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Revisioning History: A Rhetorical Redesign of the Charleston Museum

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REVISIONING HISTORY: A RHETORICAL REDESIGN OF THE
CHARLESTON MUSEUM

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
Professional Communication

by
Brittany Lauren Minors
December 2007

Accepted by:
Dr. Barbara Heifferon, Committee Chair
Dr. Teddi Fishman
Dr. Joseph Sample

Abstract

The Charleston Museum has the distinction of being the oldest museum in the United States, founded in 1773 and still operating today. It was begun as a branch of the Charleston Library Society and soon grew to be a significant institution in Southern and American scientific discovery and research. Over the 225 years of its existence, it has amassed an impressive collection of natural history specimens, as well as rare artifacts of Lowcountry history and culture. Unfortunately, the exhibits are in need of visual and ideological revision.

The revision is based on the history of the Charleston Museum, several key professional communications and rhetorical theories, and current trends in museum design. Four sections of the main exhibit area are addressed: Colonial, Years Surrounding the Civil War (*The South Carolina Lowcountry*, Halls I and II), Nature, and *The Early Years*. Each section is examined using description and images taken in the museum, and applied to the professional communications and rhetorical theories previously discussed.

The result of this examination is a workable set of suggestions which the museum may choose to implement within the exhibit space in order to make it a more inclusive, visually pleasing, and educational exhibit.

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this work to my grandfathers, Ivey Joseph Cooper and Charles Robert Minors. This thesis would not have been possible without their lessons about learning.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Barbara Heifferon, for all of her encouragement and assistance. Her knowledge and guidance are priceless. I am also very thankful to the other committee members: Dr. Teddi Fishman and Dr. Joe Sample. Their support and contributions helped this thesis develop to its fullest potential.

I am also grateful to the staff of the Charleston Museum: Grahame Long, Sean Money and Sharon Bennett. Their willingness to participate and enthusiastic helpfulness helped me to get to “know” the museum, and gave this thesis a heart.

I would also like to thank my parents for their continued support of my education and aspirations. Their love and encouragement have been amazing.

Finally, I would like to thank Tripp, for “being cool through all of this.”

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Preface

Before I begin this thesis, there are several aspects of its exigence and its rhetorical qualities that must be articulated in order to understand where it came from and what its purpose is. Because this thesis is meant as a tool to be put to use, the language and the form are somewhat different than most theses in its field. Additionally, I will present portions of a document provided to me by the Museum that explains its current mission and the purposes and contents of its facilities. The presentation of this document accompanied with the explanation of audience constraints will provide a basis for this thesis.

As mentioned, this thesis is somewhat unusual, because it is meant to be presented to two different audiences: my thesis committee and the staff of the Charleston Museum. Thus, I have had to make rhetorical choices considering my different audiences. My committee expected an academic argument rhetorically analyzing a museum space and institution from the standpoint of visual rhetoric. However, during my research of the Museum, I became acquainted with many members of the staff, who specifically requested a copy of it in its finished form to assist them in future redesigns. Because the staff expected to use this document, I have felt compelled to make

several adjustments to the traditional thesis language and form to better serve that audience.

This language adjustment is especially evident in Chapter 4, in which I lay out my recommendations to the Museum. I saw this chapter as being the one most key to the staff, and thus adjusted my rhetorical stance. In this chapter, I have “softened” my language to avoid a more critical tone. I offer some suggestions which may appear quite radical to the Museum staff, and I wish to make these suggestions with the highest degree of sensitivity as possible. Because of the staff’s requests regarding this thesis, I did not want to make these suggestions offensive in any way to ensure that they may be persuaded to implement them at some time in the future. Therefore, my language may at times appear un-academic and even “hedging.”

I have been sensitive to the staff’s view of my recommendations in the form of the thesis, especially Chapter 4, as well. The exhibit space I describe is certainly in need of stylistic updating; the colors and style of the exhibit reflect their age and could reflect a lack of aesthetic concern on the Museum’s part. However, the historiographical updates (i.e. including more information regarding history that has been omitted) are the updates which I feel are the most important and also the most difficult to call attention to, especially to an audience whose cultural and historical views are largely unknown. Therefore I have made the rhetorical choice of placing the minor stylistic changes first in

my recommendations, with the idea that the staff may be “eased” in to the more serious recommendations regarding cultural representation.

During the course of research, I had several conversations with different members of the Museum staff in the course of my research. In one such conversation, I was provided with a document which gives an outline of the Charleston Museum and its current mission, organizational status, educational programs, collections and facilities. This is not a document that appears to be distributed to a mass audience; it is merely a 5-page typed document whose intended audience (besides myself) is undetermined. I will present sections of this document which relate to the thesis, namely “The Museum’s Mission,” “Collections” and “Exhibitions,” and provide a rhetorical analysis of them as they relate to my findings in the thesis.

The Charleston Museum’s stated mission is as follows:

Founded in 1773, the nation’s first and oldest museum preserves the cultural and natural history of the Lowcountry. Its formal mission is “to explain the natural and cultural history of Charleston and the South Carolina coastal region through the maintenance, improvement and expansion of collections documenting the natural forms and material culture of this region.”

According to this mission, the Museum's purpose is primarily preservation and the maintenance of collections. This seems to be in line with their current activities. However, it is out of line with the stated purposes of other museums which were founded at the same time (and to which the Charleston Museum has ties). For example, the British Museum (which was aided into existence by Sir Hans Sloane, who gathered "natural curiosities" from the South Carolina coastal region) states on its website that, "The Museum aims to reach a broader worldwide audience by extending engagement with this audience. This is engagement not only with the collections that the Museum has, but the cultures and territories that they represent" (from the British Museum website, About Us section).

Clearly the British Museum is actively considering audience, as well as the deep histories which are embedded in its collections, and the rhetorical interaction between the two. By comparison, the Charleston Museum seems wholly unconcerned with the audience it serves and concerned only with preservation efforts, presenting an interesting dilemma. For whom is the Museum preserving these collections? The Charleston Museum's audience is mentioned only in the portion of the document explaining their educational programs (school classes, families and adults) and is not mentioned as part of the mission statement. Moreover, the purpose the collections serve once they have been preserved (i.e. the creation of dialog, the expansion of knowledge,

the healing of historical wounds, etc) beyond “education” is unclear. How are these collections and exhibitions educational? What is the rhetorical exchange that takes place between object and viewer and how does the Museum foster that exchange?

This ideology of preservation seems to be a pervasive one in the city of Charleston, which is a museum unto itself. Nearly every building downtown has been preserved to minute detail under the gentrification movement, which has created a sort of “living history.” It is a city both booming with international industry and yet ruled by “old families”: those that were at the helm of gentrification, preserving their heritage and homes, sometimes at the expense of the lower classes that were pushed out of the area in the name of tourism. This ideology is another constraint which I have encountered in the research of the Museum itself. Because much of these activities occur among the “old families” and behind closed doors, as a researcher, I am not privy to the decisions and rhetoric which drives them.

The Charleston Museum describes in this document that its collections “represent the oldest-acquired and richest assemblage of South Carolina cultural and scientific objects in the world” and that the collections serve many purposes including permanent and temporary exhibitions, research, and Museum-sponsored educational programs. The Museum also lists its collecting departments to include, “history, historic textiles, natural history, ornithology,

historical archeology and documentary/archival materials” (2). It includes its historical properties (the Heyward-Washington and Joseph Manigault houses and the Dill Sanctuary) as part of its collection, rather than additional museum properties/exhibitions. This explanation of the collections and their purpose approaches a more modern view of what museums “do” in terms of education and research, however there is still an emphasis on preservation above all.

The explanation of the exhibitions and their purpose is especially interesting, in that it clashes with the current physical environment of the exhibitions. The document states that, “Exhibitions help to fulfill the Museum’s educational mission and to share the institution’s collections. Permanent exhibitions provide comprehensive treatment of regional heritage...” (2, my ellipses). However, the permanent exhibitions are far from comprehensive in any way, as I demonstrate in Chapter 4.

As apparent from this document, the Museum seems to be suffering from a sort of ideological schizophrenia. Part of it wants to reach out to the community and educate it about Lowcountry history and science. Part of it simply wants to preserve the incredible collection it has amassed over the last 225 years. As a whole, the purposes and missions laid out in this document seem both mired in preservation and hopeful for a deep educational experience. This document is essentially a microcosm of what exists inside the museum: a space with incredible potential bogged down by an ideology of

“preservation above all.” It is imperative that the Museum solidify their own rhetoric, and make some difficult decisions regarding their role as preservers, as educators, and as an institution in an increasingly-cosmopolitan community. This decision-making process will most likely need to take place before any redesigns are planned, because the articulation of a clear purpose and mission is central to the rest of the Museum’s activities and exhibitions.

The Charleston Museum has an enormous amount of potential, and an incredible opportunity to educate an expanding local and tourist population about the history and nature of the Lowcountry region. The Museum is poised to begin a dialogue of recovery within its community and to an audience that may have a drastically different view of Antebellum history. Most importantly, the Charleston Museum is able to celebrate the region and all that its activity has added to the history of the United States and to the international community. This thesis aims to identify the specific fractures which appear in the Museum’s exhibit space and show the potential that the Museum may capitalize on in order to create a rich and inclusive exhibit which will appeal to and educate both the local community and the growing tourist audience.

Chapter 1

The Rhetorical Situation of the Charleston Museum

The Charleston Museum in Charleston, South Carolina holds the distinction of being the oldest museum in the United States. Founded in 1773 as a branch of the Library Society, the Museum began collecting natural history specimens and equipment and soon built a collection that drew national and international renown. Over its 225 year history, the Museum has survived facility moves, fires, and natural disasters. It still houses an incredible collection and continues its role in scientific discovery and research. It has also expanded its collection to include objects of local historical significance, some of which are arranged in the largest exhibit, The South Carolina Lowcountry.

Unfortunately, The South Carolina Lowcountry exhibit, along with two adjacent exhibits (Nature and The Early Days), have fallen into neglect and in some cases, disrepair. These exhibits are disjointed, stylistically dated, and are in need of historiographical revision in order to bring them up-to-date not only visually, but culturally as well. These problems may stem from a variety of sources such as lack of funding, community biases, and failure to determine a central purpose for the largest exhibit space.

The field of professional communication traditionally dwells the arrangement of information in print documents such as books, brochures, and magazines, and is focusing more and more on issues concerning information that is distributed digitally. Although rhetoric, visual rhetoric and design, and revisionist history have been addressed in these arenas to a great extent, museum space has been neglected by the field, perhaps because it is seen to be the realm of historians, curators, scientists and architects.

However, museum space presents a special challenge in terms of its rhetoric and information design. Unlike publications or websites, “pages” cannot be added easily. In many cases (and in the case of the Charleston Museum) such organizations are non-profit, and have limited access to funding to make large-scale and frequent revisions. Design decisions must take into account preservation methods, as well as availability of artifacts and specimens. It is also the rhetoric of a physical space that makes this form of professional communication most intriguing, the visitor literally stands inside and is surrounded by information, thus being able to move through the information as he/she pleases.

Museums that display exhibits meant to convey educational information (i.e. non-art museums) must recognize their role in the community and within their exhibit space act as a rhetor: a speaker whose message must be clear and whose goal is to effect a change on the viewer. To

establish a museum as a rhetor, the staff and exhibit designers must insure that the exhibit's style coincides with its message and with the extra-exhibition activities of the museum (i.e. demonstrations, lectures, other events). The message given in the exhibit space must also reflect typical elements of a speech-act: have a distinct beginning and end, have a consistent message and style, and present its argument in a logical manner.

In the Charleston Museum, like many museums that display historical information, there are gaps in information and skewed representation. This may occur because of lack of artifacts, misrepresented facts, or a lack of space in which to display "the whole story." Therefore, theories of informational inclusion (both from visual rhetoric and revisionary historiography) can be applied to assist exhibit designers in creating complete, more representative and fully descriptive exhibits.

Lastly, exhibit designers must ensure that the exhibit is simple for the visitor to use and navigate, in order for the him/her to have the most pleasurable and educational experience possible. If the exhibits are difficult to understand, see, or find one's way around, visitors may rush through them or perceive them as off-putting and may ignore much of the information presented. Additionally, a museum (as rhetor who educates a very wide public) must consider issues of access: how will the hearing and vision impaired audiences react to the exhibit? Tools (most likely technological

apparatuses) must be in place in order to assist the differently abled in learning.

In this thesis, I have applied the theories of rhetoric, visual design, usability and revisionary historiography to The South Carolina Lowcountry exhibit, as well as to the adjacent Nature and The Early Days exhibits, creating recommendations for an exhibit that not only highlights the history of the Charleston Museum through the history of the Lowcountry, but also offers a greater depth of information regarding Lowcountry history. The exhibit, ideally, would trace the history of the Lowcountry, forming a parallel between the cultural and political history of the region and the impact that the Charleston Museum had upon its intellectual development and the growth of academia and industry which has allowed it to blossom since. In addition to displaying more accurate representations and inclusive information, the exhibit would show the Charleston Museum's close relationships with such institutions as the Medical University of South Carolina and the College of Charleston as well as several great scientific minds brought a depth of intellectual activity and scientific discovery to the area that is currently not shown to its greatest potential within the museum.

Should the exhibit be built, it would allow for community involvement, cultural clarity, and increased access for the thousands of visitors to the Charleston Museum each year.

The city and region surrounding Charleston, South Carolina is rich and complex in its history, natural resources, and continuous growth. It is especially famous for its architectural preservation efforts, ongoing since the late 1920's push for gentrification of the deteriorating downtown area, and the historical opportunities that such efforts provide: horse-drawn tours of the Battery; strolls through ancient churchyards; visits to The Market where slaves were once auctioned; and further inland, grand plantations with immaculate gardens.

In this city so preoccupied with maintaining the image of a specific historical period (whether for the edification and entertainment of tourists or for the pride of protecting the work of their ancestors) sits the oldest museum in the United States. It is housed in an unassuming brick building, almost concealed by trees from the street, quietly going about its work of scientific and cultural preservation and education. This museum is responsible for some of the most important scientific work done in the South in the antebellum period, and is responsible for major educational breakthroughs in the period before the Civil Rights movement.

The Museum is in need of both aesthetic and informational updating. One of the main components of its content update should be its own rich and captivating history, including its role in spurring the growth of scientific scholarship during the antebellum years of the South. I have included this

chapter to illuminate several things about the museum and why this thesis is necessary. First, a redesign of this museum cannot take place in a vacuum; this background will help inform the last chapter on recommendations and ensure the continuity of the Museum's purpose and identity. Second, it will show exactly how momentous and important the Museum has been not only in the region of Charleston and the South but also as a major academic center in the young United States. This chapter outlines the history of the Museum from its beginnings in the Library Society to the present, the evolution of the Museum's purposes over those years, and the current state of the Museum within the Charleston community.

