who were also dedicated educators, who could talk to our guests about 1777 while pretending that it was actually 1777. In theory, in most interactions with the public and in all staged vignettes, they would be using first-person interpretive techniques. In practice, this was an event that employed what some practitioners call "soft first-person" or "first-person light" techniques in which an interpreter interacts with the public using third-person language for some or all of a particular interaction. For many of our volunteers, this event was a chance to engage in a novel sort of "guerilla interpretation," taking historical interpretation to the public where they least expected it.[8] These volunteers had participated in or heard

---

Eddy Snow, *Performing the Pilgrims: A Study of Ethnohistorical Role-Playing at Plimoth Plantation* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2008); and Amy M. Tyson, *The Wages of History: Emotional Labor on Public History's Front Lines* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2013). A comprehensive database of works on this subject is available at https://www.imtal-europe.org/searchinterpretation.html. On reenacting as a hobby, see the bibliography maintained by this author at http://www.tylerruddputman.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Reenacting-Bibliography.pdf. On the development of Revolutionary War reenacting in particular (noting, though, that many of our interpreters also reenact other periods), see Tim Clark, "When the Paraders Meet the Button-Counters at Penobscot Bay," *Yankee*, July 1980, 44–49, 129, 131–35, 139, 141, 143; S. Michael Halloran, "Text and Experience in a Historical Pageant: Toward a Rhetoric of Spectacle," *RSQ: Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 31, no. 4 (Fall 2001): 5–17; M. J. Rymsza-Pawlowska, *History Comes Alive: Public History and Popular Culture in the 1970s* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017); and Cathy Stanton, "Reenactors in the Park: A Study of External Revolutionary War Reenactment Activities at National Parks" (Boston: National Park Service and Heritage Partners, Inc., 1999), http://www.nps.gov/revwar/reenactors/.

7 The 2018 program expanded to include sixty-two total participants.

8 In this sense and as used by some living historians, "guerilla interpretation" refers to acts of public history that happen in unexpected places and engage people who might not seek out

about this sort of thing in Boston and Newport and hoped to bring it to other urban environments. We recruited them selectively based on existing networks and the participation of two organized units of reenactors, the 17th and 40th Foot regiments. Few of our participants had any formal acting training, and because many came from a distance we could not conduct any advanced training on-site. To prepare these volunteer interpreters, we provided extensive primary and secondary sources through a private Facebook page and used that same page to distribute logistical updates and manage a formal registration process. I created the page at the request of key participants because Facebook, rather than emails or printed newsletters, is now the primary way many reenactors hear about events and receive information. In the month leading up to the event, daily primary source postings offered digestible bits of information and encouraged a buildup of knowledge and enthusiasm among our participants.

For visitors, we planned for both casual, walk-up engagement with the event and a more structured experience that centered on a walking tour of three key sites.[9] On the outdoor Museum Plaza, a marketplace included a table of produce, street vendors polishing shoes and offering lessons in maritime navigation, and craftspeople making window sashes and leather shoes. Down Third Street at the original eighteenth-century Powel House (a historic house operated by the nonprofit organization PhilaLandmarks), British soldiers met Philadelphia civilians when they tried to negotiate their way into comfortable winter quarters inside the house. And at the reconstructed City Tavern around the corner, an encampment of British soldiers and their female camp followers (women who travelled with and worked for the armies of the day) portrayed everyday life in the British army.

To help visitors navigate these sites, we designed a facilitated tour to provide a clear narrative arc and route, encouraging a more extended and dynamic learning experience. Members of the public sometimes shy away from costumed interpreters, feeling nervous or awkward. Many people have no idea how to even begin an interaction with someone who is pretending it is 1777, let alone know how they might learn something from it. Museum education staff in contemporary clothing led the walking tours, providing a foundation for visitors by explaining the historic events and the program people were about to experience. These educators served as twenty-first-century interpreters who greased the wheels of conversations between guests and historical interpreters.

