

# Survivance Stories, Co-Creation, and a Participatory Model at the Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center

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## INTRODUCTION

In the fall of 2013, the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation celebrated its thirtieth anniversary as a federally recognized tribe and sovereign Indian nation, still residing on its historic reservation in New London County, southeastern Connecticut (Figure 1). This journey began in October of 1983 when their political and legal status was confirmed by Congress's passage of the "Mashantucket Pequot Indian Land Claims Settlement Act." Fifteen years later in August 1998, after much effort and at a cost of almost \$194 million, the tribe opened its Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center (MPMRC) with 85,000 square feet of exhibition space, two libraries, state-of-the-art archive and

collections spaces, and educational classrooms (Figure 2). Today the MPMRC is still tribally owned and managed, and its annual operating budget is heavily subsidized by the tribe's casino-based economy.

Tribal members regularly use the museum for meetings, as an educational center for its youth, and as a gathering place for ceremonies including inaugurations, commencements, weddings and funerals, and pow-wows. The public—including school groups, tourists, and families from southern New England and beyond—also actively use MPMRC. Between 2009 and 2014, museum visitors, including all public groups but not tribal members, numbered between 72,000 and 52,000,

## ABSTRACT

Since opening its doors in 1998, the Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center (MPMRC) has had an identity as both a tribal center and a museum committed to challenging the public's conventional understandings of Native history in New England. Over a 15-year period, museum staff and the tribal community learned to work more collaboratively in an effort to document and illuminate Pequot survivance—the histories of Mashantucket families living and working in and against the modern world. A review of recent museum projects clarifies the benefits of collaboration while revealing how new exhibits and programs are impacting visitor experiences and understandings. Another kind of museum space is envisioned in which visitors, staff, and tribal members actively co-create exhibits and programs centered on Pequot survivance, using content informed by ongoing archaeological studies. In that space, co-creation practices would encourage social interaction—a collaborative pushing-and-pulling of ideas and stories in a shared search for new understandings of survivance at Mashantucket and beyond.

Desde su apertura en 1998, el centro de investigaciones y museo Mashantucket Pequot (MPMRC) se ha identificado como un centro comunitario y museo comprometido a desafiar la visión convencional de la historia de los pueblos originarios de New England. En los últimos 15 años el personal del museo y la comunidad originaria han aprendido a trabajar en estrecha colaboración, en un esfuerzo por documentar y traer a la luz la experiencia Pequot—las historias de las familias Mashantucket que residen y trabajan por y en contra de un mundo moderno. Una revisión de los proyectos recientes del museo muestran los beneficios de la colaboración, al mismo tiempo que ilustran como las nuevas exhibiciones y programas tienen un impacto en las experiencias y conocimientos del visitante. Dentro del museo se ha visualizado otro espacio en el que los visitantes, el personal del museo y los miembros de los pueblos originarios de la zona puedan constantemente crear de forma conjunta exhibiciones y programas centrados en la experiencia Pequot, mediante el uso de contenidos generados por los estudios arqueológicos en curso. En ese espacio, las prácticas de creación en colaboración alentarían la interacción social—una colaboración dinámica y generadora de ideas e historias en una búsqueda compartida de nuevos entendimientos en torno a Mashantucket y mas allá de.