The Nature of the History

The History of the Charleston Museum is surprisingly incomplete, consisting largely of minutes of the Library Society since 1773, and by the publication of several booklets and "mini-histories" that have been published between the early 1900s and 1963. The newspaper clipping files of both the Museum and the Charleston *Post & Courier* are both incomplete, due to human error. Therefore, no "accurate," complete history of the Museum exists beyond these documents. This unfortunate state of the Museum's history seems to be an underlying reality throughout the institution, as will be outlined in later chapters.

These histories that I use in the following research were written by individuals who were actively employed by the Museum at the time of their writing. They are somewhat conflicting in nature, in that the emphases of different events in the Museum's history are presented with unequal weight of importance. For example, "The Charleston Museum: Its Genesis and Development" by William Mazyck mentions only in passing that John James Audubon was involved with the Museum, and does not list the particulars of his participation. "The Charleston Museum" by Caroline Borowsky mentions Mr. Audubon's contribution as being several hundred species of East Indian birds. Therefore, it is unclear if this is the only thing that Mr. Audubon contributed to the museum, or the most impressive of many things he might have contributed. The interests of the authors (inasmuch as the lack of objectivity that comes when writing about one's own institution), coupled with the scattered nature of existing documents and "facts" must be taken into consideration as the idea of the "unreliable narrator" from literary studies: the "whole story" may not be available.

The specific intended audience for the Museum is also unclear. During its multiple changes of venue and direction, it appears that at times it was for "public" use and at times it was largely a research tool and possibly not even open to users beyond students and scientists. During each phase, I have attempted to give as much concrete information as was available on this topic,

which at times is quite explicit. At other times, I have merely postulated, given the emphasis and location of the Museum during that period.

The collections and documents of The Charleston Museum have been subject to a multitude of influences, including material disasters, which may also explain the fragmented history that exists today. The museum has suffered three fires, two wars and four transfers of ownership. Therefore, the opportunity for things to be lost, destroyed and forgotten is immense.

I would also like to add that, in light of this necessarily faulty history, I am a necessarily faulty author. I am not a historian; I am simply attempting to reconstruct, the intellectual history of the city of Charleston as it relates to the Charleston Museum.

Given the aforementioned constraints of information availability and my personal standing in relation to the history, I will present a brief overview which is divided chronologically: Early Charlestonian Thought, The Beginnings of the Museum, The War Between the States and Beyond, and The Modern Era. Each section will detail the history of the Museum during that time and include some background pertaining to the contemporary social, cultural, and political climate under which the Museum was operating.

Early Charlestonian Thought

*“Exchange of merchandise led to exchange of ideas; and by this mutual friction
was kindled the sacred flame of humanity.”*

--Arnold Heeren (quoted by Moltke-Hansen 11)

In the period from its inception as a British colony until the end of the Civil War, Charleston was a hub of intellectual and scientific activity. The main focus of the scientific study was South Carolina’s natural history, which is said to be the “best known” of any other colony at the end of the colonial era (Moltke-Hansen 6). This preoccupation with the pursuit of knowledge seems to be tied up in several specific cultural factors.

The first is simply a matter of fact: Charleston’s first major industry was shipping, which connected the city to other major shipping centers such as Boston and New York. The atmosphere of such a place was more metropolitan and reflective of European influence than other cities in the South at the time, which unfortunately led to a sense of isolation that greatly intensified following the Civil War (Moltke-Hansen 42).

The next two cultural factors are directly related to the city’s status as the Southern urban center. The first can be explained as a more modern version of the Agricultural Revolution. Those families that benefited financially from the shipping industry (and later, from plantations growing cotton, rice, and indigo) had much more time to allow their curiosity to

blossom. It is, ironically, the embarrassing institution of slavery which allowed the wealthy white colonists the freedom to explore their intellectual pursuits (Moltke-Hansen 12).

These Charleston slave-owning planter families in turn dominated the wealth in the South. Michael Johnson noted in 1860 that “the wealth of the Charleston planters put them in the top 2 percent of the adult male population” of the South “which contained by far the largest share of the nation’s economic elite” (quoted in Moltke-Hansen 42). This economic domination amongst familial entities with strong ties to Europe and to Northern cities came with strings attached: a strict hierarchical society which tightened during the era surrounding the Civil War.

It is, however, these families, with their European influences and their financial independence which gave rise and strength to the scientific and intellectual movements of antebellum Charleston. It was a sense of *noblesse oblige* which led these wealthy Charlestonians to pursue knowledge. Also in play was the Enlightenment ideal that “civilization is PROGRESSIVE INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT” (quoted by Moltke-Hansen 11). The quest to learn was seen as a recreational activity as well as one which enriched the individual and the community. David Moltke-Hansen quotes Charlestonian Samuel Henry Dickson as theorizing, “The progress of man in civilization, his advancement in knowledge, will be found as distinctly impressed upon the

character of his recreations, his favorite amusements, as upon his occupations and serious pursuits” (Moltke-Hansen 11). Thus scholarship and amusement were intertwined to the wealthy class of Charlestonians.

These cultural factors taken individually may describe any American colonial metropolitan center – Boston, New York, Washington, D.C., or Philadelphia. However the unique blend which was fostered in Charleston, between the Colonial era and those few years after the Civil War, created a hotbed of scientific research and activity, allowing serious intellectual thought in the South to bloom in ways that are only since the Depression returning to the area. This unique blend too, gave birth to the first scientific museum in the United States: The Charleston Museum.

The Beginnings of the Museum

As mentioned, The Charleston Museum enjoys the status as being the first and oldest museum in the United States, with the beginnings of its charter dating back to January of 1773. The Museum grew out of the Charleston Library Society, which is still in existence. The Library Society was collecting scientific and “philosophical apparatus” (Borowsky 11) at the time when Lieutenant Governor William Bull suggested that a committee be formed for the collection of specimens related to the Natural History of the colony.

As published in the area newspapers that spring:

Taking into their Consideration, the many Advantages

and great Credit that would result to this Province, from
a full and accurate NATURAL HISTORY of the same,
and being desirous to promote so useful a Design,
have appointed a Committee of their Number to collect and
prepare Materials for that Purpose. (Borowsky 12)

The initial curators of the new museum were Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, Thomas Heyward, Jr., Dr. Peter Fayssoux, and Dr. Alexander Baron. Of course, the timing of such an undertaking was crucial, and much of the Library Society's business after this point was less concerned with accruing materials (books or specimens) and more concerned with housing them safely during the impending Revolution. The society was in negotiations with a Mr. Rittenhouse, who was planning to build an orrery (a mechanized depiction of the rotation of the planets, this one to be sixteen feet wide by eight feet high, modeled after one in possession of the College of Philadelphia) at this time, but the plan never materialized (Borowsky 12). The minutes for the July 1776 meeting read simply, "N.B. No Meeting in July, the Colony being then invaded" (Borowsky 12). All of the curators were involved in the Revolutionary War.

However, the War did not stop the Library Society from carrying on its business. In 1778, Charles Cotesworth Pinkney was made a "country member" and something like a curator. During this meeting it is also mentioned that a

hydrostatic balance had been purchased for sixty pounds (Borowsky 12). Unfortunately in April of the same year, a fire occurred in Charleston that damaged a large part of the city; the Library Room containing the books, instruments, and the Charter Box were all destroyed. The Library Society's belongings were housed for a time in the home of Daniel Cannon on Queen Street. The Society finally found a more permanent facility on the third floor of the State House (which is now the Court House) in 1785. During this time, it appears, the museum's collection grew according to accession lists dating back to 1798. The Library Society continued to operate the museum until it was handed over to the auspices of the Philosophical & Literary Society in 1815.

This transfer of sponsoring organizations proved to be a beneficial one for the museum. John Linnaeus Edward Whitridge Shecut, a man renowned for his contributions to the fields of science and medicine, was a major figure in the Philosophical & Literary Society and in his "Medical and Philosophical Essays" proposed the forming of an "Antiquarian Society of Charleston," whose purpose would be: "primarily the collection, arrangement, and preservation of specimens of natural history; and of things rare, antique, curious and useful; and secondarily, the promotion and encouragement of the arts, sciences and literature generally" (as quoted in Borowsky 13). This Antiquarian Society

eventually evolved into the Literary and Philosophical Society. He went on to describe the growth and increase in popularity of the museum:

The surprising progress of this society is a guarantee that the Citizens of Charleston are awakening from their slumber, to the active promotion of science and literature... The objects of the association were no sooner publicly known, than numerous donations of specimens, in every department of the arts and sciences, were liberally bestowed, with which to commence its Museum... (my ellipses, as quoted in Borowsky 14)

The Museum was hailed in 1826 as being “An Honor to the State” in the Statistics of South Carolina published in that year (Mazyck 9).

Shecut’s description of the outpouring of the community to donate specimens, along with the Museum’s mention in the 1826 Statistics of South Carolina both suggest that the Museum was known and most likely open to a public of sorts. Since slavery was still existent in 1826, it is highly likely that the “public” included no African-Americans, however it is unclear what portion of the white population could have been considered a part of this “public.”

Shecut also notes that the members of the society (138 total), and thus involved with the museum are “of first standing in society, and of acknowledged literary and scientific talents” (Borowsky 15). These members

mentioned are still familiar names in Charleston: Dr. James E.B. Finley, Stephen Elliot, Dr. David Ramsay, the Honorable John Drayton, the Honorable Thomas Bennett, Benjamin Elliott and Dr. Alexis De Carandefea. With this statement, it appears that at the time high society included not only those of specific families, but also those who were eminent in their fields of study, possibly with some overlap (i.e. those who could afford education were educated).

During this period as well, the Museum saw growth. The arrival of Dr. Felix L'Herminier, a "practical chemist" offered his specimens for sale to the Museum. Dr L'Herminier was later offered the position of superintendent of the Museum. The Honorable Thomas Sumpter donated an extensive collection of minerals, birds, and insects from Chile and Brazil (his residence for several years). The Honorable Joel R. Poinsett, the Honorable Henry Middleton, Stephen Elliot, and "Mssrs. Maclure and Caradeau" also made donations to the Museum's blossoming collection. These contributions allowed the Museum to house collections of zoology, ornithology, ichthyology, and entomology along with a large collection of minerals, fossils and shells, as well as coins, medals, castings and some pieces of artwork (Borowsky 15). The growth of the museum was augmented by the purchase of memberships by the community (\$50 for a lifetime membership) and by the State Legislature and City Council (Borowsky 14).

However valiant the efforts of the Literary and Philosophical Society, sufficient funds could not be raised to house the museum in its own building. In 1819, L'Herminier was forced to return to his former residence in Guadalupe, as he was unable to make a living as the superintendent of the Society's collection. It is at this time, in 1828, that the Museum's collection was transferred to the facility of the Medical College of South Carolina (MUSC) though it remained the property of the Philosophical Society. During the museum's stay at MUSC, it was used mainly as a research tool for the students and faculty. The collection was described in the catalogs from 1828 to 1846:

The Student of Anatomy and Natural History, has facilities afforded him, which are equaled by few, and surpassed by no similar institution of our country. In addition to the Anatomical preparations and Chemical Apparatus received last year from Europe, the Chalmers-Street Museum, containing a large Collection of Minerals, Shells, Birds &c., has been removed to the College, where it will permanently remain.

(as quoted in Borowsky, 15)

An advertisement for the museum's public display read as well:

THE MUSEUM

OF SOUTH CAROLINA

In Chalmer's street, (near the City Square)

CONSISTING of an extensive collection of
*Beasts, Birds, Reptiles, Fishes, Warlike
Arms, Dresses,* and other CURIOSITIES—among
which are:

The Head of a New Zealand Chief
An Egyptian Mummy (a Child)
The Great White Bear of Greenland
The Black and the Red Wolves of South Carolina
The South American Lion
The Duck Bill'd Platypus from New Holland
The Bones of an Ostrich as large as those of a
Horse
The Boa Constrictor or Anaconda Snake, 25 feet
long
The Grampus Whale, 20 feet long
800 Birds, 70 Beasts, 200 Fishes
4000 Specimens of Minerals
Shoes of the Chinese Ladies, 4 inches long
The Saw Fish ----- Saw 4 ½ feet in length
A large collection of views of the Public Build-
ings, &c. in Europe ----- and
A Fine Electrical Machine

The whole elegantly arranged in glass cases,
Open every day from 9 o'clock, and brilliantly
illuminated every evening, with occasionally a
Band of Music.



Admittance 25 cents. Season tickets \$1;

Children half price

Jan. 6, 1826

Though none of the authors of the Museum's history make distinctly clear the extent to which the Museum was used by the greater non-scientific

community at this time, the advertisement of the Museum in this fashion indicates that it was not only a research tool for the students at the Medical College, but also a source of learning combined with amusement for the greater Charleston area.

It was during this period, in 1836, that John James Audubon gave to the Museum several hundred specimens of East Indian birds. This cooperation with such a famous name in the scientific world appears to have revived public interest in the museum. However, the proceedings of the Museum slowed soon after Audubon's visit, and the idea that the collection be moved to the College of Charleston was introduced.

This renewed interest by the local scientific community was conveyed to the general public in an article published in the *Charleston Courier* in July of 1850. The article is accredited to the Trustees of the College of Charleston, and at length it describes the advantages of the expansion and advancement of the museum, as well as the reasons why Charleston is the prime city for such an institution. The museum's genesis is referred to in the statement, "It was in Charleston the first specimens of Natural History were collected which have been scientifically described" (Mazyck 13) and elsewhere is made mention of those society members who were involved in the museum as well as were contributors to the collection, making the "zoological collections and fossils gathered in South Carolina more valuable for museums in Europe than those

of any other part of the Union” (Mazyck 14). The value of the museum, beyond its first-rate collections (for its time and place), seems to be inextricably tied to the value of Charleston society, both financially and scientifically.

Almost simultaneous with this great honor to and flurry of activity in the Museum’s work is the trend of increased consideration of education in the South and in the Charleston area in general. In the 1850’s there was a remarkable expansion of public schooling, bolstered by economic growth, and the hope for a brighter future (Moltke-Hansen 8).