---

museums or historic sites. A slightly different version, involving confronting the public with surprising attitudes and facets of the past, is discussed in Stacy F. Roth, *Past into Present: Effective Techniques for First-Person Historical Interpretation* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998), esp. 102.

9 We capped each walking tour at thirty guests. Most tour groups were smaller, which was fortuitous because ambient street noise made it difficult for our guides to be heard by larger groups during the walking portions of the tours. A new tour began every half hour, allowing enough space between groups for interpreters at the different stations to prepare for the next group and engage non-tour members of the public.

Program Facilitator Andy Wineman leads a tour of Occupied Philadelphia. (Photo Courtesy of Museum of the American Revolution)

Total museum admission for October 14–15 was 2603, and approximately three hundred people participated in the walking tours (which were free with admission).[10] Museum staff stationed at our two satellite sites estimated that approximately half the people they saw visit the sites were not on walking tours, and that most of these were not museum ticketholders, indicating that the programming was introducing the museum and its educational initiatives to people who might not otherwise have encountered it.

To help visitors engage with our interpreters and add depth to their experiences, we provided them with a small packet of materials. This packet was inspired, in part, by the materials distributed to visitors who participated in Colonial Williamsburg's RevQuest programs in 2013–15. Stephenson's conception for this packet was that it would unlock the guest experience, adding depth that might be lost by more casual engagements. It contained a folded color brochure that introduced the event, provided historic context on the Philadelphia Campaign, included a map of the neighborhood and our three sites, and encouraged guests to interact with people in

10 The 2018 program included a total museum admission of 2054, with 291 walking tour participants (in 2018, the walking tours were sold at an additional upcharge to museum admission). Besides walking tour participants, our two partner sites in 2018 received 425 visitors (City Tavern's rear yard) and 1257 visitors (Carpenters' Hall).

costume by offering conversation-starting questions.[11] These questions were inspired by the previous work by one of our curators, Mark Turdo, at other sites.[12] Guests used them in various ways, such as when two children walked up to a couple of our interpreters, who were busily gossiping while one polished a silver bowl. "Excuse me," asked one of the children, referring to her sheet, "Is this an occupation or a liberation?" The interpreter looked up from the bowl, considered the question, and said, "Well, there's more money now." In the hands of such skilled interpreters, these questions became springboards into engagements about just how complicated things were in 1777. For many people, whoever was managing the city—Loyalist officials and British troops or Congress and Continental soldiers—was less important than the price of bread.

Another folded sheet displayed the cover page of *Plain Truth*, a Loyalist pamphlet printed in Philadelphia in 1776. But this *Plain Truth* was a ruse suggested by one of our curators, and concealed inside the fold, like the old joke about a comic book hidden inside a *National Geographic*, were the instructions for a spy challenge.[13] Visitors' mission, if they chose to accept it, was to collect information about the British Army at each of their three tour stops and inside the museum. Look closely at British buttons in the soldiers' camp, for example, the packet hinted to guests, and you could identify which regiments they were from, key information for Washington and his army.

To strike a balance between the fun of acting as an American spy and the museum's educational goals, we ensured that the spy challenge required engagement with interpreters and concluded with a summation experience. Anyone who completed the spy challenge, be they part of a walking tour or not, was instructed to look for the spymaster, curator Matthew Skic, in period clothing and identifiable by a green sprig in his cap (a wartime emblem of the American cause). When approached by spying guests, Skic would take them off to the side, jot down notes about the intelligence they gathered, and reward them with a reproduction pewter American button, emblazoned with "USA."

This button, Skic explained to them, was a new emblem of the Continental Army. With many visitors, he ended their conversations by referring back to Thomas Paine's *American Crisis*, published just a year before, and reminding them that they were still in the midst of "the times that try men's souls." Skic rewarded 167 spies with buttons. Approximately 50 percent of walking tour participants completed the spy challenge, which was also available to non-walking tour museum visitors.

