Children During the American Steamboat Era - A Museum Exhibit

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Children During the American Steamboat Era

- A Museum Exhibit

By

Emily Ruoff

An Alternative Paper Plan Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Science
In
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With Concentration In Museum Studies
At
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Children During the American Steamboat Era – A Museum Exhibit

Emily Ruoff

This Alternative Paper Plan has been examined and approved by the following members of the student’s committee.

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Abstract

“Children During the American Steamboat Era” is a portion of the submitted Alternative Paper Plan (A.P.P.) in partial fulfillment Emily Ruoff’s Master of Science in Applied Anthropology at Minnesota State University, Mankato in Mankato, MN in 2019. Discussions in this paper include a summary of the new exhibit, “Children During the Steamboat Era” at the Arabia Steamboat Museum (Kansas City, MO) and the reasons as to why this topic was chosen as the theme for this display. Goals and reasons for topic choice are: to create a sense of connectivity and inclusion for the thousands of children that visit the museum every year, to engage the visitors more into thinking about their own life experiences, and to educate the public in general about the different representations of populations of peoples associated with the American steamboat era. The hope is that this display will enlighten the public to more of the nuances associated with the American steamboat era.
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Chapter One: Introduction

Background:

This Alternative Paper Plan: “Children During the American Steamboat Era” is based on the research, design, and development of the exhibit at the Arabia Steamboat Museum, titled “Children During the Steamboat Era”. The Arabia Steamboat Museum is located in the City Market area near the Missouri River in Kansas City, Missouri. It is focused primarily on a freshwater archaeological excavation from November 1988 to February 1989 of a steamboat called the “Arabia” that sank in the year 1856. The steamboat sank with 200 tons of preordered general store cargo that was being shipped up the Missouri River to numerous porting stations. This four-month long excavation was successful in bringing up all of the cargo as well as personal possessions that were lost by fleeing passengers as the boat sank. Part of the steamboat’s structure was also excavated and brought to the museum for display. Active freshwater preservation is done at this for-profit museum and is open to the public to watch and interact with preservationists who work directly with the largest single collection of American pre-Civil War artifacts in the world.¹

There are two mission statements for this museum, the first is for the general public and the second one is for the museum’s children’s educational program, Venture Quest Foundation. The Venture Quest is primarily for school groups and youth summer

camps. It is more interactive and energetic for younger visitors and is geared toward elementary and middle school age groups:²

1. It is the mission of the Arabia Steamboat Museum to preserve and maintain its collection of cultural possessions and to share them to promote education, appreciation, and enjoyment, applying the highest standards of quality in all areas.

2. The mission of Venture Quest is to provide students and educators with a memorable experience that will ignite their imaginations, increase their appetite for knowledge, enhance their school work, and impact their future careers.

Both mission statements were heavily applied to the development of this exhibit because this museum should continually improve and expand the emphasis on youth interaction and learning. “Museums need to [focus] their ideas and balance internal assets with external needs, since the answer likely lies in how the museum builds a relationship with its public and community while at the same time valuing its material and intellectual assets.”³ With consideration of these points of interest, the exhibit “Children During the Steamboat Era” was created.

In this display there are four main sections: 1) video, 2) flipbooks, 3) photographs and text blocks, and 4) artifacts:

1. The video is 4 minutes and 36 seconds long and has different sections within it such as the filming of elementary children from Walnut Grove Elementary School in Olathe, Kansas. The actresses/actors dressed as settler children in the mid-1800s and performed various activities relevant to the time. Short text descriptions accompany the short scenes with the children. In addition to those short scenes, further history is presented on corresponding events such as the Steamboat School with Reverend John Berry Meachum, simple descriptions about select toys of the mid-nineteenth century, and additional photographs of children in the 1800s on or near steamboats are included in the video. The television screen size is one-meter diagonal on the screen, making it large enough for visitors to see the scenes easily without crowding.