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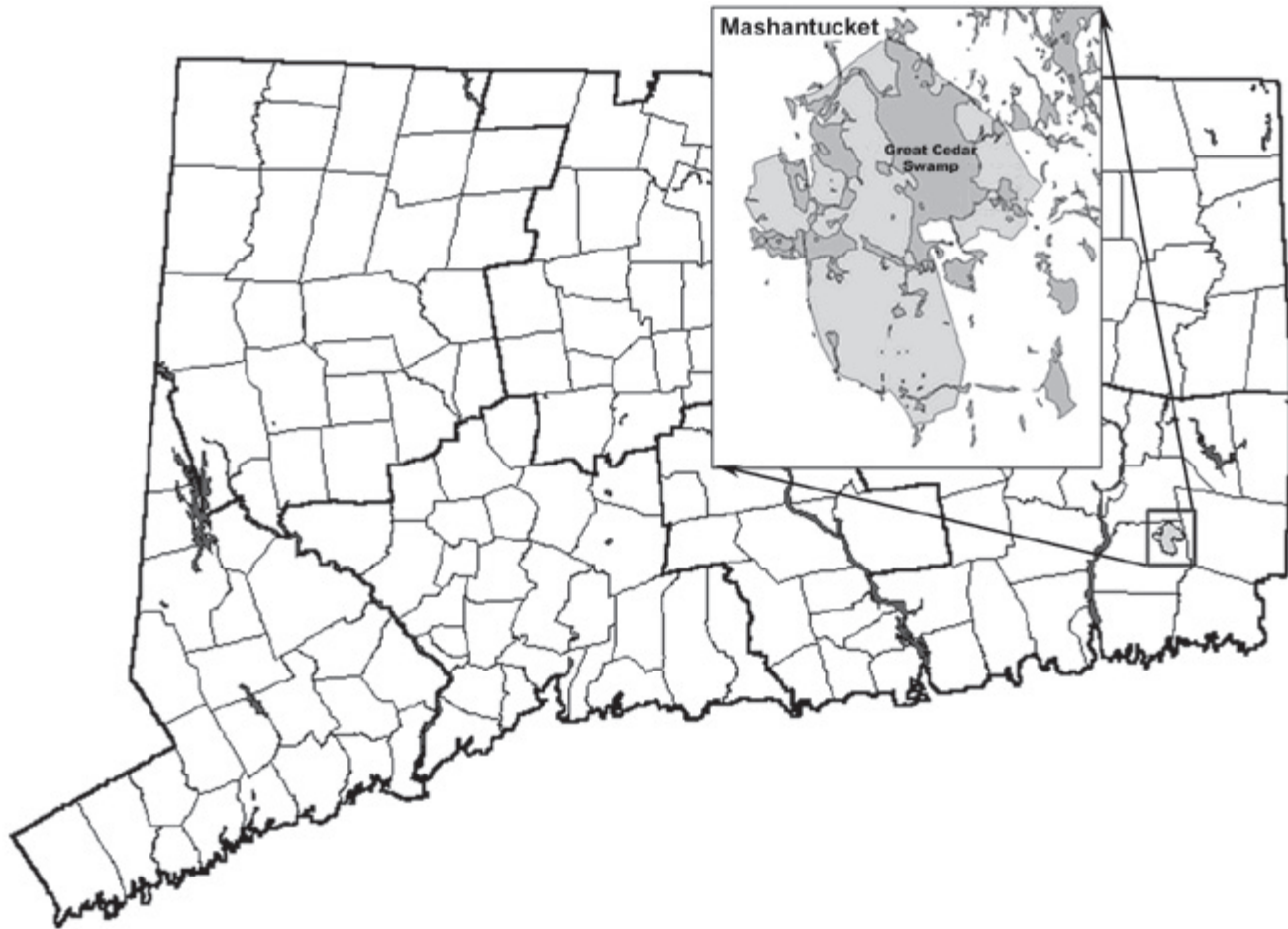


FIGURE 1. The Location of the Mashantucket Pequot Reservation in the State of Connecticut.

accounting for 90 percent of total visitation. The MPMRC's dual identity—as both tribal place and public space—was always part of the institution's original vision and is still being redefined and reworked by initiatives in research and public programming. By looking closely at several projects undertaken between 2008 and 2013, we can illuminate how that dual identity helped shape the development of new exhibits and visitor studies while clarifying the need for innovative approaches to future exhibits and programs. More specifically, this study documents the values and challenges of collaboration and co-creation in tribal settings while contributing to the still-growing literature on theory and practices (Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson 2008; Lonetree 2012).<sup>1</sup>

In our view, collaboration and co-creation are closely related and interconnected, but different. Collaborative museum projects are organized around a team of diverse stakeholders who together identify goals, undertake research, and envision specific end products (Simon 2010a). The co-creation process, while always collaborative, is more shaped by the active participation of museum visitors and a commitment to engage them in an ongoing, give-and-take process of participatory conversation, dialogue, and idea sharing (Moyer 2007; Simon 2010b). In co-created spaces, visitor experiences are less directed and more open to exploratory learning and social interaction. A commit-

ment to collaboration is necessary to co-creation, but collaboration in and of itself won't necessarily result in participatory visitor experiences.

In addition, collaborative and co-created projects often have a thematic, interpretive focus. Ours is on the recovery and representation of indigenous histories of survivance—histories of how Native peoples lived and worked in a world of always-changing political economies while maintaining their cultural identities and communities (Atalay 2006; Vizenor 2008). Still underrepresented in museums, survivance histories arguably provide an invaluable approach for creating specific spaces and programs that challenge the public's misunderstandings (or unawareness) of Native resistance, endurance (Cipolla 2013a), and survival, while undercutting common assumptions about Indian-ness and authenticity.

Survivance stories are becoming more common in some museum settings (Atalay 2006; Erikson 2002), as many tribal museums are being (re)created as both community places and sites of civic engagement (Little 2007; Shackel 2005). In these spaces, the public, tribal members, archaeologists, and other stakeholders are in a constant dialogue about many issues, from social justice to stewardship, which are inherently tied to the preservation and heritage of the past. There are few case studies



**FIGURE 2.** Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center.



**FIGURE 3.** View of the Museum's Pequot Village. This life-sized, walk-in, immersive environment is a visitor favorite.

detailing how new exhibits and programs about survivance can emerge through this co-creative, collaborative process of initial planning and development, community-based research, formative evaluation, subsequent program revision and delivery, and later assessment (Moyer 2007). This study responds to that need while also exploring how survivance can become a key pathway for developing more participatory, tribal museum-based experiences through co-creation.