11 A separate flier distributed inside the museum connected stories from various occupied cities—Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Charleston—with particular spaces and objects in the Museum galleries.

12 One of Turdo's guides, "To Wipe Off the Tears: The Treaty of Easton and the Lehigh Valley, 1755–1758," prepared for a series of events run in 2002 by the Moravian Historical Society, is available at https://www.scribd.com/doc/61492618/To-Wipe-Off-the-Tears-Guide.

13 Espionage was a real part of the Revolutionary War, and was recently popularized by AMC's television show *Turn: Washington's Spies*.

Associate Curator Matthew Skic engages in surreptitious espionage with guests. (Photo courtesy of Museum of the American Revolution)

Each tour guest also received two pieces of reproduction Continental currency and a small blank British loyalty oath they might choose to sign. We were not quite sure how these pieces would work in practice. In hindsight, I would have placed the loyalty oaths not in guests' packets but at a station they would encounter, where a British soldier might convince them of the judiciousness of signing the form.[14] As part of the packet, the oaths were sometimes overlooked by guests and we had not incorporated a particular moment into the tours for them to use them, though a few triumphantly waved signed ones in front of the redcoats to announce their loyalty—ironically rebellious from a contemporary, patriotic perspective.[15]

The currency, on the other hand, inspired more meaningful interactions with interpreters. Many visitors approached tables on our re-created market, currency in hand, and used a question the orientation flyer suggested: "What can I buy with this Continental currency?" In British Philadelphia in the fall of 1777, of course, the

14 Indeed in 2018, a table-based station on the museum's plaza, staffed by interpreters portraying the Queen's Rangers (Loyalists) had much more success, convincing several hundred people to swear allegiance to the King in exchange for a customized loyalty oath. Thanks to Travis Shaw, Clayton Willets, and Davis Tierney for staffing this program.

15 For insights into the usage rates of our various educational materials as discussed here, I am grateful to the talented staff educators who led the 2017 walking tours and completed evaluation forms: Meg Bowersox, Bob Carter, Catherine Ensslen, Kellie Haines, Andy Wineman, Mike Wronski, and Amy Yandek.

answer was absolutely nothing because Congress, an illegal body in the eyes of the British, had no authority to issue money and had fled town. The interpreters who manned a long table piled with cabbages and beets, which I had purchased at near-rotten stage from a market in the city for this purpose, played up this reaction magnificently. "What is this?" one interpreter questioned, "Paper Continental money?" He had a couple period coins that he held up, displaying them to guests. "I need hard money," he demanded, "Coin! Like this!" He even took the paper money from the guests and flung it away as worthless.

Interpreters on the plaza market. (Photo courtesy of Museum of the American Revolution)

Occasionally, the market also produced interactions that bridged the gap between 1777 and 2017 thanks to the skill and spontaneity of interpreters. At the produce table, a young girl came up with a bag of pretzels. She tried to catch the interpreter unawares. "What can I buy with these?" she teased. The interpreter, Keith Minsinger, did not bat an eye before responding to her. He took the bag of pretzels, studied it, and read the ingredients aloud. He looked at his pile of beets. "For this," he declared, pointing at the pretzels, "Three beets." He pushed the beets towards the girl. She was shocked, and her eyes widened. She grabbed the beets, running away shouting gleefully, "I got three beets!" Minsinger, who remained in character, had used the interaction to impart a small lesson in the barter economy

without falling into the old and easy trap of first-person interpreters who ignore modern anachronisms or treat them as baffling objects.