2. The flipbooks are the “hands-on” interactive portion of the display. It is a 122cm x 2.5cm pine-wood board painted white to match the faux steamboat railing of this area of the museum. It is mounted at ADA regulations in accordance with rules 307 and 308 and mounted with industrial iron brackets to match the concurrent boiler display. The ADA regulations require that protruding objects should be limited with “leading edges more than 27 inches (685 mm) and not more than 80 inches (2030 mm) above the finish floor or ground shall protrude 4 inches (100 mm) maximum horizontally into the circulation path”. Unobstructed forward reach “shall be 48 inches (1220 mm)

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5 Ibid
maximum and the low forward reach shall be 15 inches (380 mm) above the finish floor or ground. …Where a high forward reach is over an obstruction, the clear floor space shall extend beneath the element for a distance not less than the required reach depth of the obstruction. The high forward reach shall be 48 inches (1220 mm) maximum where the reach depth is 20 inches (510 mm), the high forward reach shall be 44 inches (1120 mm) maximum and the reach depth shall be 25 inches (635 mm) maximum.”.

The information is printed on aluminum sheets riveted to clear polycarbonate sheets for protection. The flipbooks manually move along metal U-bolts vertically, flipped up and down by the user. Each page of the flipbooks is 25.4 cm wide x 20 cm tall. There are three sections of flipbook topics: “Common Children’s Fashion: 19th Century”, “Items Used by Settler Children”, and “Children’s Literature”. There are four to six flip-pages for each topic.

3. The photographs and text blocks are mounted on a wall board and range in sizes from about 7.5 cm x 12.7 cm to 33 cm x 43 cm. The wall board dimensions are 2.4 meters wide, 1.2 meters tall. The photographs include Caucasian children and adults posing on or near steamboats, Native American children at Carlisle Indian Industrial School after they had traveled on a steamboat, and African American children posing on the deck of a steamboat, both slaves and

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7 See appendix for photographs.
employees on steamboats (depending on the photograph). Each photo is accompanied by a text block to elaborate on the photographs and/or cite the source of the photograph. For the text blocks that include more than the information of the source, it includes not only what is happening in the photos but expounds on what the photograph may represent through a larger perspective, such as child slavery on steamboats.

4. Below the mounted photographs and text blocks on the wall is a 30cm deep baseboard that is filled with 97 artifacts from the Arabia Steamboat’s excavation that extends the full 2.4 meters of the matching wallboard. The artifacts that were chosen to display incorporate articles associated with school, toiletries, fashion, toys, and chores. The specific artifacts placed in the exhibit include multiple children’s shoes and boots, sewing materials such as sewing needles, pins, and wooden thread spools, a wooden hair brush with remaining boar bristles, pocketknives, marbles, doll appendages, school slate boards and slate pens, ink wells, lead pencils, brass school bell, tin lunch pale, and an “Assorted Candy” box lid. All of the artifacts have been conserved or preserved and stabilized. I, myself, performed a stabilization on the brass bell, pocketknives, and slate boards as a conservator, through various preservation techniques. There is also a photograph of a wool youth boy’s shirt that is mounted with the other photographs on the wallboard. Unfortunately, the shirt

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8 See appendix for photographs of the artifacts in this display and for images of the text blocks and photographs on the wallboard.
could not be placed in the display due to the instability and poor condition of the shirt, as well as a lack of space in the display. Of all the clothing recovered, only this item has been identified as specifically a youth shirt within the entire Arabia collection. The meticulous and difficult stabilization of the item was mine to perform through the process of resewing disintegrated thread and torn fabric. Because there was no pattern of this shirt found through extensive research in recorded history, connections with other museums were established to further the research on the construction of this piece of clothing. Once advice was gained, the piecing of the shirt took two months to reconstruct. Special attention is called to it in the display due to its uniqueness and rarity.⁹

The Goals of This Exhibit Are as Follows:

First, to be an exhibit that is approachable, informative, inclusive, and entertaining for both children and adults, while maintaining a primary focus on children. On a yearly basis, thousands of children visit the Arabia Steamboat Museum through educational programs as well as coming with friends and family. This exhibit has been designed to allow the youth visitors to connect more easily to the museum and the history it is representing by displaying a compatible relationship between the child visitors and the

⁹ See appendix to view the photograph and accompanying text block of the shirt.
history of some children during the time in America when steamboat travel and usage was highly prominent.