## FROM PARTICIPATION TO COLLABORATION: HOW THE PEQUOT MUSEUM'S EXHIBITS CHANGED

The MPMRC's permanent exhibits include immersive, life-sized dioramas, computerized, touch-screen interactives, and small theaters, interspersed with graphic panels and object cases. The lower floor spans the time between the late glacial period and the Pequot War, while the second floor's spaces are devoted to the Reservation period, from A.D. 1675 to the present day. Throughout, the narrative approach is resolutely archaeological, shaped by findings from MPMRC's research program, as visitors are guided along a pathway beginning with an escalator ride down through a glacier and then progressing chronologically through an eco-evolutionary account of Mashantucket's past. For many visitors, the highlight of the first floor is the life-sized, walk-in diorama depicting everyday life in a Pequot village, ca. A.D. 1200, with its *wetu* (wigwams), outside activity areas, garden, and shell midden (Figure 3).

In the Reservation-period galleries, the tribe's post-seventeenth-century histories are represented by a series of "metonymic

biographic scenes" in which the experiences of named, historic Mashantucket Pequot are used as entry points to explore the dynamics of Indian-colonial interactions, land and resource losses, and changing household economies. For example, the tragically short life of Hannah Ocuish provides a setting for studies of childhood indenture and social justice in the 1780s, while whaler Peter George's maritime experiences in the 1820s and 1830s leads to discussions of off-reservation work and its contributions to community life. Two-thirds of the way through these exhibits, the focus shifts to the twentieth century and the Mashantucket's successful efforts to become federally recognized and rebuild their reservation-based economy. A final space, "A Tribal Portrait," represents the community's diversity through contemporary photographic portraits in which tribal members give voice to their identities. In its entirety, the original Reservation-period space was consciously developed to challenge the myth of Pequot Indian extinction by providing visitors with a well-documented narrative of a living community's persistence and revival (Anthes 2008; Bodinger de Uriarte 2007; Lawlor 2005).

The hard work of developing and designing these initial exhibits took place in the early-to-mid 1990s when museums were still learning about collaboration. An outside design firm worked closely with an executive planning team of anthropologists and a few tribal members (from the same family line) to produce a final concept plan (DMCD Incorporated 1993), most of which was then implemented over the next five years. The process involved some community members—especially tribal elders—whose knowledge, family archives, and support were actively solicited, but it was not a "real" collaboration with jointly developed goals and full stakeholder participation (Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson 2008). The public, whether as local educators, museum supporters, or future visitors, was not

involved in any of the planning as would have happened in a true co-creation process. Nevertheless, the museum's original exhibits, when they opened, were a unique resource in southern New England, offering new insights on the long-term cultural histories of Mashantucket Pequot peoples while documenting their continuing presence as an indigenous community.

Things began to change in the museum's tenth anniversary year (2008) when new leadership, ongoing research, tribal concerns, and initial visitor studies provided a context for a systematic critique of the Reservation-period galleries as well as some imaginative reflection about what those spaces might become (Handsman 2010a). Over the next five years, five projects were undertaken, including the development of a concept plan (2008–2009), two short-term exhibits (2008–2009), one permanent installation (2010–2011), and one new technology-based experience for visitors (2012–2013) described in the following section.<sup>2</sup> The museum-based project team was comprised of Mashantucket Pequot staff members, other tribal representatives, non-Native staff with expertise in education and research, and outside consultants from anthropology and exhibit design, working together under the direction of MPMRC's then Executive Director Kimberly Hatcher from the Mashantucket Pequot community. The collaborative team was inclusive and active, meeting bi-weekly to identify and finalize project goals, share research findings, discuss and argue out emerging themes, visit other museums, review design plans, and edit both text panels and images. The process was labor-intensive, demanding a shared sense of institutional priorities and the partial emergence of a new culture of negotiation and compromise.

Our thematic focus was Native survivance (Vizenor 1984, 1990), those ongoing histories of Indian peoples being Native and American all at once: having to live and work in and against the colonial and modern worlds, while preserving traditions, holding onto ancestral lands, finding new places, and rebuilding communities (Clifford 2004, 2007; Handsman 2012a; Raibmon 2005). Much more than survival, survivance stories are about "creative acts of resistance" (Atalay 2006; Phillips 1998) that are often counterintuitive and unexpected (Deloria 2004). Survivance stories also challenge persistent stereotypes and the myth of authenticity, while recounting how Indian communities confronted ever-changing state policies (Thrush 2007) and race-based ideologies (Handsman 2015). Survivance experiences are always diverse within a community—varying by generation, household, family, and gender—a reality that complicates both research and representation.

Survivance stories were almost entirely absent from New England museums before the 1990s. That began to change in the Columbian Quincentenary era (1990–2000) as new research was published (Calloway 1997) and tribal communities became more politically active. But even then and now, most museum exhibits fail to explore tribal histories after the late seventeenth century, while still acknowledging the contemporary presence of living Indian communities. That approach leaves a noticeable gap in Native histories, one that often confuses museum visitors who often arrive thinking "there are no real Indians in New England today." By making survivance a critical focus, we will provide richer accounts of what happened in New England Native communities in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In turn, those accounts will begin to fill in the gaps in visitor understand-

ings, while challenging their misunderstandings about who Indians are, and how they supposedly became "less Native" in order to survive.