Foregrounding the market and making it the first stop on walking tours meant that this program was more about civilians than the military. Yes, the city was occupied and much of our promotional material focused on redcoated soldiers. But by starting in a civilian market where the only soldier in sight was an occasional sentry, we reminded guests that not everyone was a soldier. In Philadelphia in 1777, many people went about their everyday lives without seeing many more soldiers than Americans see policemen today.[16] Additionally, the city had been a hub of Continental Army activity for two years by 1777, so after a brief period of panic and uncertainty when the British arrived, soldiers were not a very exciting sight, even if the color of their coats had changed. More broadly, foregrounding civilian experiences meant that everyday people in 2017 might more readily imagine themselves in 1777. Raised as many people are on a triumphal narrative of the Revolutionary War that favors patriot soldiers and civilians, it takes a leap of the imagination for many Americans to empathize with other figures, especially British soldiers. Beginning with the sympathetic concerns of the people on the market—a house carpenter whose livelihood depended on new construction or a food vendor unsure how to value paper money—offered the first, gradual step into a more empathetic view of neutrals, Loyalists, and British soldiers.

Racial diversity was a common part of civilian life in Philadelphia in 1777 and today, but it was lacking in our costumed interpretation of civilian life in the occupied city. At a market in 1777, you would have seen free and enslaved Africans and African Americans buying and selling goods, and portraying this would allow us to tell important personal stories that might resonate with more Philadelphians today. Our interpreter base for this event, however, was primarily white. Because of the relatively white demography of the hobby of reenacting (from which we drew our participants), our selectiveness in recruiting participants (further narrowing the potential pool to those who met our educational and accuracy

16 We were lucky to have prodigious secondary historical scholarship to draw on regarding this subject. On the occupation, see John W. Jackson, *With the British Army in Philadelphia, 1777–1778* (San Rafael, CA: Presidio Press, 1979); Darlene Emmert Fisher, "Social Life in Philadelphia during the British Occupation," *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 37, no. 3 (July 1970): 237–60; and Willard O. Mishoff, "Business in Philadelphia during the British Occupation," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 61, no. 2 (April 1937): 165–81. On Philadelphia civilians of this period, see Clare A. Lyons, *Sex among the Rabble: An Intimate History of Gender and Power in the Age of Revolution, Philadelphia, 1730–1830* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Simon P. Newman, *Embodied History: The Lives of the Poor in Early Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003); Steven J. Rosswurm, *Arms, Country, and Class: The Philadelphia Militia and the Lower Sort during the American Revolution* (New Brunswick, NJ, and London: Rutgers University Press, 1987); Billy Gordon Smith, *The Lower Sort: Philadelphia's Laboring People, 1750–1800* (Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 1990); Peter Thompson, *Rum Punch & Revolution: Taverngoing & Public Life in Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998); and Karin Wulf, *Not All Wives: Women of Colonial Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005).

standards), and because the event was unpaid (again, limiting our participants to locals or people who could afford to travel for it), it was difficult to identify and attract people of color to volunteer as living history interpreters in our first year. A number of historic sites have made efforts to increase the diversity of their front-line staff in recent years. In 2019, the museum began an initiative called "Diversify Living History" and a public program series called "Meet the Revolution" that are cultivating a more diverse staff and volunteer base so we can tell these stories through costumed living history events as well as through tours and other educational programs.[17] People of color found freedom by fleeing to British lines and working for the British Army, enslaved people worked and lived in occupied Philadelphia, and the Museum's exhibits and year-round programming highlight these stories.[18] Future incarnations of Occupied Philadelphia need to feature a wider diversity of people to better represent the past but also offer more perspectives and opportunities for empathetic engagement with our diverse visitors and neighborhood residents.