In conjunction with this goal, an application of the Jay Rounds’ “Strategies for the Curiosity-Driven Museum Visitor” was applied in an attempt to call the visitors’ attentions to the exhibit through a process similar to the “optimal foraging theory” in ecology. As Rounds describes, “the curiosity-driven visitor seeks to maximize the Total Interest Value of his or her museum visit. Such visitors use a set of simple heuristics to find and focus attention only on exhibit elements with high interest value and low search costs. Their selective use of exhibit elements results in greater achievement of their own goals than would be gained by using the exhibition comprehensively”.  

A “curiosity-driven visitor” should be understood not as a personality type, but as an agent who, … is visiting a specific museum with the goal of piquing and satisfying curiosity.”

This means that the “Children During the Steamboat Era” exhibit was designed so that many different “curiosity-driven” visitors could be attracted to the exhibit through this processes of “high interest values” and “low search costs”. By utilizing three distinct sections to this display, it was intended that the higher variety of features such as the flipbooks, video, and wallboard would attract a higher number of visitors to this exhibit who have varying interests and curiosities.

The second goal was to design the exhibit to be more interactive than most other displays at the Arabia Steamboat Museum. This way the various populations of visitors,

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11 Ibid
not only children, can become more connected to the display through the use of multiple senses, not only visual. Most of the other displays at the museum must be ‘hands-off’ in order to protect the artifacts but this display was designed to permit greater interaction over just a visual level by encompassing a feel/touch activity.

The final goal was to design this exhibit to flow with the motifs in the museum while also providing uniqueness to help it gain attention from the visitors. (This goal also connects to the “curiosity-driven” visitor mentioned previously.)

**The Limitations and Hardships of The Exhibit Are as Follows:**

It is first important to note that limitations are not necessarily a negative impact. Sometimes by having certain limitations, this can actually make decisions simpler to decide due to not having such a large variety of choices.

The availability to find information about the populations of children is already quite difficult in much of written history. Only within the past century has the field of anthropology begun to see a major increase in the attention to children’s cultural history. In the time of the American Steamboat Era, children were a marginalized topic of discussion when approaching the subject matters such as passengers and traveling immigrants on both trains and steamboats, the daily rituals of the steamboat travel, and the personal experiences of the children who were passengers on steamboats.

When conducting research on different populations of children during this time period, there are also constraints on how many primary sources have been published or
are available to the public. For the research about African American and Native American children, primary sources were more limited than uncovering primary sources from Caucasian, settler children. This may be because literacy in English was less common among African American and Native American children and the willingness to publish during this time. Finding information in these topics for the exhibit therefore proved quite difficult. And in addition, with the struggle to find primary sources, finding photographs of any children on or near steamboats at this time was also quite challenging. In summary, photography had only been invented in the late 1820s\textsuperscript{12}, which means that the fab of photography did not become “mainstream” until about the 1840s or ‘50s. Because of this, photographs of only steamboats that were taken before the 1850s are even rare to find. Considering that the steamboat era only stretches to the late 1880s to early 1890s, this means that only half of this time period even has the possibility for photography of the common public. With children already being a marginalized population in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century’s recorded history, this only makes the finding of these certain photographs even more strenuous.

There were limitations on the exhibit’s available space. The passageway between the exhibit wall and the railing to another exhibit on the other side are fixed and only a few feet wide. Because of the confined available space for visitors to observe/interact with the

display, while also allowing other visitors to pass by without clogging the area, this makes the choices of what to include in the display limited.

The format of the exhibit needed to be similar to other surrounding exhibits. Because of this, there were limitations to how much information and artifacts could be added and to how much interaction could be created between the exhibit and visitors.

Another limitation is obviously the time and funding dedicated to this display. I was the main designer and developer of this display, but with this responsibility also came the management of the other contributors to the exhibit. This includes the help from Film Producer, Matt Hawley, and Museum Director, David Hawley, several outside vendors and resources. Matt Hawley’s task was to assist in producing the video display for the exhibit. Because this exhibit was not part of his full-time employment, time management needed to be as detailed as possible. A similar situation also applied to any activities or edits required by museum director David Hawley to approve the features, expenses, and updates to the museum. Lastly, time management and funding limitations for myself required that I ensure enough time to make updates, fixes, and re-edits to any suggested changes and then to have them reevaluated by the director. Funding for even a simple display can be quite extensive and necessarily can impact planning and necessitate difficult decisions about what may or may not be feasible to include.