In preparation for the move to the College of Charleston, many changes occurred in the structure of the Museum and of the College itself. A professorship of natural history was created, the first professors being Rev. John Bachman (noted for his work with Audubon) and Dr. Lewis R. Gibbes (possessor of an extensive botanical and conch collection, and cooperater with Captain Alexander Bache of the U.S. Coast Survey). The connection of Dr. Gibbes with Captain Bache brought in the services of Dr. Louis Agassiz, a world-travelled scientist. The arrival of Professor Agassiz sparked fervent interest amongst the society scientists of Charleston, among them John Edwards Holbrook, biologists St. Julien and Edmund Ravenel, botanists F. Peyre Percher and H.W. Ravenel, chemists William Hume and Charles U. Shepard and geologist Michael Tuomey (Borowsky 16).

Also among those with a renewed interest in the Museum was young planter Francis Simmons Holmes, who was making discoveries about the rock formations beneath the Charleston area. He had amassed quite a large collection and was provided a room by the College in which to house it. Dr. Bachman, was also in possession of an impressive zoological collection, although no evidence shows that the College of Charleston intended to institute a museum from the two collections combined (Borowsky 17).

In March of 1850, the American Association for the Advancement of Science held its meeting in Charleston. During the event Professor Agassiz, then curator, suggested the expansion of the museum to include collections of the Paleontology of the state in conjunction with the well-established Natural History collections. A few weeks later, the museum was granted permission to pursue the Paleontology collection and to house it in the College of Charleston. Other players offered their collections as fodder for the museum: Tuomey offered his fossils, Dr. Holbrook his fishes, Professor Shepard his minerals and Mr. Holmes (and others), collections of shells, rocks, and fossils (Borowsky 17). The amassing of such a collection was quite an excitement, for even at the time it was realized that, “the museum which the college was about to acquire is the oldest in the United States” (quoted in Borowsky 17, source unknown). Also in 1850, the Medical College announced the

impending demolition of the building then housing the Museum's collection in order to build Roper Hospital.

Shortly after it was decided that the museum would indeed expand its collection to include Paleontology and to commence its general development, Francis Holmes was elected Curator of the Museum. In the following months, he was also appointed Professor of Geology and Paleontology and Natural History at the College of Charleston. Also established at this same period was the Elliot Society of Natural History, which declared that the contributions it received be donated to the Museum's collection. Holmes was Secretary of this organization as well.

The museum officially opened to the public in January of 1852. With the intimate involvement of the Museum with the educational structure of the College of Charleston, it can be inferred that the collections served a similar purpose as they did while housed at MUSC, which was mainly research and study. Professor Holmes continued to secure more and more accessions of Natural History specimens. He requested, and received, a taxidermist for the museum in order to mount a number of the specimens, some of which were being presented by members of the Audubon family. Holmes' excitement about the museum's possibilities influenced the community and contributions from the locals flooded in almost daily, including a herbarium of Southern plants, assembled by Dr. Henry W. Ravenel (Borowsky 17). An article on the

city of Charleston appeared in Harper's New Monthly Magazine in June of 1857, stating that "...Charleston has also a good literary college of excellent local standing...One of the departments of the building contains one of the best museums in the United States, second perhaps to none" (my ellipses, as quoted in Borowsky, 19).

The War Between the States and Beyond

The next great event in the history of the Museum was an unfortunate event in the history of the United States: the Civil War. Professor Holmes had taken a position as the Chief of the Nitre Bureau, which took him out of South Carolina. However, he returned to assist in moving the collection to his family's property in the town of Edgefield to protect it from the ravages of the war. Many items were taken to Edgefield and stored in Holmes' barns, some larger pieces were left at the museum, and still others were buried.

Unfortunately, after the cessation of the war, one of the barns was burned by displaced slaves, destroying two boxes of the property of the museum, and a great collection of Holmes' own books (Mazyck 1). Eventually the surviving 198 boxes were returned to Charleston and replaced in their original cases (Borowsky 19).

After the war, some controversy involving the correct "owner" of the Museum and its collections took place. The College of Charleston was in a position to support itself without help from the City, except for the

department which was responsible for the Museum. It was thought that the museum had been established for the equal benefit of the College of Charleston and the public, therefore it should be maintained by the City of Charleston. The trustees of the College gave the Museum two options: close, or operate under a stringently limited budget. Professor Holmes then resigned as curator in 1869. The circumstances under which Holmes resigned are a bit vague. Borowsky hints that he was unhappy with the choices and resigned in frustration: "Professor Holmes, finding neither of these courses acceptable, resigned in 1869" (19). It is unclear whether Professor Holmes was acting as curator from out-of-state or had returned to Charleston after the war. It is also suggested by Borowsky that he had amassed enough wealth through the sale of the phosphate in the rocks he had previously studied that he had no need for employment by any institution. Though still a young institution, the Museum had already experienced varying degrees of public and personal commitment during its lifetime.

Dr. Edward McCrady, a retired math professor, succeeded Professor Holmes and was curator for five years before transferring to Harvard to be the assistant to former curator Professor Agassiz. Following him was Dr. Gabriel E. Manigault in 1873.

Dr. Manigault's tenure as curator again changed the purpose and collections of the Museum. He is credited as rounding out the Museum's

collection to include those objects which were of aesthetic and cultural nature, rather than just the purely scientific ones, although he made incredible contributions as a scientist. Dr. Manigault was a skilled osteologist (skeletal anatomist), and prepared a great number of skeletons for display and use in the museum, most of which are still in the museum's possession, a few of which are on display. Dr. Manigault accessioned several plaster copies of Egyptian and Assyrian art, as well as reproductions of Greek terra cotta vases. (These too are still part of the Museum's collection; the plaster copies of Egyptian statues are on display today). He was also very able in cabinet work, and produced many display cases for the Museum.

During his time as curator, Dr. Manigault was faced with a challenge not unlike the difficulties his forbears had been confronted with: Charleston's earthquake in 1886. It is unclear the extent to which the collection was damaged, save for the fact that Dr. Manigault's cabinetry skills were lauded in the necessary rebuilding of the display cases (Borowsky 19).

Following Dr. Manigault as curator was George H. Ashley, who had been the first biology professor in the College of Charleston. His term was marked by the return of the Museum's emphasis on natural science. He also worked to restore public awareness of the Museum, and drew attention to its exhibits during the 1902 South Carolina Interstate and West Indian Exposition (Borowsky 19).

However, it was under the curatorship of Paul M. Rea that the Museum saw the most growth and greatest changes especially in regards to its housing, its mission, and its outreach. When Rea assumed the position in 1903, the Museum was in danger of being lost:

“...the municipal authorities finally came to feel that the museum was not a sufficiently useful public institution to justify any large use of tax funds...The museum was overcrowded, under-lighted, inaccessible, inactive...The collections were necessarily disintegrating” (quoted in Borowsky, 19-20, my ellipses, source unknown).

Rea pulled together the means of support which were available to him in order to save the Museum. First, he employed the assistance of students at the College for the maintenance of the exhibits and the collections of different departments. Second, he appealed to the trustees the necessity for “associating scientific men of Charleston with the Museum and of securing expert advice on technical questions” (quoted in Mazyck 26, source unknown). Rea appointed several “honorary curators”: Professor Daniel S. Martin (Brooklyn, NY) to be curator of Minerals, Rocks and Invertebrate Fossils; Mr. William G. Mazyck (Charleston, SC) to be curator of Recent Shells, Mr. Arthur T. Wayne (Mt. Pleasant, SC) to be curator of Birds, and later Professor N.W. Stephenson

(Art) and Mr. F.W. Wamsley and Mr. Herbert R. Sass as Assistants to the Director (Mazyck 26).

Rea understood that the revival of the Museum relied on the revival of interest amongst the key scientific and society players in Charleston:

Another reason for gratification in securing the interest
And aid of these scientists, lies in the hope, thus strengthened, that the
College of Charleston Museum may once more become the rallying
Point for scientific men of the generation, and thus renew the
Brightness of its name, which Shecut, Elliot, Holbrook, Audubon,
Bachman and Agassiz [Ravenel, Dickson, Holmes, Gibbes and
McCrary] made famous” (Rea, as quoted in Mazyck, 27).

Rea’s next move to insure the survival of the Museum was to allocate more appropriate quarters for its collection. In 1905, Rea presented his plans for a municipally-supported museum so well that the City of Charleston found additional funding for the institution. In 1907 the College and the City entered into an agreement regarding the lease of the Thompson Auditorium for the purposes of housing the Museum, in which the city would supply \$7500 for renovation and an additional \$2500 yearly for upkeep. The collections were moved into Thompson Auditorium the same year, and the museum was, for the first time, officially titled The Charleston Museum (Borowsky 20).

Although the Museum had independent housing and an independent name, it was still considered an “affiliated institution” operating under the ideological umbrella of the College of Charleston and controlled by its trustees. The College decreed that the Professor of Biology would be the Director of the Museum, and that both the Biology and Geology departments would be housed in the Museum itself (Borowsky 20). It was not until 1915 that the Museum and the College officially separated. At this time, Rea resigned his positions at the College of Charleston (professor of biology and geology) in order to put all his efforts into the Museum alone.

Working alongside Rea was the education and (later) social reformer, Ms. Laura Bragg. Bragg had come from Massachusetts in 1909 to work in the education and Natural History department in the Museum. Among a multitude of other personal accomplishments, Bragg led the Museum in educational reform. She assembled traveling exhibits for use in the public schools (both black and white). She organized natural history excursions through the Charleston area for locals wishing to learn more about their homeland. She arranged that the Museum allow blacks admittance (previously they had not been allowed, not even if they were maids accompanying their employers’ children). Most importantly, she solidified the Museum as a public institution in Charleston by creating the first free public library in Charleston county, housed in the Museum itself (Allen, 28-71).

With Bragg, the Museum became less of a hub for the scientific learning of the area's elite students, and more a home for the general education for the larger Charleston community.

The Modern Era

Unfortunately, this is where the attainable written history of the Charleston Museum ends. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the rest is an incomplete history, compiled from the archives at the Charleston Post and Courier, which are themselves incomplete. There exists a sort of "list" of minor events of the museum until about 1940: the organization of the "Hall of Man" (1916), the organization of the "South Carolina Gallery" (1919), the organization of the "Children's Room" (1921), the American Association of Museums celebrates its 150th Anniversary at the Charleston Museum, its only Southern charter member (1923), the purchase of the Heyward-Washington House (1928) and the purchase of the Joseph Manigault House (1933) (Borowsky 21).

I was able to find very little information on the Museum's major activities between the years of 1950 and 1979, so I will presume that the Museum engaged in activities much like what has been described in the preceding paragraph: lecture series, accessioning, the upkeep of current collections, and educating the community. However, after 1979, the Museum

was the focus of much activity: a major move, another fire, a much-publicized land-ownership debate, and the installation of its pinnacle exhibit.

Because the Thompson Auditorium building was falling into dire disrepair, the Museum was moved once more -- into its current building (designed specifically for the Museum) in 1979. The (empty) Thompson Auditorium building burned shortly thereafter under mysterious circumstances. The pillars of the former Museum still stand in the park on Rutledge Avenue, directly across from the Medical University of South Carolina – a previous “home” of the Museum for many years.

It is evident that after the museum’s move to its new quarters, it experienced some difficulty in attracting visitors. The articles (“Push On To Boost Interest In Museum” published September 24, 1987 and “Museum Director Happy To Show A \$317 Profit” published March 25, 1988 both by H. Jane Shealy) indicate the partnering of the Museum with a well-known local Public Relations firm in order to boost its attendance. The Museum also had to contend with a publicized legal battle over land on James Island which had been left to it by the Dill family for use as a wildlife preserve and research area. (The Museum kept the land and continues to use it for that exact purpose, with a full-time ornithologist on staff. The property is occasionally used for fundraising purposes, to demonstrate the activities of the Museum beyond its physical walls.)

An article published on July 23, 1989 offers a first look at the Museum's newly installed "South Carolina Lowcountry" exhibit. This installation is the same which stands in the Museum today, barely altered. Finally, a May 27, 1991 article proclaims that the attendance of the museum was up 45 percent.

This is as much as I can authoritatively say, based on the resources that were available to me, for the Museum's history and activities. The lack of cohesive information about the Museum is unfortunate, because it is a phenomenal institution not just for South Carolina but for the Nation.

The Charleston Museum has an amazing history. This institution has continued to foster intellectual activity and discovery through all of the major conflicts which have attempted to divide our country: one revolution, one civil war, and the decades-long battle for civil rights. Through all of these, the Museum has remained true to its purpose of preserving scientific, historical and cultural artifacts, and educating both local and national audiences. It has survived these conflicts, as well as the unavoidable disasters of fire and earthquake, which on their own may well have been the end of other such collections.

The founders of this Museum surely could not have fathomed its 225-year survival as an institution. Nor would they have imagined that Charleston, South Carolina, because of the Museum, would become a major center of scientific activity or would take steps to revolutionize education in a

segregated South. However, this seems to be the reality of the Museum – an institution that has been revolutionary since the beginning.

My purpose in presenting this history is to show the incredible importance of the Museum in its historical context, and to contrast it with its current state of need. The Charleston Museum is a marvel, and must be presented as such.

Chapter 2

Theoretical Lenses: Traditional, Visual and Revisionist Rhetoric

In the previous chapter, I outlined the complex and astonishing history of America's oldest museum. By doing so, I established its place in the Charleston intellectual landscape and community as a long-standing rhetor: an institution which speaks to an audience, and to which an audience responds. It is clear simply by mentioning the public outpouring of specimens during periods of growth that the museum and the community of the Lowcountry are not mutually exclusive, and at least in the past one has sought to better the other, and vice versa. Thus it is apparent that the museum be addressed not simply as an edifice or a warehouse of objects open to the public, but as a rhetor with a message and a distinct way of communicating that message.

In order to arrive at an effective set of recommendations for the Charleston Museum, I must first examine the broader rhetorical theories which apply. Of course, there are a multitude of directions one could possibly take in redesigning the physical space and the information displayed in it. My examination will focus primarily on the rhetorical implications of information (words as well as images and objects) as displayed in a cultural/scientific

museum. Therefore, I will be applying the theories of rhetoric, visual rhetoric and revisionist rhetoric to the Museum.

In this chapter, I will explain the basis of each theory, identify the key theorists in the area and show how each individually can be beneficial to the Charleston Museum. Finally, I will use the three lenses in conjunction with each other, in order to address fully the obstacles and realities facing curators and exhibit designers. I hope that the basic understanding of how the three lenses operate together will provide a theoretical basis for exhibit designers to create exhibits which are more full, rich and which have more explanatory power for the Charleston Museum.

Theory of Rhetoric

I will begin with rhetoric. At the most basic level, rhetoric can be defined as any speech act which displays certain characteristics: the presence of a speaker, an audience, a message, and an exigence. However, different theorists have refined these elements to include very specific characteristics, thus creating a clearer view of what rhetoric truly is.