Once they had explored the market, our educators led walking tour guests south down Third Street. The whole route is largely devoid of original eighteenth-century buildings, but this had its advantages. We had trained our educators in a model walking tour and provided a tour outline, and each one customized their tours as we taught them to do with their tours inside the museum. They used the post-Revolutionary War built environment to point out the 1790s First National Bank, the apartment house that stands on the site of revolutionary statesman James Wilson's house (made famous as "Fort Wilson" thanks to a 1779 riot), St. Paul's Church (heavily remodeled in the nineteenth century but in 1777 the

17 On the roles and perspectives of African Americans engaged in living history and reenacting in particular, see Mark Auslander, "Touching the Past: Materializing Time in Traumatic 'Living History' Reenactments," *Signs and Society* 1, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 161–83; Henry B. Crawford, "Reliving History, Revisiting Heritage: Personal Perspective on African American Living History Reenacting," *Interpretation* 4, no. 1, 2 (1999): 31–34; Patricia G. Davis, "Ripping the Veil: Collective Memory and Black Southern Identity" (PhD dissertation, University of California, San Diego, 2009); Steward Henderson, "My Life as a Black Civil War Living Historian ('Part One' through 'Part Six' and 'Conclusion')," *Emerging Civil War* (blog), June 2013, https://emergingcivilwar.com/tag/henderson-memoir/; Scott Magelssen, *Simming: Participatory Performance and the Making of Meaning* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014); Cathy Stanton and Stephen Belyea, "'Their Time Will Yet Come': The African American Presence in Civil War Reenactment," in *Hope and Glory: Essays on the Legacy of the Fifty-Fourth Massachusetts Regiment*, ed. Martin H. Blatt, Thomas J. Brown, and Donald Yacovone (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), 253–74; Michael W. Twitty, "The Unbearable Taste," *Common-Place* 11, no. 3 (April 2011), http://www.common-place.org/vol-11/no-03/twitty/; Michael W. Twitty, *The Cooking Gene: A Journey Through African American Culinary History in the Old South* (New York: HarperCollins, 2017); and Amy M. Tyson and Azie Mira Dungey, "'Ask a Slave' and Interpreting Race on Public History's Front Line: Interview with Azie Mira Dungey," *The Public Historian* 36, no. 1 (February 2014): 36–60.

18 As part of the 2018 program, educators used a hands-on activity cart featuring images and replica objects to tell stories and encourage conversations about race, slavery, and freedom in occupation-period Philadelphia. This cart program was developed by Jacob Grossman, a Program Facilitator at the Museum, based on his master's thesis on the same subjects, "The Occupation of Philadelphia and Public History" (MA Thesis, Temple University, 2017).

site of a British hospital[19]), the parking lot where Robert Bell's print shop (source of both *Common Sense* and *Plain Truth*) once stood, and other long-gone Revolutionary sites.

Our market was a civilian world. Travelling down Third Street to a historic house, visitors might have expected more civilian stories in a traditional domestic space.[20] Instead, when they arrived at the Powel House, the only extant eighteenth-century house in our immediate vicinity, they stood at the nexus of the civilian and the military worlds. In the fall of 1777, British officers were keen to move in to the city's finer homes as winter lodgers. On October 6, for example, Quaker diarist Elizabeth Drinker (1735–1807) wrote that "an Officer call'd this Afternoon to ask if we could take in a Sick or Wounded Captain" as a lodger in her home. "I put him off by saying that as my Husband was from me, I should be pleas'd if he could provide some other convenient place, he hop'd no offence, and departed."[21] The Powel family avoided lodgers in their home as well for most of the winter. Our interpreters used primary and secondary accounts of civilian life in the city and at the Powel House to turn house's porch, sidewalk, and yard into the scene of civilian-military relations.

Depending on when they arrived at the Powel House, visitors saw British soldiers haranguing townspeople, loafing, loading baggage into the house, staging sidewalk footraces, and halting suspicious characters. Occasionally a sailor wandered down from the market, ran into sentries, and was questioned about his activities. The interpreters also treated the street as part of their scene, announcing their presence by shouting to pedestrians across the street whose looks they did not like and talking with curious contemporary Powel House neighbors who came out onto their own stoops. On Sunday morning, inside the Powel House, two professional actors staged a short theatrical vignette about the Powels in May of 1778.[22] This scene took the walking tours into the house and through several rooms as Samuel and Elizabeth debated their choices that fateful spring. Meanwhile, British soldiers made themselves at home in their parlor.