Using more senses, such as audio, for the display other than touch and sight was limited and ultimately not available for multiple reasons. Reason one: the limitations of time. There was little time to install speakers for audio into the video. There was also not
enough time to create proper recordings. Reason two: the limitations of the budget. Because the audio would require additional electronics installation and mounting equipment, the amount of money to add this additional feature to this display was not available.

Finding primary sources and direct quotes from children in reference to their experiences on or with steamboats was immensely difficult. Most of the available quotes of children and steamboats were written through memories of the children as adults. Therefore, since the children who experienced these events were no longer children, the influence of the quotes became muddled and more factors needed to be considered in whether the memories were accurate or remembered differently than when the memory was first created. As some psychologists have studied, with more time in between the event of the memory and the present time the memory is recalled, the memory often becomes askew and may change due to environmental, cultural, physical, and psychological changes in the person’s mind. It is also theorized that with every time a memory is recalled it can be potentially altered.13

Significance of the Project:

The main reasons for this choice of topic to be added to the Arabia Steamboat Museum are: to create a sense of connectivity and inclusion for the thousands of children

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that visit the museum every year, to engage the visitors more into thinking about their own life experiences, and to educate the public in general about the different representations of peoples that were related to the American steamboat era. The hopes for this display are that the public will learn that the American steamboat era was connected to much more than just the delivery of supplies and people. This exhibit aims to illuminate that this intricate form of transportation made it possible to access resources faster, in both knowledge and materials, as well as create new traditions and expectations of everyday life.

Research Questions:

Research Question One: Which children were connected to the American Steamboat Era? Which populations of children should be represented in this particular display?

Research Question Two: How can this display accurately portray the children of this era at this particular museum?

Research Question Three: How can this display most effectively catch attention and entertain youth visitors while also providing entertainment to adult visitors?

Assumptions and Predictions:

The assumptions and predictions made about the project were that of the populations and demographics of visitors that will visit the museum exhibit and who will
be the most interested in the topic. These groups of people include children, especially children who come to the museum as part of a children’s group such as a school or summer camp trip. The adults that will predictably be most interested in the display will be those who work with children as an occupation, who live with or have daily interactions with children, and who simply are interested in the history of childhood.

Project Plan and Expenses:

The Project began on January 10, 2019 with the beginning of the research for this primary topic and the initial discussion of how the exhibit would be set up. The estimated budget for the exhibit was unclear and so multiple design options were considered. The final amount of expenses for the development of this display was $3,526.09. The completion date of the exhibit was on October 10, 2019.

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14 See appendix for expenses chart
15 See appendix for project plan and timeline
Chapter Two: Review of Related Literature

Definition of “Child”:

In this exhibit, the term “child” is generally defined as a human that is younger or has not yet reached the age of physical puberty. The reason for this definition of “child” is because this is how many popular American dictionaries define a child. Also, in 19th century America, once children reached around the age of 14 (when physical puberty was normally present), this is when these children would migrate to a new social status in their communities as “young adults” and no longer were identified as a “child”. The emotional and mental ages of the children and adults are not taken into the definition as drastically in this paper because there was a lack of emotional and mental definitions of children during the time period and locations on which this exhibit is focused.

The definition of what, or more accurately, who is a child, is not a straightforward answer; instead, there are insurmountable complexities to this seemingly simple question of “who is a child?”. Because the questions that are being asked most commonly are by a population that considers themselves to be adults (or former children for this reference), this, therefore, offers a place for the application of personal experiences to be applied to the configuration of the question. These questioners have experienced childhood and have grown from an infant human to a fully grown human. The stage from infancy to a certain point in later adolescence is often considered to be the time in which a human is considered to be a “child”. Because becoming an “adult” often transitions one’s mental,
physical, emotional, and social identity, there becomes a weakness in this exhibit.\textsuperscript{16} Frequently children who define themselves of who they are as a “child” are often different and vastly varying than how adults articulate the definition of “child”.