In the Pequot Museum's first iteration, there were few survivance stories on the second floor, especially from the period between the final Mashantucket land sale (1855–1856) and the early 1950s when the state of Connecticut tried (and failed) to terminate its reservation system. We called this period the "Lost Century," which became the focus of a systematic, collaborative, community-based research effort. We documented and recovered survivance stories through oral histories, the mining of various archives, and the study of family-based collections of letters, photographs, newspaper clippings (including obituaries), and long-cared-for objects. Some of what we found had not been discovered by earlier researchers, while other materials enriched our understandings of the tribal community's social interactions and conflicts with outsiders in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>3</sup>

Over the course of several years, as the research continued, the museum team developed and implemented concept-and-design plans for two temporary, formative exhibits about Pequot survivance: "RACE Matters in Indian New England" and "Pequot Lives in the Lost Century," which opened in 2008 and 2009. Both were installed for the busy summer visitation period (June–September) and provided settings to introduce new ideas and test different approaches for encouraging visitor exploration. Eventually this work led to "Almost Vanished," the museum's first new permanent exhibition since 1998; it opened in the spring of 2011 in a reorganized space in the Reservation Period galleries (Figure 4). "Almost Vanished" includes a re-created reservation home—a setting for a sound-and-light show about community life between 1900 and 1950—as well as 10 graphic panels focused on Pequot survivance. The panels present new insights into the community's resistance to the land sale of 1855–1856, everyday life and the reservation-based economy of the late nineteenth century, and the emergence of a multicultural Native community in nearby Westerly, Rhode Island, which played a critical role in preserving Indian (and Pequot) identities in the 1920s and 1930s (Mancini 2012). The lives of tribal members are also highlighted, including Martha (Aunt Matt) Langevin, a Mashantucket resident and community activist (1901–1978), and Ephraim and Sarah Williams, a Pequot couple who raised their family at Mashantucket from 1887 into the 1930s.

The "Almost Vanished" installation was the focus of systematic visitor studies, which began in April 2011 and continued for six months. Our goals were to document visitor behaviors in the new space while exploring how the Reservation-period galleries contributed to the overall museum experience. Methodologically, we used a standard form for tracking time and motion, while also recording specific ethnographic observations (Yalowitz and Bronnenkant 2009). A total of 646 data sets were gathered on visitors who were not part of specific groups, such as schools or camps. Data were entered into spreadsheets, analyzed, and compared to baseline research conducted during the summer of 2008 (Handsman 2011:10–16). In the study period, 9 of 10 museum visitors spent 10 minutes or less in the new exhibit; only 3 percent were there longer than 16 minutes. These patterns are almost identical to those seen in 2008, demonstrating that most visitors in these samples did not spend enough time in

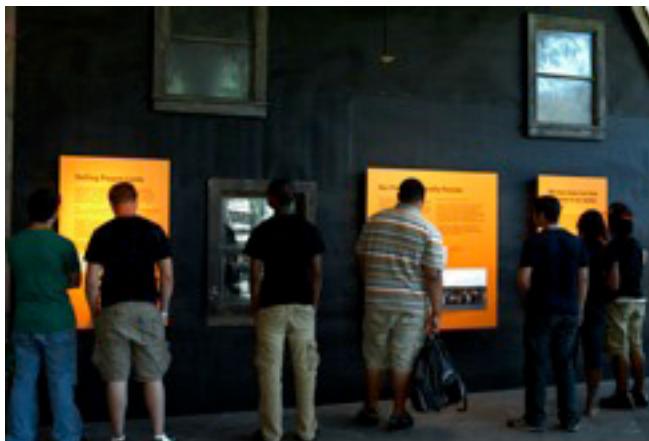


FIGURE 4. Visitors in the “Almost Vanished” exhibit.

the Reservation-period galleries, the key spaces for exploring Pequot histories of survivance. This finding was confirmed by additional data ( $n = 48$  observations) comparing lengths of stay in the first-floor and second-floor spaces. Visitors spent 9 times longer on the first floor, averaging more than 30 minutes in the Pequot Village alone, compared to less than 10 minutes in “Almost Vanished.”

In part, these differences are shaped by the overall museum experience, in which visitors are encouraged with maps, way-finding signage, and greeters to begin their tours with the first-floor exhibits. After an average of 90–120 minutes, most arrive in the Reservation-period galleries tired, hungry, and ready for a break. So it’s no wonder they spend too little time in “Almost Vanished” and other second-floor spaces. We wondered what would happen if we encouraged visitors to use a different pathway through the museum, beginning with the Reservation period and then moving back into earlier times. A new brochure, “Another Pathway through Pequot History,” was designed and made available to visitors whose behaviors were then timed and tracked. In a sample of 50 observations, about one half of the visitors stayed slightly longer in “Almost Vanished” (5–10 minutes) than those who followed the conventional route; the extra time was spent watching the sound-and-light show and exploring text panels. Certainly we had hoped for an even larger contrast, but these results suggested that it was time to begin developing new visitor experiences in order to encourage more and longer explorations of Pequot survivance in the second-floor exhibits.