19 The British dug graves in the yard, as one resident remembered it, "in which the dead were thrown wrapped in the clothes in which they died, without coffins. After many showers arms & legs projected above the ground." Whitfield J. Bell, Jr., ed., "Addenda to Watson's Annals of Philadelphia, Notes by Jacob Mordecai, 1836," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 98, no. 2 (April 1974): 149.

20 Some historic houses, of course, are also attempting to shake up these expectations. See especially Franklin D. Vagnone and Deborah E. Ryan, *Anarchist's Guide to Historic House Museums* (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, Inc., 2016).

21 Elizabeth Drinker, diary, October 6, 1777, "Document 160," *North American Women's Letters and Diaries, Colonial to 1950*, http://nwld.alexanderstreet.com.udel.idm.oclc.org/cgi-bin/asp/philo/nwld/getdoc.pl? S8567-D160. In 2018, we activated Drinker's story with an informal program in which visitors could meet Elizabeth Drinker and her servant, Nanny Oat, portrayed by interpreters Elizabeth Sulock and Mary Elizabeth Corrigan, respectively.

22 These actors were hired by PhilaLandmarks and paid for by the museum. They developed their script based on primary and secondary sources in collaboration with PhilaLandmarks staff.

Interpreters engage guests near the Powel House. (Photo courtesy of Museum of the American Revolution)

In the fall of 1777, soldiers were encamped out the outskirts of the city as they awaited more permanent winter housing. But just as we had used the Powel House for generic vignettes depicting things that happened at other Philadelphia townhouses, we used the third tour stop at City Tavern's rear yard as a place to evoke the world of the British military and the camps that were more far-flung. Reconstructed in the 1970s, City Tavern now offers meals and experiences that evoke eighteenth-century dining under Chef Walter Staib. City Tavern's highly visible yard, like our plaza and the Powel House's sidewalk, gave interpreters a place to surprise and engage casual passersby as well as dedicated guests. The National Park Service, which oversees the property, granted us permission to erect soldiers' tents and re-create a British Army encampment. City Tavern Restaurant and Chef Staib partnered with us to feed our participants during the event.[23] We issued food from period vessels in the form of a military ration and meals were integrated into the interpretive programming of this event rather than hidden away, making food part of guest conversations. Food preparation and eating is a compelling way to

23 The museum paid for these meals on a per-head basis that fit within a pre-existing budget thanks to the gracious cooperation of Chef Walter Staib and City Tavern Restaurant.

Interpreters engage passersby over the fence of City Tavern Restaurant's rear yard. (Photo courtesy of Museum of the American Revolution)

humanize people in the past and connect contemporary audiences to a transhistoric process, even if only as observers. From a logistical perspective, feeding our participants on-site served as a form of compensation for our volunteer interpreters and guaranteed that they remained in place for the duration of the event instead of leaving their sites for meals elsewhere.

City Tavern's backyard was our military encampment. At this station, guests were immersed in the world of the British Army as soldiers drilled alongside guests, repaired clothing, and sent out sentry details and patrols. Interspersed with the soldiers were female camp followers whose presence surprised many guests. Old myths relegate such women to the roles of prostitutes, but recent studies have demonstrated that armies of the period saw these women (most of whom were married to soldiers) and their children as integral components of military campaigns. They worked as seamstresses, laundresses, food vendors, and in other roles and received food rations, all of which we re-created at City Tavern and elsewhere.[24]

24 On camp followers, see Holly Mayer, *Belonging to the Army: Camp Followers and Community during the American Revolution* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999); and Nancy K. Loane, *Following the Drum: Women at the Valley Forge Encampment* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2009). See also John U. Rees, "'The proportion of Women which ought to be allowed . . . ': An Overview of Continental Army Female Camp Followers," *The Continental Soldier* VIII, no. 3 (Spring 1995): 51–58, and "'The Multitude of women . . . ': An Examination of the Numbers of Female Camp