Definition of “American Steamboat Era”:

The main focus on the American Steamboat Era is on the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers. The Missouri River has the most significance for this exhibit because the Arabia Steamboat sank on this river as well as the location of the museum being next to this river. The time period that has been established for the “American Steamboat Era” is when steamboats frequently began working on these two main rivers to when the majority of steamboats ended their work on the rivers due to change of transportation preferences. The time that steamboats began in America was 1807 when the first successful steamboat was able to travel on the Hudson River and begin regular trips with passengers and cargo.\textsuperscript{17} Steamboats quickly became popular and the beginning of the “American Steamboat Era” began in the 1810s. The use of steamboats increased from there until the time when the railroad began to supplant water travel and assumed a major portion of the transportation for passengers and cargo in America. It was not until the


1880s and ‘90s that the steamboats became obsolete and the end of the “American Steamboat Era” ceased.

Representation in Museums:

One of the main questions asked by historians is “who gets to tell the story of history?” and “who has the right to do so?” Because much of the Arabia Steamboat Museum is focused on the European settlers moving westward in America, there are large groups of other populations that are underrepresented, who lived alongside these European settlers. These underrepresented populations deserve to have a voice as well. With the lack of representation in some museums in the United States, “this demonstrates how socioeconomic status and race are also factors that hugely limit museum accessibility. Often, museums maintain structures in which history is told from the viewpoint of the white majority in a way that caters heavily to the white middle- and upper-class public. This can further propagate through elements like high entrance fees and a lack of affordable transportation, as well as having almost all-white administrative and design teams.”

With the limitation of diversity in museum staff, this can lead to segregation and ignorance of histories being presented.

The representations of these neglected groups are given more voice in this exhibit through primary sources and direct quotes from written histories by members of these

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groups of people. One example in this display of direct representation is from Chief Standing Bear and his experience as a child on a steamboat traveling to a boarding school. Direct quotes and references were used from his memoir to represent parts of Native American history at this point in the United States’ history as a whole.19 20

Because there is a lack of recorded histories from marginalized populations, finding primary sources was difficult. Persistence was required in this endeavor, in order to locate these histories as sometimes they may just be buried behind the more pervasive, Anglo histories. As pointed out by former First Lady Michelle Obama, “There are so many kids in this country who look at places like museums and concert halls and other cultural centers and they think to themselves, well, that’s not a place for me, for someone who looks like me, for someone who comes from my neighborhood.”21 One of the goals for this exhibit and for the educational program at the Arabia Steamboat Museum as well as many other museums in the United States is in representation and inclusion. We want to let the children and other visitors know that their “story is part of the American story and that they deserve to be seen”.22 The Arabia Steamboat Museum and Kansas City as a whole strive for fairness. For transportation, Kansas City has free streetcars that stop by the museum frequently every day that many of the museum visitors utilize. The museum also puts effort into welcoming “otherly-abled” people. For instance, if a person with

19 Luther Standing Bear, My People, the Sioux Houghton Mifflin, 1928.
20 See appendix for Native American text block
little to no eyesight visits the museum, tour guides will allow them to hold certain artifacts in order to “see” the history, and there are many videos to listen to sounds at the original excavation site as well as interviews with the excavators and historians, and stories of the museum and the steamboat’s history. The museum is wheelchair accessible, and there are multiple transcripts of the verbal tour transcribed into other languages.

How Audience is Discussed in Museums:

In museums, the definition of the audience and how to involve them in the museum has changed drastically in the past fifty years. There has been a shift to move from the focus on material culture provided by the museum to focus more on the audiences. And more specifically, the “audiences that are more representative of populations and of local communities.”

The realisation that not all visitors are the same has meant that museums are attempting to define a variety of experiences from a visit to their organisation and cater to the needs and tastes of a diverse audience.\(^{24}\)

When comparing older styles of museums, even as recently as twenty years ago with those of today’s globalized cultures, “learning in museums can be conceived as a further tool next to/after formal education, a further instrument, useful to increase knowledge and understanding, to develop personal skills and to acquire new competencies, able to strengthen the links between individuals and the reality in which they live.”\(^{25}\) Especially with the new concepts and engagements with cultural heritages in educational fields, including museums, it becomes a positive way for audiences, and especially child audiences to become familiar with various perspectives and points of view in history and in the present time. Because of this, there is an awareness of skills such as critical thinking, personal interpretation, and a way to consider society as “‘something built by people’ rather than an abstract concept. With regards to youth, this process is really important for the formation of the own identity, the transition to adulthood and an informed choice of the role we all have in society.”\(^{26}\)


Children Related to Cultural Groups of The American Steamboat Era:

The cultural and ethnic groups that were included in this display of the American steamboat era and the specific children that were directly related to this time and place in history were chosen based on geographical positions and written recordings of this time.