Lloyd Bitzer lays out the guidelines for these elements as they relate to the creation of what he terms the “rhetorical situation.” His elements are a bit different, as he defines the rhetorical situation as being made up of an exigence, an audience and constraints. He defines *exigence* as “an imperfection marked by urgency...something waiting to be done...” (304, my

ellipses). However, not all exigencies are rhetorical (Bitzer identifies natural disasters, and death among these), meaning they cannot be changed by discourse. In his view, an exigence can only be rhetorical if it is “capable of positive modification” through discourse (304).

The audience to which Bitzer refers is not a passive one which merely “hears” that which is being “spoken” about the aforementioned exigence. His audience must be involved and able to promote some sort of action resulting from the exigence: “...properly speaking, a rhetorical audience consists only of those persons who are capable of being influenced by discourse and of being mediators of change” (305, my ellipses). Finally, Bitzer identifies constraints as a key element of the rhetorical situation. He defines constraints as “persons, events, objects, and relations which are parts of the situation because they have the power to constrain decision and action needed to modify the exigence” (305).

Bitzer theorizes that rhetoric occurs in a specified situation, one which is grounded in objective reality. In his view, rhetoric exists to promote some sort of change or to “alter reality” in some way, if only to create discourse on a topic where before there was none: “The rhetor alters reality by bringing into existence a discourse of such a character that the audience, in thought and action, is so engaged that it becomes a mediator of change. In this sense rhetoric is always persuasive” (Bitzer 302).

The historical museum, unlike art museums, presents a representation of reality, or of what is accepted as “truth” by the exhibit designers, curators, and museum staff. The change that occurs on the part of the viewer of the exhibits can take many forms. Most basically, the change can be a creation of knowledge where before there was none, prompting a response that may take the form of, “Gosh that’s interesting,” or “Who knew?” Of course, it is possible for these exhibits to effect a more tangible change in its audience. An example of exhibit-as-rhetor creating change in the viewer occurs in the nationally-traveling exhibit Bodies. In this medical science exhibit, viewers are allowed to see actual human organs which have been preserved through a polymer process that makes the organs take on a plastic feel. In one portion of the exhibit, viewers can see a pair of “healthy” human lungs which have suffered only minor discoloration due to environmental factors (smog, dust, second-hand smoke etc.). They can also see a pair of smoker’s lungs which are nearly black and somewhat scarred from years of tobacco use. The exhibit staff found that smokers touring the exhibit would leave their cigarette packs behind after this visual, and decided to install a tall, clear plastic receptacle into which visitors making the decision to quit could toss their unwanted cigarette packs. Thus the historical or scientific museum, as a general institution, is engaged in a rhetorical situation by Bitzer’s definition.

The Charleston Museum corresponds with these elements in specified ways. In relation to the element of exigence, the Museum's relationship is two-fold. In the previous chapter, I explored the exigence which brought the Museum into being: the desire and need for scientific exploration in the colony. Over time, the Museum's exigencies included the demand for cultural preservation and education. Unfortunately, the inclusion of two disparate exigencies in one rhetorical institution has produced a cacophony of communication within the walls of the Museum. As is explained in Chapter 4 in more detail, the exhibit space not only has room dedicated to the history of the Lowcountry up until the Reconstruction, but also has a hall with a diverse natural history exhibit displaying models and skeletal reconstructions of prehistoric animals as well as animals from the current zoological period (birds, mammals and reptiles). The juxtaposition of these two exhibits (which, incidentally, run directly into each other) muddles the message of the museum: is it scientific or is it historical? The rhetoric of the museum is unclear due in part to the inclusion of these two highly specialized exhibits.

By Bitzer's definition, the audience is a group that has the ability to alter reality after being exposed to the rhetoric in question. In the case of the Museum, the audience happens to be all who journey through the exhibits. In its heyday, the audience was those scientists and educators who were personally and/or professionally interested in the Museum. Again, over time,

the mission of the Museum altered to include a wider and wider portion of society. Though the “general public” (which included whites only at least until the turn of the 20th century; the date of integration in the Charleston Museum was not available) was allowed to visit the museum, during its stays at the College of Charleston and the Medical College of South Carolina it seemed that the main audience was comprised of scientists and medical students. During his time as curator, Gabriel Manigault included objects that were more culturally geared (for example, replicas of Greek art and a replica of the Rosetta Stone). The addition and advertisement of these objects most likely had an effect on the audience base which attended the museum as well; it was no longer purely scientific, it held interest for the mildly curious as well. As Charleston became a recognized tourist destination during the 1920’s, the audience grew even larger to include people from all parts of the United States and eventually, the world. It is a difficult task to assess how the Museum’s message affects each audience member, and the Museum has attempted to include all aspects of its research and experience (natural history, cultural history, its own history) in order to adapt to a growing and highly diverse audience. In the next chapter we will explore the methods which the Charleston Museum currently employs in order to meet this demand, and the degree to which it is successful.

The constraints in the rhetorical situation surrounding the Charleston Museum are a bit less abstract. In the case of any museum, there is the constraint of physical space, which makes this rhetorical situation most interesting, and which goes hand-in hand with the constraint of funding (funding being needed to expand physical space). The Charleston Museum in particular is a non-profit organization that relies on memberships and private funding for its operation. Other constraints are related to cultural attitudes about the ways in which cultural heritage should be represented to a wide audience such as that which the Charleston Museum addresses.

These constraints which relate to the community surrounding the rhetor are addressed by Mary Beth Debs. She defines the stakeholders in a rhetorical situation a bit differently from Bitzer: identifying writer, audience, text and additionally, sponsoring organization (164). Her theory hinges on the idea that rhetoric is not created in a vacuum; rather, it is the result of being in an interconnected society: “The society we participate in is made up of a proliferation of organizations, and part of the way in which we identify ourselves is made up of the multiple, often embedded, memberships we each hold” (161). Thus, the writer alone is not responsible for the rhetoric which he or she produces on behalf of the organization; the organization, because of the ultimately and necessarily collaborative nature of the rhetoric produced, assumes all liability in the face of the audience. This produces the effect of

“anonymous authorship,” in which no one writer/rhetor is responsible for the product.

Additionally, the effect of anonymous authorship in conjunction with a sponsoring organization creates a circumstance which defies Bitzer’s rhetorical situation: the ability of the exigence to be positively effected by change. The rhetoric that appears under the guise or “stamp” of a larger, collective body will be associated with that body’s predetermined identity. The audience will expect particular things of the rhetoric. For example, in an energy company’s annual report, a stockholder would expect to see certain hallmarks of the company: the logo and colors, on the visual level, and messages promoting innovation, efficiency, and possibly ecological research. This does not necessarily denote “lip service” to the consumer, but the corporate body recognizes the need to address what is expected of them, else losing investors.

Likewise in the Charleston Museum, the creators of the exhibits (laying out the objects and images to writing the accompanying texts), do not operate in a vacuum. Because it is a non-profit organization that relies on the generosity of individuals and corporations to give to its cause, it is subject, to a degree, to the attitudes and beliefs of those givers. Also, the Museum itself has a branded identity that aligns with particular beliefs that have been reiterated to the larger community for 225 years. Advocating for change in the message (and thus in the core beliefs of the Museum) will be a very difficult task to

carry out, given the nature and source of the Museum's funding. Thus, a constraint grows from an element in the Museum's own rhetorical situation.

Now that I have identified the individual elements of a rhetorical situation and discussed how they interact, I would like to explore the logic by which rhetoric operates. Aristotle in *On Rhetoric* explains that rhetoric itself must contain three basic appeals in order to be successful: *logos* (the appeal to logic), *ethos* (the appeal to ethic, or goodwill), and *pathos* (the appeal to emotion). In a museum space, the same is true. The museum must display logical appeals that would take the form of facts, artifacts and other displays of concrete knowledge. In addition, those objects and facts which display this concrete knowledge would be arranged in the space in such a way as to demonstrate the museum's argument in a logical fashion. A common pattern used in museum space is that of chronology: the exhibit having a set start and ending "date" which shaped the "argument" within those two points. In a physical space, *logos* may also correspond with visual cues (arrows, textual demarcations, color codes, etc.) to help the reader navigate through the exhibit in the way which best constructs the argument of the exhibit. This will be examined in the next section on visual rhetoric.

The museum must also use of *ethos* in order to make the exhibits believable. This appeal can be present in many aspects of the museum's business, aside from the maintenance of exhibits. A museum may advertise its

partnership with other organizations in the education of the community, by holding lecture series, or by informing the larger community of its ongoing preservation efforts that often are unseen by museum-goers. Within the exhibit space itself, *ethos* can be shown in several ways, including: statements which take the place of omissions (i.e.: “Unfortunately, Artifact A is unable to be displayed because of Reason B, however, we have created Reconstruction C as an example.), the tone and style of explanatory texts (i.e. accurate and descriptive without being exclusively academic), and the inclusion of aspects of the topic being explored which are not typically addressed (this will be explored in the third section on revisionist rhetoric) among others. These actions and inclusions on the part of the museum will present a socially conscious “face” to the public which the museum serves.

Last is *pathos*, the appeal to emotion, which can be ephemeral in a space devoted to time and facts. However, it is quite possible for a museum exhibit dealing with history, especially that which includes painful memories, to demonstrate *pathos* as well as credibility on the museum’s behalf. Undoubtedly, the omission of a frank discussion of the memory/historical event in question will not be lost on the visitor, and by its omission or glossing-over, will cast suspicion upon the museum and its intentions. These events must be addressed as accurately as possible, and any gaps in information must also be accounted for. The visitor can not only realize the social

responsibility of the museum, but also internalize the full weight of the event at hand.

For example, the newly-completed Mercedes-Benz Museum in Stuttgart, Germany could be passed off as a glorified showroom full of Mercedes models from the beginning of automation. With the advent of such historical education outlets such as The History Channel, it has become common knowledge amongst that audience that many large German corporations were involved in production for the Nazi war machine. Mercedes-Benz was just one such company, producing engines for airplanes and automobiles, as well as manufacturing transport vehicles. Therefore, any omission in the museum of their involvement with the Nazi party would be glaring to both Germans and to individuals familiar with the economics of the time. However, under German law it is felonious to omit or misrepresent facts pertaining to World War II and the Holocaust. Therefore, the Mercedes-Benz museum not only mentions in correct detail their involvement (they made a contract with the Nazi party to “rent” concentration camp prisoners to work in the factories) but provides a display case containing a wood-and-leather shoe worn by a prisoner, a ledger recording information regarding the prisoners and a contract between the Mercedes-Benz company and the Nazi party requesting additional prisoners. In this way, the Mercedes-Benz Museum has not only fulfilled its legal obligation to display accurate facts, but has created a visual

display that is both truthful and heart-wrenching. Text on the glass above the shoe explains that these shoes were the prisoners' tie to life, for if they had no shoes, their feet were prone to sores and infection which could lead to illness – an ill prisoner was useless for work and would be killed.

Thus, the Aristotelian appeals of *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos* are relevant not only to the rhetor who writes an article or a speech, but also to the rhetor who constructs an argument in physical space. Combined with the basic elements of the rhetorical situation as outlined by Bitzer and Debs, I now have a firm basis for the rhetorical situation of the Charleston Museum. I am also able to apply them to the other two forms of rhetoric which the Museum is subject to: visual rhetoric and revisionist historiographic rhetoric.

Visual Rhetoric

Before I begin exploring the aspects of visual rhetoric, I would like to explain a few things about how I will discuss the topic. First, I will use the word “image” to represent any visual assemblage of pictures, objects and text. When I make comparisons to the Charleston Museum in particular, I will be referring to exhibit space, which includes all three elements combined. Second, I would like to define “visual language” as being a combination of conventions including but not limited to: typeface, size, color, figure/ground relationship (gestalt principle), placement, and spatial arrangement.

Because I have already outlined the main components of the rhetorical situation (audience, speaker, exigence, text, and corporate authority, as well as *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos*), I can now apply them to visual language. However, there is a slight difference between traditional rhetoric and rhetoric as applied to visual images. Language and words are a specific code: look words up in a dictionary, there is a meaning that has been set by the users of this language. Visual language focuses more on the viewer – a picture cannot explain itself, thus the viewer is left to interpret it based on cues present in the image. Several theorists have made claims as what tools the audience uses to interpret these images. I will be examining claims made by Charles Kostelnick and Michael Hassett, and Ben F. and Marthalee S. Barton. Their interpretations of how viewers read visual language depend on the cultural influences and expectations of readers.

(This is, of course, an incomplete study of what theories rhetoricians can apply to effectively redesigning a museum exhibit space. Usability theorists in the field of visual design may be helpful in the detailed examination of what to include and how to do it. Such a theorist is Edward Tufte, whose ideas on aesthetic yet effective visual design may be helpful once more concrete planning stages has begun.

Kostelnick and Hassett seek to “reveal how users structure visual language” focusing “not so much on the external features of design...but on

the behavior of users who deploy and interpret visual language and on the panoply of factors that influence those activities” (5). They propose several principles of visual design:

- Conventions prompt rather than stifle invention.
- Conventions pervade all forms of design.
- Conventions operate in social contexts where users control them.
- Conventional practice is intrinsically rhetorical. (5-6)

I will be focusing on the last two dealing with social contexts and the rhetoric of visual design conventions.

As mentioned above, the realm of visual rhetoric is markedly more user/reader-centered than that of traditional oral or textual rhetoric.

Therefore it follows naturally that readers respond to visual cues based on their enculturation. To use a simple example, imagine finding your way about an airport in a foreign country whose language you are unfamiliar with. In order to locate your luggage, you would naturally look for a sign which, regardless of the language which appeared beside it, depicted an ideogram of a suitcase. This is a convention of Western visual culture; “we” have agreed that the idea of a suitcase would represent luggage claim. The same can be said for less obvious visual cues, such as headings, fonts, size of images, etc. These things are “read” in order to interpret the broad meaning of the image in

question, deciding which information comes first, what picture/object goes with which text, and how information flows to create a complete argument.

Of course, when these visual cues and elements which our culture (I will assume Western culture in general) has agreed upon are misplaced or misrepresented, a jarring effect is produced. On one hand, it could be completely unintentional and merely the result of lack of time or planning on the designer's part or the lack of a "designer" altogether. However, it may also be very calculated in order to stun the reader in such a way as to make the message more powerful, memorable, even subversive. An example of flouting convention for effect can be seen in the size and shape of outdoor advertising. Billboards have a few different typical sizes that are more or less in scale with each other and they usually are rectangular, with the longest sides appearing horizontally. However, Bacardi ® has produced a billboard which appears to be long and slender, with the longest sides appearing vertically, and shows only a bottle of their featured liquor. This is of course not subversive, but the form has been selected because it produces an effect which catches the viewer's eye simply because it is unconventional.