After an hour on the tour, visitors arrived back at the Museum Plaza from which they could enter the museum or revisit other sites. Early in our planning process, I had advocated for some sort of concluding conversation, perhaps where guests would be asked, having seen so much, to choose which side they would have favored in 1777. In the end, our educators concluded the tours more informally as an accommodation to varying visitor preferences and in acknowledgment of the existing length of the tour experience. In future iterations, I would like to experiment with different ways to conclude tours that might provide clearer finales and generate more conversations with and among guests. For example, although our staff and volunteers reported occasional interactions that connected the events of 1777 with more recent invasions and occupations, staging some sort of final interaction about these subjects would encourage more guests to make these connections and take what they learned about 1777 into the present.[25]

In addition to the walking tour, and to provide guests and participants with some structured variety, we planned a few larger, semi-scripted scenes over the course of the weekend. A sort of kick-off ceremony at ten o'clock on Saturday morning involved a military formation, an unfurling of the period British flag, and a fifer playing "God Save the King." But it caused hardly a stir on a Saturday morning in Philadelphia. This is a neighborhood, after all, well used to pomp and circumstance, ceremonies, Revolutionary soldiers, and fife music. People hardly batted an eye when a column of British soldiers formed up along Third Street.

Instead, the events that caught people in their tracks, that made them look up from their phones, stop walking, and gather closer, were the ones that were less self-consciously spectacular. We introduced some with a third-person narration and conclusion that prepared guests for a scene and explained its context (allowing a moment for viewers to prepare for time travel). Others were even less formal. At 4:00 p.m. on Saturday, for example, at the suggestion of one of our volunteer interpreters, we staged an interrogation of potential deserter-sailors. In the fall of 1777, with the Americans effectively blockading the city, it had been weeks since any ships arrived or left the port. Languishing in Philadelphia's taverns and boarding houses were dozens of out-of-work sailors, and some of them had checkered pasts

---

Followers with the Continental Army," *The Brigade Dispatch* XXIII-XXIV, nos. 4–2 (Autumn 1992-Spring 1993); and Don N. Hagist, "The Women of the British Army in America," *The Brigade Dispatch* XXIV-XXV, nos. 3–2 (Summer 1994-Spring 1995). These articles are also available online at *RevWar'75*, http://www.revwar75.com/library/index.htm.

25 For a reflection on this aspect of the event written by a participant interpreter, see Kirsten Hammerstrom, "Occupation as Liberation," *Kitty Calash—Confessions of a Known Bonnet-Wearer* (blog), October 16, 2017, https://kittycalash.com/2017/10/16/occupation-as-liberation/. Another post-event commentary by a participant is Bryan Kennedy, "Context," *Drunktailor*, October 17, 2017, http://drunktailor.blogspot.com/2017/10/context.html. At the 2018 program, Hammerstrom portrayed widow Elizabeth Weed, who assumed control of her late husband's medical business in 1777, and Kennedy portrayed Thomas Nevell, a carpenter and Weed's future husband. Along with living historian Asher Lurie, they activated the interior of Carpenters' Hall to reimagine its probable occupation use as a military hospital. Hammerstrom published a series of blog entries (October 22–26, 2018) documenting her research and delivery of this aspect of the 2018 program.

as former British naval sailors. The British authorities knew this and called for any such seamen "belonging to any of his Majesty's ships or vessels of war, now in or about this town, to give themselves up."[26] The alternative was to wait it out and hope that no one recognized you.