The groups of children that were included in this display range from African American, to Native American, to Caucasian Settlers. Other ethnic groups such as Chinese immigrants were not included in this display because they do not have a direct connection to the steamboats on the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers.  

Implementing the History of Children to The Arabia Steamboat Museum:

Due to the issues and perspectives mentioned already, the issue became determining a methodology for how to incorporate the historic, ethnic and social ramifications all within this one display. Therefore, the implementation of the history of the children at the Arabia Steamboat Museum was done so that more marginalized populations could be recognized as existing groups of this time and area. Often difficult topics such as slavery or the genocide and assimilation of Native Americans are pushed to the side or not as readily discussed at museums. (Often done to dissimulate those histories with the cover of less shameful events.) Luckily, though, this is a trend that is being recognized and more museums are making changes to address these dark historical

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27 For more information on this topic, read chapter three, research question one.
events more often. Before this exhibit was developed at this specific museum, only small hints toward slavery were addressed, as well as the assimilation of Native Americans into “white” culture. This exhibit was created to include previously overlooked histories at the museum. The hope was to create an environment where visitors with genealogies or other connections to these added topics could feel more included and recognized in this museum and community. “Museums are inventions of men [sic], not inevitable, eternal, ideal, nor divine. They exist for the things we put in them, and they change as each generation chooses how to see and use those things.”28 With the addition of this exhibit, the museum “can relate to the communities it serves and makes appropriate decisions in how it serves them.”29

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Chapter Three: Findings and Discussion

Research Question One: Which Children Were Connected to the American Steamboat Era? Which Populations of Children Should Be Represented in This Particular Display?

The children that are included in this exhibit are populations of children that are directly connected to the history of steamboats on the Missouri, Mississippi, and Ohio Rivers. This includes African American slave children, children of European descent, and Native American children. These are the three largest demographics of children that are directly connected to American steamboat history on these rivers and in the Midwest. Populations such as children of Eastern Asian descent are not included because no record of large majority of these children could be found traveling in this area of the country and on these rivers specifically. In all the information found in the research, these children of Eastern Asian descent travelled on larger steamships across the Pacific Ocean to California instead of entering the United States on the East Coast such as in New York like many immigrants from Western and Central Europe.

To emphasize, the populations of children for this display were specifically chosen for their relations to the American Midwest, particularly the Missouri, Mississippi, and Ohio Rivers. The focus of the exhibit with regard to time period stretches approximately 60 years around the American Civil War. This encompasses the ages when slavery was legal through several decades after the emancipation of slaves in 1863.
During the height of the American steamboat era, African slave ships traveling between Africa to America had largely ceased. This means that most of the children that were slaves at this time in American history were born in America and no longer retained much of their African cultural heritage and had assimilated into portions of Anglo-American culture. In like manner, the Native American children, although indigenous to the continent, were also forced to integrate.

Many Native American children traveled on steamboats during this era en route to the Native American boarding schools. These boarding schools were widely created to assimilate Native Americans into the “white” American culture and lifestyles. The African American children traveled on steamboats as working slaves, employees, or slave cargo. But the largest demographic of children that are connected to this era are children of European descent.

These Anglo-European children were born in America or were recent immigrants to America from a European country and they are almost exclusively grouped together into the Caucasian population. These children were often accompanied by family members when traveling on the steamboats. While the other two populations, African American and Native American children, were often not accompanied by family or friends but were instead separated from their loved ones and community for long periods of time to either work on the steamboats or to travel to other locations for additional work and/or education. For the African American and Native American children, steamboat travel was often an unpleasant experience. African American children often had to work on the steamboat as slaves and Native American children were often traumatized by the
movement of the large steamboats and the accompanying factors such as loud noises and exposure to the new harsh industrial environments.

Research Question Two: How Can This Display Accurately Portray the Children of This Era at This Particular Museum?

The “accuracy” of portrayal in history will always be relatively subjective. There will be variations of interpretations and memory, yet, there will be consistent repetitions within cultures. Because of this, there will be multitudes of interpretation for accuracy in the historical events being addressed here, and there will most likely be disputes on what is truly “accurate” in this display. To the best of my abilities, this display has been created to address many perspectives and to attempt to show a sliver of American history that is as “accurate” as possible based on research materials and sources available.