This leads to the next point that design choices are inherently rhetorical. Kostelnick and Hassett tell us that, "Designers must select conventions based on their interpretation of the potential readers and the situational context in which those readers will use them. This selection,

adaptation, and integration requires rhetorical judgment” (6). Of course, the rhetorical judgment referred to is the consideration of all the elements discussed in the previous section.

Visual theorists Ben F. and Marthalee S. Barton have examined visual rhetoric as applied to the map, incorporating not only the inherent rhetoric found in them but also the presence of the makers’ ideology. Maps, and other forms of visual communication that are assumed to be produced for the good of the public (as opposed to say, advertisements) must be held especially accountable for the ideology which they contain because it is a “‘neutral’ view of reality” (51). In short, the map, as well as other similar visual representations, are taken as “natural” when in fact it is a reconstruction of sorts based on rhetorical principles and ideological concepts (53).

The basis of their argument is that the map does not, and cannot, accurately describe reality because it is not reality. Thus judgments must be made by the designers as to how to create a map that is not only usable, but as inclusive and fair as possible. They list the conventions of naming, placing (top, bottom, center), including/excluding, and ordering as being integral to the overall message produced by maps and visual displays altogether.

Much like Debs, they call into question the authority of the producer of the map, and likewise of any visual representation, based on what is displayed and how the display is constructed. Maps, like other organizational

communication, are also produced collaboratively, and are subject to the same issues involving anonymous authorship (organizational expectations regardless of fairness, effectiveness valued over democracy, etc.).

Barton and Barton suggest two potential visual constructions which would include all relevant information in a democratic fashion. First, they suggest recreating the map as a collage, juxtaposing information and visuals at every opportunity, ensuring completeness (71). Their second suggestion is to recreate the map as a palimpsest. They cite de Certeau in the description: “The place, on its surface, seems to be a collage. In reality, in its depth it is ubiquitous. A piling up of heterogeneous places” (73). This would show the map/visual as a product of process and would allow for addition later on (74).

I would identify current historical museum design (in general) as a weak combination of attempts to be both a palimpsest and a collage. Essentially, the exhibit is a room of artifacts paired with verbal explanations and even interactive units and the whole appears as a collage in itself: it is a jumble, of which the viewer must make sense and interpret a message. In historical museums specifically, the convention of chronological placement reigns, that gives the illusion of “process” as in the palimpsest. It is an illusion in two manners. First, historical events do not occur in a vacuum, unaffected by other events previous and concurrent. The visitor traveling through a traditional historical exhibit may encounter a pattern of “Event A, then Event

B, then Event C.” However, the past continues to effect the present, building in layers which may either lead to resolution or continued conflict (take for example the constant aggression between Israel and Palestine – this has been going on for centuries, each event building on and bleeding through the past to the present). The “process” as palimpsest is an illusion also because a process has occurred before the exhibit was created: that of selection and representation, which the audience is not privy to.

In addition to the design of the actual exhibits, the maps of the exhibit space (and even the signage which accompanies the display) can be misleading. For example, in the Charleston Museum, a portion of their exhibit space is labeled Early Days and is a collection of specimens and curiosities which were the main attractions during the early 1900s. In this way, the space is labeled correctly: the exhibit holds objects from the early days of the museum. However, the exhibit fails to show the extent to which the museum was a scientific driving force in the area. It comes off as merely a cabinet of curiosities arranged for the amusement of the general public. Hence, the incompleteness of the museum “map” is not as visible. In the Early Days exhibit, viewers are indeed going to see specimens from the Museum’s beginnings, but there is much more information available (and worthy of display) that they will not see.

These ideas lead to the next section, Revisionist Rhetoric, in which we will examine the possibilities of rewriting history in a more inclusive manner.

Rhetoric of Revisionary Historiography

I have examined two broad forms of rhetoric, traditional and visual, and how they essentially work through the interaction of the key elements they are composed of (writer, text, audience, sponsoring organization, context, exigence and social construction to name a few). I have also discussed how these forms of rhetoric work within information spaces, specifically that of the museum and exhibit space.

Now I will introduce a specific type of rhetoric, revisionary historiographic. The introduction of this type of rhetoric will provide an ideological basis for the recommendations for the Charleston Museum that will be made in Chapter 4.

However, to understand revisionary historiographic rhetoric, I must first describe what traditional historiographic rhetoric is, and how it operates in the museum space. Vitanza defines traditional historiography as having “its major topos ‘time’ (chrono-logic) and, therefore, emphasizes ‘narrative events,’ ‘periodization,’ and clearly demarked ‘beginnings, middles, and ends,’ whether they be informed by linear, cyclical, or predominately casual logics,” (85).

This is the type of rhetoric represented most often in the museum space, and it is the rhetoric employed by the Charleston Museum. The visitor enters the

main exhibit at the historical era of Native Americans, and moves through the Colonial, Antebellum, and Post-War eras. This type of rhetoric, constructing an argument through time, is not unusual and almost expected on behalf of the museum visitors.

However, Vitanza calls to our attention the same argument that Barton and Barton make regarding the construction of maps: “They write ‘as if’ the data are representations of manifest reality. They write ‘as if’ from an omniscient point of view. They think of history ‘as if’ it is constructed at the level of ‘writing degree zero,’ that is, ‘as if’ it is relatively value-neutral and without any ‘rhetorical’ dimensions” (86).

This view of history as “just the facts” presented in a “Event A, then Event B, then Event C” pattern (presenting no real interaction between events, only their chronological placement) fails users in several ways. There is truth in the adage, “The winners write the history books,” meaning that not only does the recorded history reflect the mores and values of the victors, but it very likely will contain information that persuades an audience that the victors were correct in their victory (i.e. the actions they took were taken for all the right reasons, resulting in a desirable outcome).

An example most Americans are familiar with is the European treatment of the Native Americans. Schoolchildren were taught that the Native Americans were “savages,” though it was not mentioned that the

Europeans could not possibly have survived without them, nor that they may not have been “savage” had the Europeans not attempted (and succeeded, eventually) to take over their land. It is still taught that the Europeans arrived in the New World seeking religious freedom, which may very well have been true for some, but many Europeans arrived in North and South America seeking wealth, some arrived as deposits to prison colonies such as Georgia. This portion of American history is exceedingly complex, but because it was recorded by European Americans (not Native Americans, not African Americans) it insinuates that European Americans were acting in good faith, making the idea of Manifest Destiny plausible. Presenting this tangled and difficult (because of subject matter and because of lack of sources due to Native Americans and African Americans having extremely limited forms of recorded communication) history as a simple, linear chain of events denies users of information as well as assumes that the European American version of history is not only accurate but morally correct.

Vitanza suggests to readers another manner of rhetorically presenting history which is comparable to Barton and Barton’s recommendations regarding the denaturalization (the process of viewing critically) of maps. Revisionary historiographic rhetoric can be employed in two different ways, or in both ways in tandem. The first form is revisionary history as full disclosure and the second is revisionary history as self-conscious critical practices (94).

Revisionist history as full disclosure “addresses a ‘wrong’ interpretation of the facts, or it accommodates previously undisclosed facts.” Vitanza explains that there are several reasons why a revision may be needed: there may have been a ‘inaccurate perception’ of the manifest ‘reality’ of what are still conceived of as objective ‘archival facts,’” new “archival facts” have been discovered “*or even more importantly*, that such facts on occasion are viewed as having been in varying degrees present in the consciousness of the time but having been deflected in the actual writing of history by, or because of, the ‘prevailing ideology’” (95). Examples of voices which have been silenced by prevailing ideology are those voices of women, slaves, Jews, Native Americans and other non Franco- and Anglo- American groups. This type of rhetoric would appear very much like the collage form of map-making described by Barton and Barton: including all that is possible to include, thus making the story as complete and democratic as possible.

Revisionary history as self-conscious revisionism focuses more on the writer’s own preconceptions and the “understanding that *all* writing (thinking) is a form of *self-deception*, which for the most part is unwittingly achieved across sets of deeply rooted, unselfconscious predispositions or ideologies and consequently that all facts are already ‘interpretations’ in themselves” (95). This approach to revisionary history would appear much like an apology of sorts, with the author (or corporate sponsor) admitting to

their own fallacy as a biased human being (or conglomeration of biased human beings). This is the sort of history which I attempted to construct at the beginning of Chapter 1, admitting my own lack of skills as a historian and the incomplete nature of the materials with which I had to work.

It is these two ideas of revisionary historiography and their role in rhetoric which will shape my set of recommendations for the Charleston Museum's main exhibit depicting the history of the Lowcountry. For this exhibit, I am proposing a revision which will be based in full-disclosure and recovery. The revisionist rhetoric I will employ will allow for the inclusion of information (which could range from "objective facts" to photographs to cultural objects – depending on what is available) which has been excluded either consciously or accidentally by the exhibit designers, museum staff or the sponsoring community. The intended effect of such a deep, explanatory exhibit is to educate the viewer simultaneously about the complexity of the Charleston Lowcountry region and the importance of the Charleston Museum in Southern and American scientific discovery as well as to mend the riffs of information regarding slavery and its role in the region's economy.

By using the tools and ideals set forth by traditional, visual and revisionist rhetoric, I will be able to properly address the exhibit space as a place of rhetoric, capable of creating and maintaining a rich, full, democratic (i.e. reflecting cultural and social equality inasmuch as is possible with regards

to the space and resources) and educational message for its viewers for years to come.

These three modes of rhetorical expression will intertwine and interact with each other in the final form of the exhibits' revision. The basic groundwork of rhetoric described in the first section will be present no matter what form the revision takes (in fact, it is there now). However, more interesting will be the myriad ways in which visual principles and revisionary historiography interact, which will be discussed in Chapter 4. It is my hope, as well, that the ways in which these rhetorics blend will result not only in an appropriate exhibit, but a representative and inclusive one as well.

Chapter 3

Current Space: Description and Analysis

In previous chapters, I have constructed historical and rhetorical backgrounds from which to move forward with recommended changes to the Charleston Museum. In this chapter, I will map the state of the current exhibit using both verbal description and images, most of which were taken at the Museum during the spring of 2007. I will also include a diagram of the space. This diagram was created by myself as a rough estimation of the exhibit space, as a museum-generated one was not available due to security concerns. These measurements, therefore, are not exact.

First, I will present the current space using a series of images and accompanying description, drawing on both my personal observation and description published in *Architectural Record*. Next, I will provide a rhetorical analysis of the space. This description will help inform Chapter 4, which will describe potential recommendations of redesign which the museum to better represent the history of the Charleston Lowcountry and the history of the museum itself.

I will preface this chapter with a hypothesis about how the museum came to be in its current state. I have mentioned several times during the

course of this thesis that the Charleston Museum is a non-profit 501c (3) organization; it is responsible for the acquisition of its own funds. Therefore, redesigns and major renovations and changes are slow to come and often require several years' planning, fundraising, and implementing. This may account for the mismatched first and second halls of the Lowcountry exhibit. Although I could not confirm it, my hypothesis is that a redesign had been started, but only halfway implemented before the previous exhibit designer left. It is not my intention to undermine any work done by previous or current exhibit designers. My intention in this chapter is to simply show the current state of the exhibits to give a more informed and thorough redesign recommendation in Chapter 4.

Entrance and External Façade

Downtown Charleston is known for its historical row-house and Georgian architecture and the fervent preservation and gentrification efforts of the city since the 1930s. The Charleston Museum, situated on the corner of John Street and Meeting Streets, is built in a type of architecture which is quite unusual to the region. Instead of the stately columns and long porches of other buildings in the area, the Charleston Museum's architecture is quite blunt: a combination of Brutalism and Critical Regionalism (Fig 1), composed of rounded corners and long, flat, windowless walls. It is, in its environment, decidedly "modern" and creates a drastic contrast.



Fig 1: Portion of main façade of The Charleston Museum, facing Meeting Street Photo: L Minors

The building was a design competition winner, designed in 1975-76 by Solomon and Crissman Architects, Inc. In an article in *Architectural Record*, it is stated that the design is:

...almost anachronistic. Unabashedly contemporary, but with no Post-Modernist touches, it looks like nothing else in the old city except perhaps the 18th- and 19th- century warehouses on the waterfront and at railroad sidings. Since the new museum is essentially a warehouse, this would seem to be appropriate. Post-Modernists, however, may see the building as lacking “contexture” because its

architects passed up the chance to make direct reference to the classical forms of Charleston's 18th-century landmarks. (my ellipsis, 94)

This article identifies the building misspeaking its context. As discussed in Chapter 2, this is an important element of classical and visual rhetoric: the ability of the rhetor to properly address its audience. Because the major portion of the exhibit space is devoted to Lowcountry history and because the museum is located in the downtown historical district (as opposed to the more recently-developed islands and North Charleston area) the modern and "blank" façade of the museum conceals its mission both within its walls and in its community interaction. Thus, before visitors even enter the museum, the message of its contents is muddled by the building's appearance, which is mute regarding the purpose and history of the museum by flouting the architectural history of the city.

Clearly, one cannot ask a museum to tear itself down and start from scratch because its architecture is out of place. The demolition and rebuilding of such an institution would be incredibly time- and cost-consuming. With this in mind, I will offer some cost-effective solutions to the issue of the blunt, inexpressive architecture of the museum which may aid the viewer's understanding of what the museum's work and purpose is in Chapter 4.

Exhibit Layout Overview

Figure 2 is an estimation of the exhibit space I intend to address within the Charleston Museum. I would like to note that two exhibit halls are not shown on this diagram, as they are not the focus of my redesign. The first is Kidstory an interactive history of Charleston for children, which has been recently completed, and the second is a dual hall: one half is devoted to Charleston silversmith work and the other half is a temporary exhibit space.