## MOVING TOWARDS CO-CREATION: PEQUOT SURVIVANCE AND AN IPAD-BASED EXPERIENCE

Today visitors can access more survivance stories by borrowing iPads loaded with two short multi-media interactives to be used in specific locations in the Reservation-period galleries. Staff from the museum’s collaborative team and outside consultants initially developed the approach and its content. The program was then evaluated with visitors and focus groups of museum members during the summer of 2013.<sup>4</sup> Titled “Tapping into



FIGURE 5. Mashantucket Pequot Farmhouse, circa A.D. 1780. Its furnishings are based upon excavations of site 72-66.

Pequot History,” this pilot program models how future experiences might be enriched by using portable technologies to create alternative pathways, a strategy that is now common in museums (Rubino 2011). Museum visitors were specifically targeted in an effort to encourage individuals to lengthen their stays on the second floor. Our working hypothesis is that longer stays might lead to deeper explorations, thereby laying a foundation for enriching their understandings of Pequot survivance.

One of the iPad experiences takes place in the farmhouse exhibit, originally reconstructed and furnished using archaeological data (Figure 5). The full-sized, walk-in frame house and associated outdoor landscape are meant to “unsettle [undercut] hegemonic notions of Indian-ness” (Bodinger de Uriarte 2007:151) by locating Pequot families in historic spaces where ordinarily the public do not expect to find them. Visitors are puzzled by the space—many have just arrived from the Pequot Village downstairs—and often resort to the familiar to make sense of the farmhouse. They say it looks like “Little House on the Prairie” (a “pioneer house”), or the “cabin where I grew up in Puerto Rico,” something you would see at “Old Sturbridge Village,” or the “huts used by Swiss shepherds in the summer” (think of Heidi). Other conversations resort to language about acculturation—“things changed a lot,” one father explains, and “they had to adopt” [adapt]. Most spend less than 5–10 minutes in the farmhouse, ignoring the texts and object cases with their stories of “near self sufficiency” or of Pequot purchases made at nearby stores.<sup>5</sup>

The farmhouse-based iPad experience is meant to encourage visitors to explore the space in more depth. We also see it as an opportunity to share new insights from ongoing studies of excavated collections and archival records. The ten-minute pro-

gram consists of four narrated chapters and three supplemental explorations (called the Explore More sections), all activated by conventional finger swiping and tapping. One chapter, "What Lies Beneath," examines the precontact archaeological history of the farmhouse site (72-66), periodically used for hunting camps between 8,000 and 3,000 B.P. and then again around 1,300 years ago. Other chapters focus on site 72-66's historic Pequot occupation and the assemblages excavated from it and a closely related site (72-161), also occupied in the late 1770s. Each site's assemblage can be explored further by tapping on objects in their farmhouse or wetu setting, which then link to images of excavated artifacts from such objects, described with brief captions.

The iPad program complicates the farmhouse's survivance stories in two important ways. First, it illuminates community diversity by revealing that most Mashantucket families still lived in wetu in the 1770s, traditional house forms just like those seen in the Pequot village exhibit. But these wetu, like the farmhouse, were furnished with glass windows, English (creamware) and colonial-made ceramics (slip-decorated red earthenwares and utilitarian stonewares), glassware, kaolin smoking pipes, and kitchen utensils. By locating this non-Native-made material culture inside traditional house forms, we hoped to complicate visitors' assumptions about Pequot life and history.

The second insight is about the community's economy in the 1770s, the focus of another chapter in the iPad program. Regional exchange networks enabled the acquisition of the Pequot's material culture by linking reservation families with urban-based merchants, local artisans (including stoneware potters), and storekeepers. This was not a cash-based economy, although currency sometimes played a role. Instead periodic transactions, involving Pequot purchases, labor, or Pequot products (for example, foodstuffs or articles of clothing sewn by Pequot women) were entered into account books along with notations about cost or value. Later, the accounts were reconciled and sometimes balanced. But in any given period, the ebb and flow of transactions was unbalanced as household objects, foodstuffs, and supplies were acquired against future expectations of the receipt of labor, goods, and other payments (Handsman 2013a). This economy began to be actively shaped and reshaped at Mashantucket starting in the early eighteenth century. As Pequot families participated in it, they did not lose their Indian identity or their connections to the reservation. If anything, the economy enabled household and community survival, a reality that again challenges visitor assumptions about the supposed irreconcilability of Pequot and colonial worlds.

Visitors could pick up iPads at a program cart outside the farmhouse. Their movements and interactions were timed and tracked and the data recorded on another form. Studies from the summer of 2013 indicate that the iPad program's potential impacts are limited by the ways in which the units are actually used. In a sample of 105 timed observations, representing a pool of 200-plus visitors, almost 75 percent of users spent six minutes or less with their iPads, insufficient time to engage fully with the farmhouse explorations. Only 5 percent of users spent 13 minutes or more with their iPads, slightly longer than the average visitor stay of 11 minutes for the entire Reservation-period exhibits. Participants in three focus groups, a total of 30 museum members, undergraduate students, and museum professionals, used their iPads for longer periods, usually 20–30

minutes in length. But their experiences were not part of a typical museum visit, as they were actively recruited for each session. Still they helped identify operational issues and confusions with the iPad units, while engaging in spirited conversations with one another and museum staff.