Another perspective to address within the scope of this exhibit concerns how certain historical events and occurrences are recorded by comprehensive cultural memories. The vast majority of these cultural memories originate from individual adult perspectives and not inclusive of the entire population which includes children. Modern methodologies, however, show that “children are now no longer seen as mere passive recipients of culture passed on by their elders. Children are seen as having agency, and
their own perspective on the world around them, as shapers of the forces, in turn, shaping them.”

Because most of the artifacts at the Arabia Steamboat Museum includes objects being sent to general stores up and down the Missouri River on steamboats, the material culture that is therefore portrayed is primarily representative of Caucasian adults. Steamboats were owned, managed, and traveled on by a vast majority of Caucasian peoples. This population, often being called “Pioneers”/ “Settlers” today were the ones that established general stores and businesses in the towns that they erected along these rivers. The ordered supplies that were accordingly delivered by steamboats had a largely industrial purpose and not so much focused on children, especially minority children. The objective then is to present as extensively as possible, utilizing the limited number of artifacts available, items that are representative or related to children.

Because there is more material culture displayed at this museum that is connected to Settler children as opposed to minority children, special attention was therefore given to representing the child populations not represented in the material culture from the Arabia through accessing parallel outside historical sources. The depictions of these minority children are represented through the use of the video, text blocks and photographs in the display since no material culture at the museum was available to be utilized for these populations.

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Research Question Three: How Can This Display Most Effectively Catch Attention and Entertain Youth Visitors While Also Providing Entertainment to Adult Visitors?

Several elements to consider for this exhibit with respect to being viewed and touched by children is that the museum’s genre is rather adult-oriented, the artifacts are very delicate, and the nearby displays have a format that needed to be continued and replicated. This limited the activity level and interaction with regard to children, as the focus became more about how to present information on children during the steamboat era, and secondarily how to create as much interaction as possible within these constraints.

Furthermore, since this display represents a population that involves not only one cultural group but several, text blocks/descriptions were needed in order to educate the public on these other demographics since artifacts for all the perspectives were not readily available in the museum’s archives. The two populations of children that were not represented through artifacts in this exhibit were African American children and Native American children. Because of the lack of certain material culture to represent the minority children, a decision was made for the exhibit to add more text in order to present minority information and perspectives. But because this increased the amount of text in the display, there is a worry that too many words can deter the child visitors from being attracted to this exhibit. To counteract this possibility, an interactive flipbook display was created so that children can physically flip through pictures of this steamboat era with significantly less text for entertainment and education. It is not to say that children in whole do not appreciate reading, but that some children that visit this display may not be
able to read in English, or that their reading levels are too low to understand much of the text.

Another method that was utilized to prevent accidentally deterring visitors, especially children, from enjoying this display was to create a video so that pictures and short video clips would portray a snapshot of the history of childhood during the American steamboat era. The visual senses of both video and text in the film could be compared to the printed parts of the display. Within the video, there are short clips of acted scenes and within the scenes, there are brief text descriptions. The goal was to promote less wording through the visualization of acting, which would be much more child-friendly without disturbing the integrity or visual flow of the museum.
Chapter 4: Conclusion

“A museum striving for intentionality recognizes that it exists in an external environment and that the external environment affects its internal world; thus, such a museum is flexible and it balances internal desires and resources with its community’s needs and external forces.”

“Children During the Steamboat Era” was designed so that the many different communities who visit this private museum can feel more included. Inclusivity was one of the primary goals for this exhibit as well as being fun and educational for all visitors. (This includes visitors of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds, etc.) The purpose was to involve the visitors and community and to allow them a way to further connect to this special history of the American Steamboat Era and the *Arabia* steamboat.

With that in mind, was this new exhibit able to accomplish all of the endeavors and goals that were originally envisioned with regard to children’s interactivity, increasing sensory elements, maintaining museum continuity, and improving inclusiveness? By 1) adding new interactive features such as flipbooks, 2) increasing electronic screens with child-centric themes, 3) expanding on a niche in the underrated and neglected history of childhood during the steamboat era, 4) expanding the use of existing un-displayed artifacts, and 5) filling in a previously blank exhibit slot, the new

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“Children of the Steamboat Era” exhibit was in fact able to accomplish a successful expansion within the museum environment.