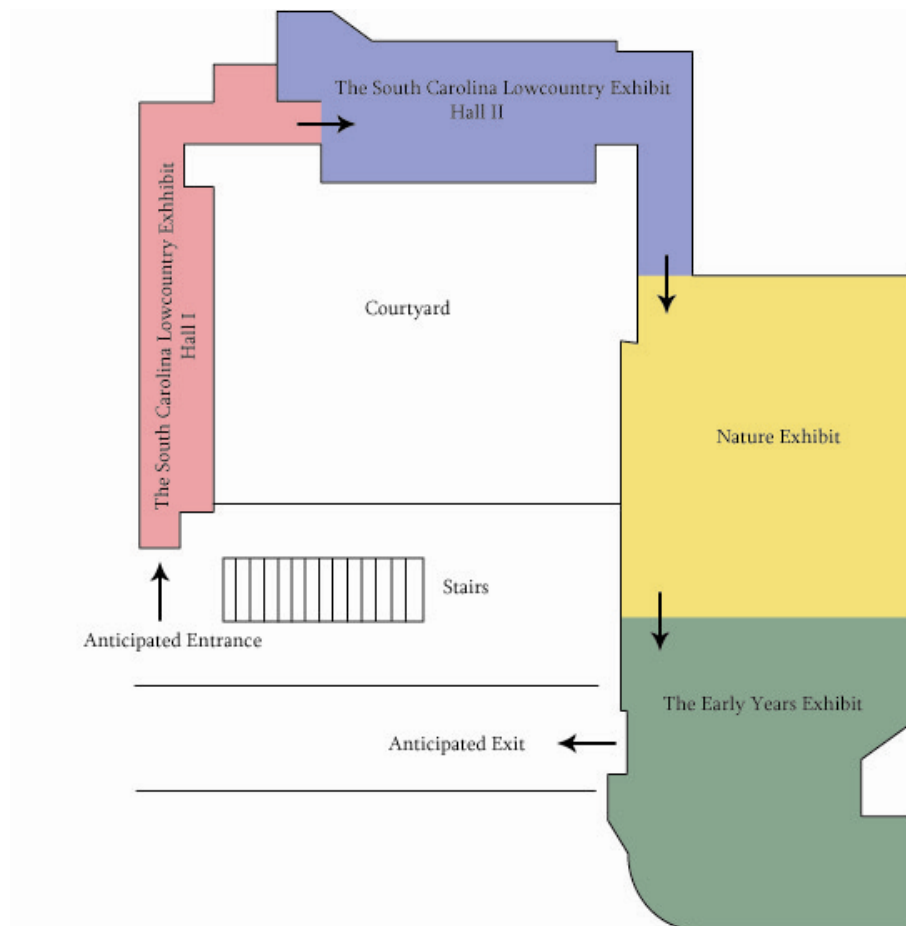


Fig. 2 Estimated Museum Space in Charleston Museum Drawing: L. Minors

The following diagram points out areas of the exhibit space that are mentioned specifically, for a better understanding of the space.

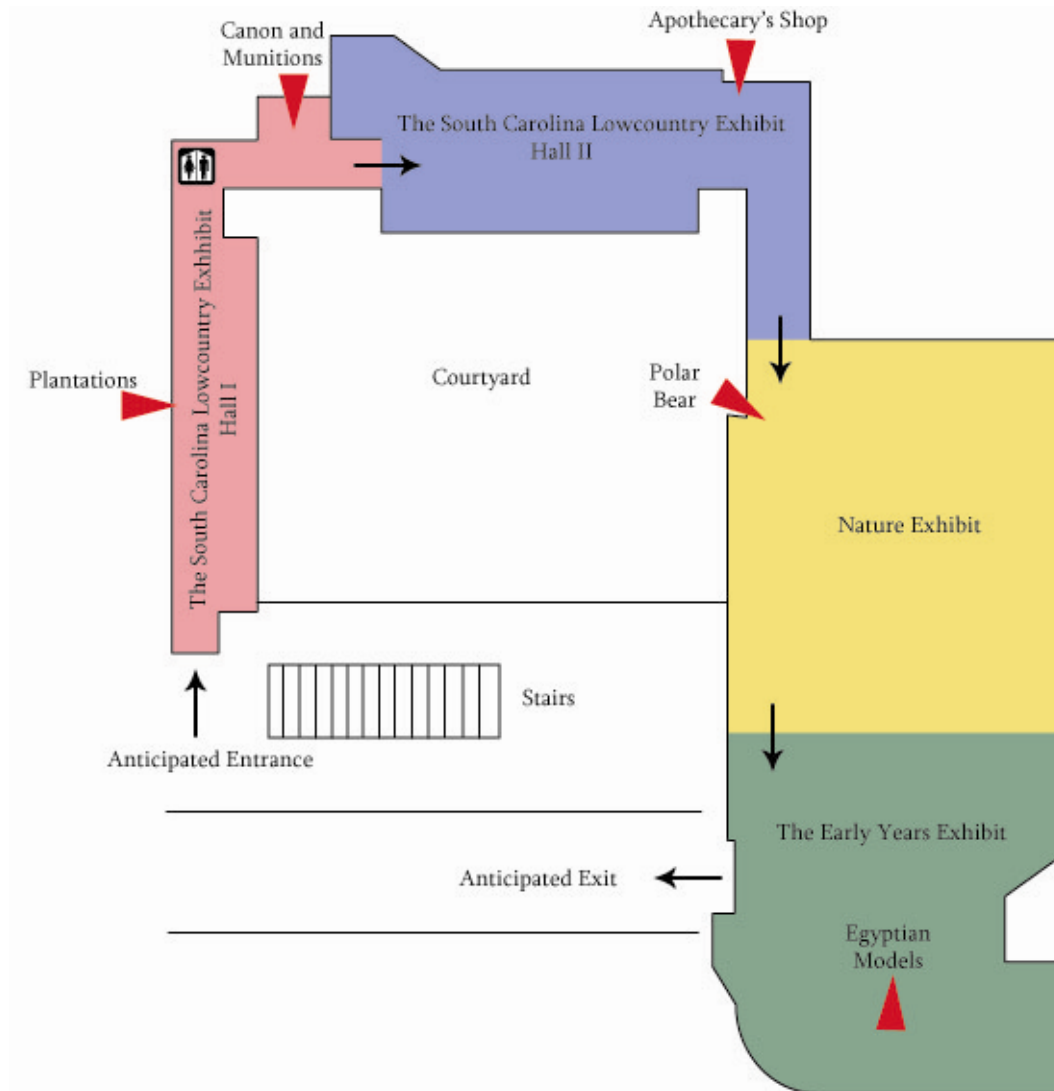


Fig. 3 Museum layout highlighting specific exhibits. Drawing: L. Minors

As shown, the anticipated entrance to the main exhibit halls is through The South Carolina Lowcountry exhibit, and the anticipated exit is through The Early Days exhibit. The South Carolina Lowcountry exhibit halls are both comparatively much more narrow and constricted in available space than are the Early Days and Nature exhibits. This may account for the limited amount of historical information which is found in the South Carolina Lowcountry exhibit – its abrupt end after the post-Civil War era may simply be due to lack of available space. Conversely, the Early Days and Nature exhibits occupy very spacious, open areas of the available exhibit space in that portion of the building.

The South Carolina Lowcountry Exhibit – Hall I

The South Carolina Lowcountry exhibit is the main focus of this thesis. It was installed in 1987 and has had little attention since, besides the routine replacement of textile objects for preservation purposes, the installation of LCD screens in the first hall, and an attempt at the redesign of the second hall.



Fig. 4 Entrance to The South Carolina Lowcountry exhibit Photo: L. Minors

The exhibit addresses several aspects of the South Carolina Lowcountry: the historical ethnic and cultural makeup of its citizens and founders, the predominant agricultural methods of the area, the effect of major conflicts (namely the Revolutionary and Civil Wars) on the area, and the day-to-day life of the citizens. It is broken up by hanging titles that read (respectively): Native Americans, Early Settlement, Seaport, Plantations, and Cotton. The last hanging title is different in style and format and denotes the region's rice production.

The visitor enters the first hall and sees first a representation of the entire state of South Carolina and a description of its indigenous peoples (Native Americans). Displayed are artifacts and tools that date to the period.



Fig. 5 Native American section of The South Carolina Lowcountry exhibit. Photo: L. Minors

This description is brief and moves quickly into a section detailing the different nationalities of the colonists, and just a few of their cultural contributions (Early Settlement). This section lists a few of the main nations from which the colonists emigrated (primarily France, England and Germany). There are brief descriptions of their early religious and cultural life, including some documents and drawings, as well as artifacts (Fig 6).



Fig. 6 Early Settlement section of The South Carolina Lowcountry exhibit. Photo: L. Minors

Next is the section describing plantation life (Plantations) which will include the sections of “Cotton” and “Rice” in this description for two reasons: first, the artifacts date from generally the same timeframe, second, the production of cotton and rice both were linked to plantation life.

These sections are made up of two main forms of visual display: black-and-white photographs of the plantations and their slaves, and implements used by the slaves on the plantations. The photographs make up the majority of the “Plantations” portion, and the implements are displayed in conjunction with the particular type (cotton or rice) plantation on which they were used. The artifacts are rare because many implements were used to destruction and no longer exist in any displayable form. The photographs, however, depict slaves in non-working situations (Figure 10 shows a slave playing the violin), which seems to be misrepresentative of the actual plantation culture.

Also in these sections are two LCD screens showing looped clips of the PBS production *When Rice Was King*, which gives a little more information and shows more accurately the working conditions of the slaves and describes the rice plantations in general.



Fig 7: Plantations section. Photo: L. Minors



Fig. 8 Farm tools in Plantations section. Photo: L. Minors



Fig. 9 Wall section in Plantations portion. Photo: L. Minors



Fig. 10 Plantation photographs. Photo: L. Minors

The next two photos show the space in its entirety. From these images, it is apparent how narrow the physical space is, which may explain the restricted amount of information displayed. The first image shows the exhibit space looking towards the entrance. The Early Settlement, Seaport, and Plantation portions are in view. The second image was taken from the same point, but looking towards the exit. Visible are the Cotton and Rice portions (note that the hanging signage for Rice is simply a close-up of rice vegetation rather than the brown and yellow signage that is the standard for other signage in the exhibit; it appears in the upper right hand corner). Also note the LCD screen hanging at the very back of the exhibit. The other LCD screen

hangs perpendicular to it on the right hand wall and is not visible in this photograph.



Fig. 11 South Carolina Lowcountry exhibit view 1. Photo: L. Minors



Fig. 12 South Carolina Lowcountry exhibit view 2. Photo: L. Minors

As evident from the figures, the style of the exhibit “dates” it and makes evident the lack of effort of redesign. As mentioned above, the physical area of this portion of the exhibit space is the smallest, so at one time it was necessary to present as much information as possible in this small space. However, this space constraint has restricted the scope of the subject, which is the history of the South Carolina Lowcountry. For instance, one of the only examples of slave’s “voice,” which is displayed is a collection of earthenware containers, is made by a slave known as “Dave.” The “Dave” pieces are sometimes adorned with humorous rhymes about plantation life, or about his master. Aside from the “Dave” pieces, there are no slave artifacts other than

the implements used. One explanation, which I have already touched on, is that the tools and materials used by the slaves were used up and either discarded or destroyed. However, there is no descriptive text for the visitor to explain this lack.



Fig. 13 Ceramics collection, including “Dave” jars. Photo: L. Minors

It is not only the slaves which have been glossed over in this first section of the exhibit. Other ethnic groups have also received little recognition, specifically the Lowcountry Jewish population, which is mentioned only in passing. Although it may not be evident to the casual visitor to the downtown area, Charleston has a very rich and vibrant Jewish population and history. There are three traditional synagogues and one

Messianic synagogue in the Charleston area and there even exists a Jewish-only cemetery in West Ashley. In Chapter 4, I will describe options which may allow the visitor to learn more about the ethnic makeup of the Lowcountry in its early years without compromising authenticity while also offering a more complete version of the history of the region.

South Carolina Lowcountry Exhibit – Hall II

As the visitor leaves the previous portion of the exhibit, he/she moves into a small hall, containing the obligatory restroom facilities and a couple of cases containing various military implements from various centuries. In the center of the hall is a small canon, and flanking it on either side of the hall are displays of munitions from the late 19th and early 20th century. Just past this display is a wall and text describing the Post-Revolutionary era, and the formation of the State of South Carolina. These two displays seem out of context. The visitor is easily confused: What do these 20th century guns have to do with the Revolution? Why do these munitions appear so close together? Could this be the entrance to a militarily-focused history of the Lowcountry? Figures 14 – 16 show this portion of the exhibit. Figure 14 shows the short hall from the standpoint of the end of the first hall. Figure 15 shows the canon and the collection of guns, and Figure 16 shows the collection of 20th century munitions, which is directly opposite the mounted canon.



Fig. 14 Hallway with canon and beginning of Hall II. Photo: L. Minors



Fig. 15 Canon and guns in hallway. Photo: L. Minors



Fig. 16 16th century munitions display in hallway. Photo: L. Minors

Also, the exhibit style has changed. In the previous hall, the text and surrounding displays were mostly brown, or sepia-toned, perhaps a reflection of the dominant style of the time in which the exhibit was installed (1987) or an attempt to create a rough sort of atmosphere to reflect the pioneering way of life during the Colonial era which the exhibit displays. In the next hall, the cases are a dark blue color with white text, which seems to be the only stylistic norm within the space. The space features various typefaces which clash stylistically with one another.



Fig. 17 Beginning of Hall II. Photo: L. Minors

After the portion of this exhibit that discusses the formation of the State of South Carolina, the exhibit goes on to describe trade and daily life during the Antebellum period. All of these cases are blue with white text, as mentioned. In Figure 18 is a case entitled “China Trade,” which is printed in a conventional “Oriental” typeface, and differs completely from the rest of the exhibit.

The inclusion of this typeface has produced two effects. First, it interrupts the exhibit-as-rhetor’s message by breaking the style of the message’s transmission. The rhetor’s historical message is undermined by the appearance of whimsy and attempted creativity, thus negating the *ethos*

necessary in a historical space. In addition to the stylistic issue of inconsistent use of stylistic elements (uneven appearance), the use of this typeface carries post-colonial issues of “Oriental gaze,” or that theory that the Western world has objectified the East through art and cultural practices. Rather than reflecting a creative design, the use of this typeface has reflected an unintentional neo-colonialist attitude.



Fig. 18 China Trade display. Photo: L. Minors

Also in this portion of the Post-Antebellum exhibit are textiles and other artifacts that reflect the daily life of Charlestonians during that era. Figure 19 shows a large portion of this exhibit. As shown, it is in the same style (blue walls and cases, white text) as the previous exhibit.



Fig. 19 Long view of Antebellum exhibit. Photo: L. Minors

Immediately following the day-to-day artifacts arranged in this exhibit, is the portion of the exhibit that details Charleston's role and history in the American Civil War. This section of the exhibit is again in a different style than the section preceding it. The color of the walls and cases changes from the blue with white typeface to a grey with black typeface. The contents of this exhibit consist primarily of textiles (specifically a rotating collection of some well-preserved Civil War soldiers' uniforms, other dress, and a rotating collection of flags), shells and war implements, and mounted copies of newspaper articles, photographs and other documents. Figure 20 shows the beginning of the Civil War section of the exhibit.