So the introduction of a new technology, with its hands-on experiences, did not significantly increase the amount of time visitors spent in the Pequot farmhouse and nearby exhibits. Using iPads there is not yet a dramatically effective way to enhance visitor explorations, as they still arrive tired and eager to "move on." What are needed are new approaches to how visitors move through the museum, including spaces that offer participatory experiences. But iPads proved to be a cost-effective strategy for introducing museum visitors to new themes and content, as well as a new approach to programming. "Tapping into Pequot History" cost about \$51,000 in grant monies and museum cash, less than one-fifth the cost of the "Almost Vanished" installation. The project used museum visitors' (mis)understandings and confusions about Pequot survivance as a starting point for program development and formative evaluation. Their behaviors, when using iPads, clarified the potential of technology-based experiences while helping us understand how they might be integrated into a true co-creation process in future projects.

## THE POTENTIAL OF A CO-CREATION PROCESS: MODELING ANOTHER KIND OF FARMHOUSE SPACE WITH PARTICIPATORY PROGRAMMING

Although our visitors are beginning to play a more active role in the process of exhibit exploration, the Pequot Museum has not yet fully embraced the idea of providing participatory experiences (Simon 2010a) in which visitors and tribal members would be co-creators and participants in an ongoing process of social interaction, dialogue, and discovery (Handsman 2012b).

Although the iPad project is a step in the direction towards providing participatory experiences, it does not really contribute to remaking the Pequot farmhouse exhibit into a "visitor-centric" space. But the technology may be helpful as we move towards participatory programming. We now turn to our second case study, again focused on Pequot survivance as seen in Mashantucket's reservation households and their use of plants in the later eighteenth century. For more than 30 years, archaeological research on the Mashantucket Pequot reservation has often been undertaken in response to tribal development initiatives. Field studies have documented and explored a long and rich record of Native occupation and land use, represented by hundreds of sites from the last 12 millennia (McBride and Grumet 1996). Archaeobotanical studies are an important component of this work, especially when historic Pequot sites are being investigated (McBride 2005). The data from 10 such sites, ranging in age from the late seventeenth through the late eighteenth centuries, include more than 8,000 preserved remains, processed from 18,501 liters of soil collected from 216 archaeological contexts.

Recently, that extensive dataset was systematically organized and reanalyzed over several years as part of a dissertation project completed in 2013 (Kasper 2012, 2013). The goal of that work was to investigate how the archaeobotanical record can be used to deepen our understandings of Mashantucket Pequot reservation life. The project sought to understand the roles that native and introduced plant species played in diet, foodways, and medicinal practices, and also how that record reflected and illuminated the reservation's changing ecosystems and cultural practices. Ultimately, this type of analysis turns our attention to how indigenous societies intensify their own traditions and use of Euro-American practices when faced with conflict and competition for resources (Cronon 1983; Den Ouden 2005; Panich 2013). The plant remains and cultural traditions that were the focus of the project help to redefine Pequot communities as more active participants in their own history and as long-term stewards of their reservation.

The archaeobotanical research will be useful in future efforts at the museum to develop new participatory approaches to programming focused on Pequot survivance, ones that complement and extend the exhibit and program initiatives described above. Currently, the Pequot farmhouse's furnishings are mostly non-Native made, indicative of the community's active participation in the emerging market economy beyond the reservation. But the archaeobotanical remains from the same period, the last quarter of the eighteenth century, are about the reservation itself and the community's ongoing subsistence economies that include household-based practices and cultural traditions and the ways they shaped and were shaped by local ecologies. For example, the plant remains from sites 72-66 and 72-161 were gathered or grown across a diversity of reservation habitats, including hardwood stands, wetlands, gardens, and orchards, and a diversity of open fields and burned-over plots in various stages of ecological succession (Kasper 2013:174). At Mashantucket, subsistence economies were another important strategy for survivance at a time when the community's land and resource base was still being actively eroded.

This insight, and the archaeological studies upon which it is built, could be made available to museum visitors through another iPad-based program with chapters on field methods, flotation, virtual and real tours of reservation habitats, and opportunities for data analysis. But consider instead how the farmhouse exhibit and adjacent spaces might be transformed into an "exploratorium" or an interactive "survivance laboratory" in which participatory experiences, visitor-staff interactions, and hands-on programs are foregrounded. There is no how-to manual for this work with step-by-step instructions, but there are insightful resources and some innovative museum projects that help one envision both the process and that future space (Simon 2010b).<sup>6</sup>

A new beginning is needed, a co-creative approach that will engage various museum visitors (tribal and museum members, local residents, college students, educators) in participatory experiences aimed at deepening their skills as commentators and questioners while building a framework for social interaction. The Reservation-period galleries, and the Pequot Farmhouse space, are appropriate settings for enhancing engagement and interaction through specific activities, including "feedback walls" where visitors can share observations, ask questions, or offer ideas, perhaps in response to a posted ques-

tion. "Ask the Curator-Archaeologist-Archivist" programs would also be used to facilitate conversations while introducing ideas about Indian survivance. The goal of this initial phase is to begin building a community of active co-creators, both museum staff and visitors, who will work together to develop, lead, facilitate, and assess a variety of experiential exhibits and programs on the museum's second floor (Simon 2010b:263–279).