And so, towards the end of the day's programs on Saturday, a column of British soldiers marched up from their camp behind City Tavern and jumped into action. I had imagined some sort of formal start to this vignette, but it began almost instantly. Voices were raised, the redcoats dispersed themselves around the market, and very quickly they had rounded up anyone who looked like a sailor. The redcoats roughed up the sailors, interpreters who quickly fallen into different postures, some almost cowering and pleading that they had never set foot on a ship in their lives and others protesting that they were free-born Americans with no debt to the British Navy. The soldiers asked them pointed questions about their past services, inspected their hands for telltale callouses, and even proposed that they recognized a man or two from the transport ships from their Atlantic crossing. Shortly before the vignette, one sailor interpreter had asked me for a sharpie marker. In a few moments, he had inked period tattoos on the men's hands, a dead giveaway in some instances that they were seamen. The British hauled off several protesting sailors.

Interpreters stage an interrogation and arrest of sailors on the Museum's plaza. (Photo courtesy of Museum of the American Revolution)

26 Announcement, *Pennsylvania Ledger or the Weekly Advertiser*, October 10, 1777.

I was nervous about how this vignette would end. We had not scripted a conclusion, and when I detached myself enough to look around, I realized that dozens of people were gathered on our plaza—far more than the thirty we had expected to arrive with the walking tour—and I worried that the scene would end with a whimper that left it unclear what had happened or what observers should do next. But then one of our staff members—curator Matthew Skic, who had been playing the role of spymaster all weekend—picked up a half-rotten lime from a market table, stood in the back of the crowd of spectators, and threw it at the soldiers. The redcoats bristled, turned, and hauled him out of the crowd. As they rifled his clothing, a small book fell to the ground. It was filled with his notes, acquired from eager spy-guests, on troop strengths, strategic plans, and the British Army's locations. Visitors watched closely to see what would happen next.

No one had planned this. Few people in the crowd had any idea what it meant. All of the resources we had provided and the preparations we had done with our participants and staff would inform how they conducted themselves next, but it was impossible to predict how people in the crowd would react. The soldiers, jubilant now, forgot the sailors and crowed that they had caught someone who really mattered—a spy! Eyes widened. Skic protested, loudly. And as the soldiers hauled him off, kicking and shouting, the crowd of spectators did something quite unexpected. They cheered.

I doubt the visitors had been converted into British sympathizers. But for the briefest of moments, some people had found themselves at eye-level with redcoats and civilians and felt like participants rather than witnesses. We had captured people who might never come through our museum doors—people walking their dogs, running their errands, or touring Old City—in an emotional experience of history. This was done with amateur, skilled interpreters with a deep historical knowledge but little formal acting training. There was no stage or any acoustic amplification. Visitors stood on a concrete Museum Plaza in a modern architectural scene 240 years after the fact. But they felt themselves participants in the scene, transported into a moment that they felt was real enough—or realistic enough—that they were drawn into it wholeheartedly. Many of them had arrived at the museum with little knowledge of 1777 and certainly with little or no sympathy for a British Army that had apparently occupied the city. But Occupied Philadelphia brought them into contact with viewpoints and people who made the events of 1777 seem much more complex and human. Perhaps Philadelphia had been liberated after all.

• • • • •

Tyler Rudd Putman is the Gallery Interpretation Manager at the Museum of the American Revolution and a PhD candidate in the History of American Civilization Program in the Department of History at the University of Delaware.

Thanks to the staff of the Museum of the American Revolution, especially R. Scott Stephenson, Hannah Boettcher, Meg Bowersox, Elizabeth A. Grant, Kevin Heim, Emma Hollier, Philip Mead, Becky Phipps, Allison Schell, Matthew Skic, Mark A. Turdo, Adrienne Whaley, and members of the education and guest services staffs. Occupied Philadelphia 2017 would not have been possible without collaborations with the staffs of City Tavern Restaurant and PhilaLandmarks and, most importantly, the voluntary participation of members the 17th and 40th Regiments of Foot and other civilian living historians. Thanks to Nicole Belolan, Brandyn Charlton, Kyle Dalton, Michelle Gabrielson, Elizabeth Sulock, and Matthew C. White for their advice on the 2017 program.