Fig. 20 Beginning of Civil War exhibit. Photo: Lauren Minors

Visible in the above photograph are replicas of Confederate flags, photographs mounted on the wall, and implements in cases (at the back of the picture). The Charleston Museum prides itself on the historical integrity of its collection; that is to say, the all artifacts are real. The Museum does display the authentic flags under glass, and rotates them regularly to preserve the delicate fibers (if left under light for too long a time, they disintegrate very quickly). The replica hanging flags (and signage) may be present to augment any flags that are not currently on display, and to create vertical visual interest. However, as evident from the above image, there is no transition

between the Pre-Civil War exhibit to the Civil War exhibit; one flows directly into the other without distinct signage.

This portion of the exhibit does several things very well: provides permanent replicas of objects that may not be immediately viewable, offers both “human” and “military” artifacts (i.e. uniforms and shells), and displays a vast amount of textual evidence in the form of reprinted artifacts. However, it is the over-proliferation of the textual evidence that overwhelms the visitor in this section. Figure 21 shows how tightly packed the walls are with signage and reprinted artifacts.



Fig. 21 Civil War exhibit wall of text. Photo: L. Minors

The wall is so full that the viewer cannot discern the most important piece of information amongst the group. In addition, the text is printed in such a small size that it may be difficult for some visitors to see. The physical difficulty of viewing this portion of the exhibit may have the unwanted effect of turning visitors away, or having them rush through this portion of the exhibit: surely the opposite intended for such an important part of Charleston (and American) history.

After the Civil War portion, the visitor moves next into the Post-Civil War section of the exhibit. This section contains, much like the Pre-Civil War portion, a collection of textiles (primarily clothing of the time) and other artifacts (household items, industry items). The largest artifact in this portion of the exhibit is a reconstructed apothecary storefront, which at one time stood in downtown Charleston, including the original clerk's desk and bottles.

However, this portion of the exhibit does little to explain how the city of Charleston, or the area of the Lowcountry in general, was able to recuperate from the devastation of the Civil War. It does a wonderful job of showing the way life went on years after, but does not address the economic and political hardship that occurred directly after the War. It also seems to be composed mainly of artifacts, with little textual explanation of the historical significance of these artifacts (with the exception of the apothecary's shop).



Fig. 22 Post-Civil War exhibit, long view. Photo: L. Minors



Fig. 23 Apothecary's shop in Charleston Museum. Photo: L. Minors

At the end of the Post-Civil War portion of the exhibit, the visitor moves into a small hallway connecting to another exhibit: the Nature exhibit. This next exhibit starts abruptly, with no signage. Figure 24 shows what the visitor sees while moving into the next portion.

The Nature Exhibit



Fig. 24 Hall leaving South Carolina Lowcountry Hall II, entering Nature exhibit. Photo: L. Minors

This first view of the Nature exhibit may be confusing to the visitor. When the visitor initially entered the exhibit, it was entitled The South Carolina Lowcountry and up until the point at which the visitor enters this hall, the exhibits have been pertinent and historical. Suddenly, the visitor is

presented with a preserved polar bear, which seems completely unrelated to Charleston or the Lowcountry.

In the same hall with the polar bear, is a full Nature exhibit, consisting of various preserved and mounted mammals, birds and reptiles in both permanent and what appear to be temporary cases. The animals displayed are not specifically from the Lowcountry area, but are from all over the world and from various eras.



Fig. 25 Nature hall, view 1. Photo: L, Minors

The photograph above shows the Nature exhibit as if the visitor was standing at the polar bear. Along the middle and bottom right hand side are the temporary, movable cases, which contain mounted mammals. Also

viewable in this photo are replicas of prehistoric animals and assembled skeletons of reptiles. Figure 26 shows a closer view of the moveable cases, which appear to need repair or replacement.



Fig. 26 Moveable cases in Nature exhibit. Photo: L. Minors

The rest of the Nature exhibit is displayed in cases that face each other and form a corridor. Figures 27 and 28 show how this hall is formed. Some of these cases are more permanent, but through their style and arrangement, reflect their advanced age. Figure 27 shows the cases as they continue on the wall shared by the polar bear. Figure 28 shows more of the moveable cases which form the corridor. This view is also taken as though the visitor were standing with his/her back to the polar bear.



Fig. 27 Permanent cases on the right side of the formed corridor. Photo: L. Minors



Fig. 28 Moveable cases on the left side of the corridor. Photo: L. Minors

Many problems arise with the presentation and even the existence of the Nature exhibit. First, there is no signage that explains why the visitor is now exiting a Post-Civil War exhibit and entering a Nature exhibit. Both end and begin abruptly. Second, the specimens that are displayed are not limited to the indigenous fauna of the Lowcountry, as is best illustrated by the presence of the giant polar bear, prehistoric reconstructions, and a skeleton of a giraffe. If the Nature exhibit contained only animals of the Lowcountry, its existence might be more viable.

The Charleston Museum has for its entire existence collected natural specimens, and continues to be actively involved in the natural history community in a variety of ways. However, the presence of this sort of exhibit immediately after (or, it could be argued, in the middle) of a history exhibit, is unfounded. I will explore other options for this rich and wonderful portion of the Museum's collection and history in Chapter 4.

The Early Days

After the visitor travels down the corridor formed by the Nature cases, they encounter the final portion of the exhibit: The Early Days. This exhibit occupies the same hall as the Nature exhibit, the partition between the two being formed by the aforementioned moveable and permanent cases. Unlike the Nature exhibit, The Early Days exhibit does have naming signage, placed under a plaster cast of an Egyptian sculpture, as visible in Figure 28.

This portion gives a rough and general overview of the activities of the Museum from its 1773 inception. The artifacts in this portion are quite various, as the following figures will illustrate. The varied nature of these artifacts is exemplary of the Museum's collection prior to the Civil War until the mid-20th century. Figures 29 through 33 show the varied nature of the artifacts and specimens.



Fig. 29 Long view of The Early Days exhibit. Photo: L. Minors

In the photograph are visible two plaster casts, one large in the right quarter of the image, and one smaller in the far left side. Both were purchased by previous curator Dr. Gabriel Manigault in an attempt to incorporate more aesthetic pieces into the collection, which at the time was primarily scientific.

Also visible are a few skeletons and preserved and mounted species, which demonstrate the vast and varied natural science collection the Museum has maintained since the beginning. The next photographs show in detail the contents of this exhibit.



Fig. 30 Jars of preserved marine life and mounted water buffalo. Photo: L. Minors



Fig. 31 Cultural objects of indigenous peoples and replica of the Rosetta Stone. Photo: L. Minors



Fig. 32 Reproductions of Western Art. Photo: L. Minors



Fig. 33 Mummy in Early Days exhibit. Photo: L. Minors

Note the signage in the above photograph: handwritten, and surely a remnant of the Museum's time in the Thompson Auditorium, nearly thirty years ago.

These photographs demonstrate the “cabinet of curiosities” nature of the Museum’s early collection. Unfortunately, what is not demonstrated in this exhibit, is the rich scientific history which the Museum has, and the degree to which the Museum was essentially a scientific “hub” from Colonial times to well after the Civil War. Though some of the first marine specimens are on display (preserved in the original jars and rum), the depth of significance of this collection is not fully explained to the visitor and it does, at the end of the exhibit track, appear as it did at the turn of the 20th century: as a cabinet of curiosities. Sadly, there is much more to the history of the Museum than an amusing collection of plaster casts, stuffed birds and ancient Egyptian artifacts.

Conclusion

After fully exploring the historical and scientific exhibit space in the Charleston Museum, it is evident that the exhibits are in need of serious redesign. As mentioned, there are problems with style, usability, and social and cultural representation. However, I feel that the greatest area of need is the proper representation of Charlestonian culture, and the once flourishing scientific community which the Museum founded and fostered over the past 225 years. To not stress this fact and the rich history behind the institution, is truly a disservice to the Museum itself.

In Chapter 4, I will present recommendations not only for the different sections which I have identified, but recommendations for the exhibit as a whole, and for its continued success. These recommendations will be based on existing structures and artifacts, and will seek to achieve a cohesive and fully representative exhibit for visitors from all locales to enjoy.

Chapter 4

Recommendations for the Charleston Museum

In the previous chapters I examined the rich history of the museum, theories in the field of professional communication which apply to the exhibit space in the museum, and a synopsis of the current exhibit space as it stands in the museum. I have shown that the museum is unfortunately not reaching its potential and is in need of both ideological and visual revision. In this chapter, I will offer recommendations based on both the problems I identified in the current exhibit space. These recommendations will be informed by the professional communications theories discussed in Chapter 2.

For the most part, my recommendations will be on a broad scale, in order to leave room for the creativity of the exhibit designers themselves. Because this thesis may be put to use by the Charleston Museum, I will leave the minor details open to interpretation. For example, if I suggest consistency of typeface, I will not specify the exact typeface to be used. Also, it is my understanding that completely redesigning a museum exhibit requires some knowledge of architecture, engineering and preservation methods. Since I have no knowledge of these fields, I will make no specific recommendations regarding them.

I will list my recommendations by exhibit portion, moving through the exhibit as in Chapter 4. My recommendations will fall into several categories: stylistic (updates regarding visual design), inclusion (updates addressing ideological factors and cultural representation) and usability (updates addressing visitor interaction with/within exhibit).

In my recommendations, I will take into consideration the fact that the museum is a non-profit, and is responsible for all of its own funding. Therefore, I will seek to make my recommendations as cost-effective as possible. I understand through conversations had with museum staff that often it takes several years to raise funds for and implement redesigns. Fortunately, some recommendations which I deem most urgent can be implemented with very little funding.

Many positive effects will result if these recommendations are implemented. Culturally, the Museum will reclaim its previous glory for its impressive historical and scientific exhibits and its ongoing preservation efforts. This will generate positive publicity for the museum, drawing a larger audience (and therefore increased funding) from the South Carolina community as well as from the tourist industry which thrives in Charleston. By culturally updating its exhibits, the Museum will connect more vitally with the Charleston community, therefore augmenting its preservation activities to include the preservation of the history that is being made in the present era, as

well as including history which has been obscured in the past. These recommendations allow for a different treatment of the current Nature exhibit; one which will showcase the rich history of the Museum's involvement with natural history as well as the natural beauty of the Lowcountry region. The redesign also allows for the Museum to demonstrate its own history in the development of scientific thought in the United States and abroad. These recommendations also include an opportunity to update the exhibits using current technology, the addition of which would in themselves produce a great amount of positive publicity for the Museum.

Entrance and External Façade

Creating visual contrast between the façade of the Charleston Museum and its surroundings (i.e. large trees, other dark-colored buildings in the area) can serve to attract attention to the Museum, possibly even making it into more of a landmark than just another building. The contrast between the façade of the building and its context would serve as a visual “tease,” inviting visitors in under a sense of intrigue and curiosity as to the contents of the Museum. Rather than passing the building off as uninteresting (therefore passing off the contents as the same), visitors will not only have a better understanding of the contents of the Museum, but also be excited about their experience there. As mentioned in Chapter 4, it is unrealistic to ask or expect the museum to do major exterior structural work to enhance or disguise its

anachronistic and possibly off-putting architecture. Currently, the dark brick hidden behind a row of oaks along Meeting Street appears drab, even gloomy. It is possible that the dark color of the brick shaded by the trees allows the museum to slip into obscurity, thus reducing the numbers of visitors annually.

I propose that a series of outdoor signage is produced, perhaps bi-annually, that is hung over the blank sides of the museum. These might be of some appropriate outdoor fabric, and printed with large, colorful images of the collections, both permanent and temporary.

These panels would serve several purposes. At the most basic level, they would advertise the contents of the museum in large scale, which would be eye-catching through the oaks and create visual interest to those possibly passing on the street or walking in and out of the Visitor's Center across Meeting Street. Additionally, they would communicate to the passers-by the contents and purpose of the museum. Most importantly, they would be cost-effective to produce and implement.

The South Carolina Lowcountry Exhibit – Hall I

The goal for the redesign of this and subsequent exhibit halls is to create a space of intellectual exchange between object, text and visitor. By redesigning these exhibits taking into account the effect they have upon the visitor, the Charleston Museum will not only have a space of aesthetic quality,

but will also have a space in which visitors may engage with the history of the Lowcountry and its global value.

In Chapter 4, I identified several broad issues to be addressed in the first hall of the South Carolina Lowcountry: outdated visual design, cultural misrepresentation and incomplete historical depth, and visitor interaction (usability) needs.

First, I will address the outdated visual design. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the prevalent color scheme in this hall involves brown and sepia-toned visual displays, as well as brown-and-yellow overhead signage, all indicative of the time period in which they were installed, the late 1980's. While the maps and photographs which have been greatly enlarged as to become part of the displays are striking images, the replication of these in the brown tones is out-of-date.

In regards to the visual design of this hall, I recommend that the color scheme and typefaces used be updated to a more era-relevant combination. That is to say, perhaps using colors and typeface that evoke the time period being described could perhaps have a more unifying effect upon this hall. Rather than having the history of the colonial era of the Lowcountry presented in a modern manner, the use of these period visual elements would make the message “seamless” and create an exhibit in which the visitor feels

enveloped by the time. This is key, since the exhibit is in effect a rhetor, its appearance must mesh with the information presented.

The way in which cultural and historical information in Hall I is presented is in need of revision as well. As mentioned in Chapter 4, there are some clear instances in which cultural history is either “glossed over” or misrepresented entirely.

In both the “Native Americans” and “Early Settlement” sections, cultural groups and the interactions between them are not described in much depth. This coincides with both the “double map” theory of Barton and Barton and with Vitanza’s revisionary historiography. In as much as there do exist some artifacts and brief mentions of all the cultural groups which had a stake in the early Charles Towne colony, the exhibit is “complete.” However, it is perceivable that the exhibit could in ways expand upon this information, and in a more inclusive manner.

For example, rather than separating the Native Americans entirely from the early settlers, a portion of the exhibit could be devoted to information describing their interaction through the colonization and state-founding process. What were the challenges to both cultural groups? How were land rights meted out? How has the population of Native Americans in the Lowcountry region been affected since the beginning of colonization? Answers to these questions, and possibly others, could fill in the history of the

region in ways that the visitor might not readily anticipate, thus providing a deeper educational experience.

In the portion of the exhibit which details the early settlers and their cultures, a bit more depth of information could be beneficial as well. Possibly by accessing some form of immigrant statistics from the time, an easily-understandable graphic could be produced to show the cultural makeup of the colony.