For example, we might install side-by-side cases with multiple drawers, filled with archaeobotanical remains and herbarium specimen sheets; this space would serve as an entry point for explorations of the subsistence economies in Mashantucket life. Nearby microscopes would allow visitors to observe remains and practice identification techniques. Other programs would enhance opportunities for more hands-on research, with visitors engaging in their own archaeobotanical studies, using small site-specific databases to generate and test hypotheses about changing plant and habitat uses at Mashantucket. As their studies proceed and questions emerge from their initial findings, experienced museum researchers and educators (program guides) would help visitors by directing them to additional resources (published findings, descriptions of techniques such as flotation), other analytical methods, or comparable data sets and studies, all made accessible through iPad units.

Another group of future programs might focus on using survivance-related objects (ethnographic and archaeological artifacts) to nurture social interactions and dialogue, what Simon (2010b:127–139) describes as the "sociability of objects," the potential of things in specific museum spaces to provoke, generate comment, or challenge conventional understandings. In the Pequot Farmhouse, for example, one might install a case filled with reconstructed earthenware and stoneware teapots, coffee pots, and drinking cups from 72-66 and 72-161 alongside one with decorated splint baskets made by Pequot artisans. Posted questions and prompts ("I Wonder ... I Notice" or "Write Your Own Label"), or some simple rules for visitor engagement (Simon 2010b:164–172), would be used to stimulate and nurture conversation and questioning about the differences between these kinds of material culture and what those differences might tell us about Pequot lives. Those interactions would also be facilitated and enriched by museum staff.

Clearly these possibilities call for a very different kind of programmatic space, one more often seen in informal science museums, where observation and curiosity are privileged, where curatorial authority is balanced (challenged) by visitor ideas and questions, and where active discovery is enhanced through conversation and other interactions encouraged, in part, by the constant presence of trained staff and docents. The current Pequot Farmhouse space does not allow for any of these possibilities, but its rich and puzzling immersive environment is perfectly suited as a pathway for co-created, experiential programming. The space itself would have to be opened up to provide additional surfaces for investigations, object and artifact cases, exhibit interactives, feedback walls, and a mini-theater for presentations, conversations, and survivance storytelling. The museum could also complicate the current appearance of the farmhouse, as a singular diorama, by joining it to a *wetu*-inspired architectural structure. The integration of the familiar farmhouse with the Pequot *wetu* would create a mixed or hybrid space more reflective of and useful for the exploration of the many-

layered, survivance histories at Mashantucket. Ultimately, this new museum space would have a distinct presence—not one defined by its being just another stop on a tiring tour. Instead, the future “exploratorium” would become its own destination, a place for museum visitors to visit and re-visit.

## EMERGING CONTACT ZONES AT THE MASHANTUCKET PEQUOT MUSEUM

From the beginning, Mashantucket Pequot tribal members were involved in planning the museum’s design while providing content and serving in key leadership roles. Over the first decade of its existence, the tribal community became even more active in the museum, shaping its identity as a community-gathering place. Yet during this time, little happened at MPMRC that might be recognizable now as collaboration with a descendant community (Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson 2008) or as indigenous archaeology (Bruchac et. al. 2010; Watkins 2000). In 2008, that kind of work started when necessarily intertwined projects in research and exhibition began to explore Pequot survivance, seeking to illuminate its complexly layered histories of resistant accommodations, persistent traditions, and creative adaptations. Represented today by published studies (Handsman 2012a, 2013a; Kasper 2012; Mancini 2012), the survivance initiative critically challenges and deconstructs a “change-and-continuity” paradigm (Silliman 2009) by connecting the tribal community to an ongoing history of modernity. In that history, Mashantucket Pequot families constantly engaged with larger economic, political, and ideological worlds. Doing so was not a pathway to extinction—as is so commonly assumed—but a key to household and community survival. Meanwhile, studies of reservation life, including the archaeobotanical research outlined in this study, are revealing how Pequot families continued to shape local ecologies, collect plants seasonally for food and medicines, and maintain gardening traditions, all in the face of constant intrusions and land losses.