In conclusion, “museums are quintessentially places that have the potency to change what people may know or think or feel, to affect what attitudes they may adopt or display, to influence what values they form.” The mission of this newly added exhibit is to increase and broaden knowledge of the 19th-century steamboat age. This new source of information and perspective within the museum will aid our 21st-century society in greater understanding, appreciation, and awareness of the diverse peoples involved with that time in American history.

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https://search.library.wisc.edu/digital/AK5IUR5HKD3ZBO87.

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Appendix

Flipbooks

Making the Flipbook Board
U-Bolts for Flipbooks

Insertion of U-Bolts to Flipbook Board
Placement of Flipbooks onto Board
Back of Flipbook Board
Mounting Television
Mounted Flipbooks and TV for Video
Artifacts
As a conservationist at this museum I personally cleaned and stabilized this school bell.
Shoes
Many shoes in the dekalb's collection are straight-line shoes with no left or right distinction. They could be worn on either foot, making it easier to put on. They did not wrap around the instep because they could be removed from one foot to the other.
Display Board and Exhibit Set-Up

Rough Draft of General Layout of Text Blocks and Images in Exhibit

Plexiglass Before Inserting onto Exhibit
Placement of Characters onto Title Board
Children During the Steamboat Era

Rough Draft of How the Printed Text Blocks and Images will be Placed
Preparing Text Blocks and Images for Mounting on Display Board
Mounting Text Blocks and Images to Display Board
Placement of Artifacts into Exhibit
Film

Producer Matt Hawley Preparing Camera for Filming at One-Room Schoolhouse

Actors at One-Room Schoolhouse
Finished Display
Charles Alfred Garside

Infant passenger on the Arabia. Photo taken two years after his journey on the steamboat. Photograph was donated to the museum by his family.
Shoes

Many shoes in the Arabia’s collection are straight-last shoes with no left or right distinctions. They could be worn on either foot, making it easier to put on. They did not wear out as quickly because they could be rotated from one foot to the other.
Native American Children and Steamboats

During the period when the United States used boarding schools to assimilate Native American children into “white culture”, many children traveled on steamboats and trains from their family to a boarding school, often a long distance away. Many of these children had not seen a steamboat or train, let alone climbed aboard. According to the journals of Native American children and boarding school teachers, steamboat travel was a traumatic process. Children were terrified of these large motorized forms of transportation, bullied by white people, sick from the movement of trains and steamboats, and suffered from homesickness and uncertainty.

In Chief Standing Bear’s biography, he tells his story about his experiences as one of the children who traveled on a steamboat part way to Carlisle Indian School from the Great Plains. “We rolled up into our blankets and tried to go to sleep; but riding in a steamboat with a paddle-wheel at the back which made lots of noise was an experience we were not used to, and it kept us awake” (My People the Sioux, 102).

Standing Bear, Luther. 1928. My people, the Sioux Houghton Mifflin.

Photograph: Three Sioux students as they arrived at Carlisle Indian School in 1883.
Left to right: Richard (Wounded) Yellow R obe, Henry Standing Bear, Timber (Chauncey) Yellow R obe.
As a conservationist at this museum I personally re-sewed and stablized this youth boy’s wool shirt.
Slaves on Steamboats

Before slavery was abolished in the U.S., it was common for child slaves to work on steamboats. As described by Washington Thomas and Henry Crawhion, both former slaves, African American children would start to work on the steamboats as soon as they were old enough to understand directions and do manual labor. For chores, child slaves may have done simple tasks such as cleaning and tidying the steamboat.

Despite the immense hardships in a slave’s life, there were bright spots that made working on a steamboat better than working on a plantation. For African Americans of this time, “steamboats symbolized both bondage and freedom” (Hedeen). “While slavery confined most slaves to a plantation, steamboat slaves were able to be cosmopolitan in a sense, as they docked at various cities along the river. Sometimes this mobility allowed them to maintain familial connections with loved ones who had been sold away” to different locations (Hedeen). “African American steamboat workers connected slave and free black communities through their jobs and thus were vital” to building a pan-African American culture. (Buchanan, 16).

# Expenses

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