These new insights about Mashantucket Pequot survivance are slowly being integrated into MPMRC’s exhibits and programs. Concurrently, current tribal members are still holding onto their community’s own narrative of massacre, dispossession, overseer abuse, and race-based prejudice. For example, when Mashantucket families tour the Reservation-period galleries, or when they lead tours, the story they tell is one of “persistence despite loss.” That narrative still lies at the heart of Mashantucket’s contemporary identity, and no amount of post-colonial theorizing and research about survivance will ever change that. But in some museums, including MPMRC, survivance stories can play a critical role in the development of “emerging contact zones” (Boast 2011; Clifford 1997). In essence, those zones are public spaces in which diverse living cultures, communities, and ideologies meet and clash through encounters with representations and realities that challenge and undercut wrong-headed assumptions of post-contact Native history. Such spaces and exhibits already exist in national and regional settings (Atalay 2006; Clifford 2004; Erikson 2002; Phillips and Phillips 2005; Weiser 2009), and in the virtual world (Digital Public Library of America 2015). But they are still uncommon in New England.<sup>7</sup>

At the MPMRC, the Reservation-period galleries can become a visible contact zone in which survivance histories are foregrounded. The reservation’s well-preserved historic archaeological record will play a critical role in that work, as its patterns and assemblages reflect survivance strategies and experiences mostly unrecorded in colonial archives. For example, in the later eighteenth century, the archives are filled with petitions and memorials of complaint, committee reports, and legislative proposals detailing conflicts and losses, and a supposed growing impoverishment of the community. But archaeological research is recovering a more complicated and diverse history of persistent subsistence economies, ones that were enabled, in part, by the Pequot’s creation and use of a patchwork ecology. More archaeobotanical studies are needed to document the reservation’s historic ecologies, as well as the community’s subsistence practices, generation by generation. Living off a changing landscape was an important survivance strategy, one that Pequot families have undertaken at Mashantucket for centuries. But the other side of their survivance story—the one in which they actively and astutely integrated their lives into a regional market economy over the course of the eighteenth century—was also of critical importance.

The archaeological record of Mashantucket households is replete with material evidence of this history of being Indian and early modern all at once. Museum archaeologists need to renew their efforts to explore and understand that record by developing models and methods more appropriate for an archaeology of survivance (Cipolla 2013b; Silliman 2010, 2012). The material culture of historic Pequot households puzzles museum visitors, while the survivance stories behind those objects remain almost unknown. Both are unexpected and revelatory, exemplifying what Mark Leone (2007:127) calls “surprising, counter-intuitive archaeological discoveries” that have potential to challenge and replace conventional public understandings. But those discoveries, and the research behind them, will not become more visible simply through conventional museum exhibits. What we have learned and argued here is that participatory programs and spaces are still needed to encourage visitors to engage with one another and with staff. The content of those programs and spaces should be experimented with through a process of formative development followed by visitor studies, to be followed by program revision, more experimentation, and additional evaluation, a research cycle well known in archaeology and one that has proved invaluable at the MPMRC. Here, the real power of co-creation lies in an ongoing, reiterative process of developing and reworking museum-based experiences in order to nurture and enrich social interactions and collaborative research. The goal is to deepen our understandings of Native survivance at Mashantucket and elsewhere, thereby helping to illuminate what are still almost-invisible, largely unknown histories.

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## Data Availability Statement

All data collected utilized and collected for this project was curated and can be accessed at the Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center by contacting Kevin McBride, Director of Research, Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center, Mashantucket, CT 06338; email: [kmcbride@pequotmuseum.org](mailto:kmcbride@pequotmuseum.org); phone (860) 396-7001.

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## NOTES

- Both authors worked at MPMRC between 2008 and 2013, conducting dissertation-related research (Kasper) or serving as a museum consultant for initiatives in science learning, exhibits, and programming (Handsman). We were researchers, participants, and observers in the projects described.
- These projects were funded in part by four grants from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) totaling almost \$375,000. Additional monies were received from corporate sponsors, individuals, and specific budget appropriations made by the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Council. The total cost of all the work between 2008 and 2013 amounted to more than one million dollars. The projects are documented in four final reports prepared for IMLS, copies of which are archived at MPMRC, and in various articles published in MPMRC's magazine, *Cross Paths* (Summer 2008, Winter 2012).
- In turn, the materials we found were digitized or preserved in their original condition, becoming part of a still-growing museum-based archive of Mashantucket survivance, one which can now be consulted and searched by tribal families and used in future projects.
- The evaluation of the iPad project, funded in part by an IMLS grant through its Museums for America program (MA-04-12-0232-12), is described in a final report (Handsman 2013b) on file at the Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center.
- The voices quoted are from overheard visitor conversations, and were collected during ethnographic research conducted the summer of 2012.
- Other useful resources include Nina Simon's blog, *Museum 2.0*, and recent issues of *Exhibitionist*, the journal of the National Association for Museum Exhibition.
- Joan Lester's (1993) insightful study of the art and life of Passamaquoddy Tomah Joseph is a noteworthy exception, also appearing as a traveling exhibit in 1993 at the Haffenreffer Museum of Anthropology, Bristol, Rhode Island, and at the Robert Abbe Museum, Bar Harbor, Maine. In 2014, tribal museums at Mashpee and Aquinnah (Gay Head), Massachusetts, also presented exhibits on historic Wampanoag Indian whaling, an important survivance economy in both communities (Handsman 2010b).

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