There is an opportunity to connect with the current community in this section as well. Several Charlestonians today can trace their ancestry to the colonies, be they Huguenot, German, Jewish, slave or otherwise. The Museum has the ability to research and contact these families, possibly creating an aspect to the exhibit which traces the history of the city in regards to the cultural history of its citizens. The trace would start in this section and perceivably continue until the end or the current era. The inclusion of this type of exhibit would serve two purposes: community involvement creating greater publicity, and the display of a “close-to-home,” inclusive and rich exhibit.

The next portion of Hall I presents the plantations and slavery: cotton, rice, and indigo. As in the “Early Settlement” portion, this section suffers from both cultural misrepresentation and need for more informational depth. Slavery is still a touchy subject for some Southerners. While it is largely

identified as an embarrassing institution, and one of which many Southerners are ashamed, one fact cannot be ignored. The success and financial strength of the South before the Civil War was possible in large part due to the institution of slavery. Charleston is no exception; because of its port city status, it can be inferred that some portion of its shipping business was connected with the slave trade itself.

Though these facts are things that most Southerners would rather pass over and not dwell on, it is important to be completely honest about them. Other countries have mandated the manner in which such painful histories are dealt with. German law dictates that any museum which may perceivably display facts about the Holocaust must do so with complete honesty. The failure to do so will result in felony charges. It is my belief that American museums should treat the institution of slavery in the same manner, however painful it may prove to be. For the Charleston Museum, the historical museum in a tourist city visited by people from all over the country and the world, it is especially important. For Southern visitors, slavery may be part of a type of collective consciousness and may need no auxiliary explanation (and perhaps it maybe unwanted, due to familial ties to slavery), but for visitors from outside the region the complete honesty and inclusion may provide a deeper understanding for the history of Charleston and the Lowcountry.

Chapter 4 mentions the reason for the lack of artifacts in this portion of the hall stems from the sheer lack of availability, or ability for those things to be exhibited for any period of time. Also mentioned is the pride that the Charleston Museum has for displaying only authentic artifacts, and as few models as absolutely possible. However, this gap can be breached by the creation of graphic representations of slave life. This would effectively provide more information to the visitor, while not compromising the Museum's historical integrity.

Other ways of providing more in-depth information on slavery would be to research and present documents which show the numbers of slaves imported to and sold from Charleston, the numbers of slaves working in the area from the point of colonization to the end of the Civil War, perhaps organized into some graphic form which would not take up much physical space in the already-limited hall. The inclusion of these sorts of statistics would provide a more realistic view of how slavery affected and essentially built the region.

Also at issue in this portion of the exhibit is the representation of slaves' "voice." As mentioned in Chapter 4, the examples of voice in this section are both limited and skewed. The collection of plantation photographs on the left side of the exhibit provides some interesting information. First, they show that not all plantations were after the archetypal "Tara" style. Some

were quite grand, others were fairly simple. However, it is the photographs of the slaves which appear below the photographs of houses that provide a skewed view of the reality of slave life. I am specifically referring the photograph of an elderly slave playing the violin. This photograph has connotations which evoke the stereotypical “happy slave” ideal which has been so criticized (even banned) in other forms (i.e. Disney’s *Song of the South*, based on the Uncle Remus stories by Joel Chandler Harris). This image can be taken as offensive and even racist at worst.

However, the inclusion of this image has the potential to be extremely informative. First, it is one of the only close-ups in the exhibit of a slave. In this way, visitors have the opportunity to look closely at the dress and countenance of the man, which fills in the blanks left by the sheer unavailability of slave textiles. The ability to view the face in such close range is also valuable, because human expression speaks more than text is able to.

It is the background of the photograph which may be the most informative to visitors. At Dachau Work Camp in Dachau, Germany, there are photographs of a concentration camp “band” with an explanation of its existence. In an attempt to prove the viability and efficiency of such camps, the SS would conduct periodic tours for the people of the local towns (Dachau, Munich, et al) and for dignitaries. The majority of the prisoners were ordered to return to their barracks, while those prisoners known to have musical

ability were traipsed out to entertain the visitors for an hour. The photograph, standing alone, seems misrepresentative and even cruel without the accompanying explanation. It is possible that the violin-playing slave may have a similar background. If the photograph were researched (Who took the photograph? When? For what purpose? Are there other photographs with similar histories?) and the results of the research displayed, the effect would be tremendous. Inclusion, multi-layering of history (Barton & Barton's palimpsest), and increase of slavery's "voice" would all occur.

In this same hall, perhaps as an attempt to aid the representation of slaves and slavery, are two LCD screens with looped sections of the PBS production, *When Rice was King*. The presence of these screens and the information they display is a wonderful way to include additional information to a cramped area without compromising historical integrity. However, two visitor experience problems with these screens exist. First, the screens are so old and over-used that the images are "burned" into them, making the clips difficult to see. Second, they are placed so close together and the volume is loud enough that a visitor standing between them may become distracted and/or disoriented. Perhaps the information can be combined, and shown on a single screen to reduce interference. Regular care and maintenance of these screens may prolong their usable life.

A key part of history is missing from this portion of the exhibit as well: the formation of the Charleston Museum. Since it was founded in 1773, the Museum's very early history (including the Revolutionary War involvement of all of its founders) would be relevant and interesting, providing more information into an important part of American and Southern scientific research. As noted in Chapter 2, the plantations and agricultural industry played an enormous role in the growth of the Museum, allowing the gentlemen farmers to become educated and to spend their leisure time in intellectual pursuits. Therefore, it is highly important that the Museum recognize its own deep connection to the institution of the plantation.

My recommendations for the first hall of the South Carolina Lowcountry exhibit reflect the theories of rhetoric (Bitzer), visual rhetoric (Barton & Barton) and revisionary historiography. By solidifying the rhetor in the space, the exhibit presents a more cohesive and convincing argument, thereby cultivating a change in its audience. The inclusion of additional background information in the sections regarding the early settlers, the slaves, and the Native Americans produces the palimpsest mentioned by Barton and Barton. By making that information available, and possibly positioning it in a layered fashion, the visitor may fully understand the complexity of the region and its history.

South Carolina Lowcountry Exhibit – Hall II

The end of the first hall leads into a small corridor which contains two small cases displaying 19th and 20th century military apparatus including a canon. As mentioned in Chapter 4, this may be confusing to a visitor that just left a hall of information detailing the colonial activities of the Lowcountry. These more recent munitions seem strikingly out of place, and may lead the visitor to turn around back through the previous exhibit, rather than moving forward into the larger second hall which contains the continuation of information from the first.

There are several possibilities for this space and for its contents. On an immediate level, signage that indicates the continuation of the South Carolina Lowcountry exhibit could be produced and displayed in this space, to reduce visitor confusion. This could be as simple as a poster on an easel, until more permanent plans are put into place.

The contents should be moved to one of two options. The first option would be to store them and display them as part of a temporary exhibit that perhaps focuses on military or armaments history. The second option would be to disperse them throughout their appropriate time periods, integrating them into the larger South Carolina Lowcountry exhibit.

At the end of the small hallway is the true beginning of the second hall. Here, the style is completely different from that of the first hall. It is a more

recent installment, yet still disjointed. As in the first hall, the exhibit/rhetor should blend seamlessly into the message. A redesign incorporating stylistic aspects of the time period, or at least a continuous, agreed-upon set of stylistic elements should be used.

This is especially important in regards to the “China Trade” case. The use of a stereotypical “Oriental” typeface evokes offensive images and outdated mindsets regarding to Asian culture. Though the use of the typeface may have stemmed from a desire to reflect whimsy and creativity within a context that does not generally foster it, this typeface can actually be construed as offensive, not to mention merely out-of-place.

This hall is much larger than the first hall of the exhibit, both laterally and vertically. Both the previous and next section make use of the ample space above the exhibit to create vertical visual interest through the use of hanging signage and flags. This portion of the exhibit could benefit from such use as well, both to insure stylistic continuity and also to augment the exhibit in a creative, cost effective way.

This first section of the hall could benefit from the use of definitive signage as well. It is assumed that it is a continued part of the South Carolina Lowcountry exhibit, but it lacks signage similar to that in the first hall that “tabs” the sections of the exhibit distinctly. This type of signage (hanging or

mounted) could help visitors navigate through the sections and aid to ease their understanding of the information presented.

The second section of the hall presents information relative to the Civil War. Two distinct problems exist in this section, both regarding visitor experience. The first is a continuation of the problem of signage. When the visitor leaves the first section of the second hall, the wall color changes from blue to grey (excellent, and indicative of the grey Confederate uniforms), but there is no distinct signage which indicates the beginning of an exhibit on the Civil War. Though it is easily discernable because of its location in the greater exhibit, and from the hanging replica flags which feature the Confederate flag in some form, stylistic consistency should be upheld, including distinct signage.

The other problem present in this section is an overload of information. There are several possible reasons for this, and out of those reasons, possible solutions. As with slavery, the Civil War is still “in recent memory” for some Southerners. Pride in familial participation, along with the crushing defeat and slow recovery after the war are still felt in some areas of the South. It was a complex war, still hotly debated, with several different versions of the truth. It may be this need to examine it from all angles which has led to the overabundance of information in this section.

It is to be applauded that this amount of research and discovery was carried out in order to produce this small section of the exhibit space. It is also exceptional that it is all displayed, in what Barton and Barton would call a type of “collage.” However, the overall effect in such a small space is overwhelming to the visitor; there are so many pictures, reprinted articles, and tiny boxes of explanatory text that one scarcely knows where to look first.

The preservation of all this information is important. None should be left out, and if there is more to be found, it by all means should be included. This section should be treated as the section dealing with slavery, making all attempts to be inclusive and complete. However, a redesign of the way in which the information is presented could be beneficial. Perhaps a takeaway “booklet” could be printed, placing the articles chronologically. This would afford the visitor the same wealth of information, as well as the experience of holding in their hand the same articles that Charlestonians picked up as their daily news.

In this section, other avenues of historical inclusion could be explored. Rather than presenting the “just the facts” of the war (dates, names, battles won and lost), some form of civilian and slave voice should be included if possible. What were the hopes and fears of Charlestonians as Sherman marched to the sea? Were there slaves involved in the very war that was being fought to free them? Answers to these questions would provide a deeper

understanding of what the war meant to Americans at the time, possibly changing visitors' ideas of what the war means to them today. The Civil War is widely recognized as one of the most horrific events in American history, therefore it should be treated as more than a series of victories and defeats. It is responsible for changing the American economy drastically, and the effects are still tangible in more rural parts of the South today. The continued tragedy of this unfortunate event should be addressed by offering these more humanistic viewpoints of the war.

The section immediately following the Civil War section seems to detail the way of life after the war. Again, it is devoid of specific signage, which should be included. The section contains mostly items of material culture (clothing, home items, medical items) and seems to seek to show how life went on after the devastation of the war. As with the disconnect apparent between the earlier "Native Americans" and "Early Settlement" sections, there is a gap of information between the war and the post-war era. Many questions can be raised in this gap: How much devastation did Charleston experience? How many Charlestonians were killed or wounded? How did the end of slavery effect the region? How did the Lowcountry rebuild and rejoin the Union? Again, this is a delicate time and a delicate subject, but one which must be addressed in order to maintain historical depth and integrity. These questions could be answered by materials gathered from the families

mentioned in the recommendation from the first hall (tracing lineage and relating it to Charleston history).

Throughout this hall, the strand of history which relates to the Charleston Museum is again missing. It was during this period (statehood to post-Civil War) that the Museum experienced a vast amount of growth and some very interesting occurrences, including the need to remove the exhibits to Edgefield to protect them from being destroyed in Charleston. The fact that the interests of science and education were not cast aside, but rather fostered, during such a tumultuous time is remarkable and should be explored.

Thus, the recommendations for the second hall of the South Carolina Lowcountry exhibit again relate to the theories laid out by Bitzer, Barton and Barton, and Vitanza. It is in the visitor's interest that a cohesive rhetor be presented, and that the rhetoric is as deep and multilayered as can be, in order to present the most complete and educational exhibit possible in the space. These ideals and recommendations are especially important in the next section, Nature, which poses an acute potential for extreme confusion on the part of the visitor.

The Nature Exhibit

It is the Nature exhibit which has brought the Charleston Museum all its fame. The involvement of the Museum in natural history, scientific discovery and ecological preservation has made the Museum into an important

American institution, and a still-recognized resource for researchers of nature. Therefore, the effect of this redesign should ultimately be to showcase this integral part of the Museum's history as well as to show visitors the natural beauty of the South Carolina Lowcountry in the comfort of the indoors. This portion of the exhibit should present the natural history of the Lowcountry as well as the remarkable history of the natural science scene in Charleston.

After leaving the portion of the exhibit which displays artifacts from just after the Civil War, the visitor enters another small connecting hallway, at the other end of which is a large preserved and mounted polar bear. This is the beginning of the Nature exhibit. Again, there is no definitive signage to tell the visitor where they are and why. Much like the ambiguous hall between the first and second halls of the South Carolina Lowcountry exhibit, this may cause the visitor to become confused, or even to wonder if they have done something "wrong." In this case, very inexpensive signage could be created and mounted to help direct visitors in the meantime of larger-scale revisions.

As shown in Chapter 4, this Nature exhibit is not limited to creatures of the Lowcountry, or even to creatures of the Americas. It is a seeming hodgepodge of various animals, as many as could fit in the available space. The cases reflect their advanced age, and the effect of the entire exhibit is somewhat downtrodden and limping. This is extremely unfortunate,

considering that the Museum's reputation and glory were built on the extensive natural history collections it amassed in its first 150 years of existence.

This is what makes the recommendations for the Nature exhibit the most difficult set of recommendations to imagine. It seems cruel to hide away the very part of the Museum that brought it its' fame, but it is apparent that this aging Nature exhibit is quite out of place. There seem to be three options available: relocation, extreme down-sizing, or elimination.

The option of relocation is unfortunately not cost-effective, but could provide two things for the Museum: an additional source of revenue, and an opportunity to grow, develop, and advertise this amazing scientific resource. A separate venue for the natural history collection would allow for the exhibits to be more in-depth and complete and to have better archival care overall. Possible audiences would be not only those researchers that use the collection currently, but also school groups that might otherwise visit and contribute to other exhibits, such as the South Carolina Aquarium. Indeed, this endeavor would require a considerable amount of funding and planning, but could be quite beneficial to the growth and public opinion of the Museum.

The option of extreme down-sizing may prove to be the most easily-executed, cost-effective, and perceivably fair. This would involve exhibiting only animals that are native to the Lowcountry region. It is still recommended

that the exhibit be relocated, however, but to another portion of the existing museum space. It may be prudent to replace the silversmith exhibit with the Animals of the Lowcountry exhibit, as this may be more of a draw to school groups and the children of tourists. Positioning it next to the Kidstory exhibit would make the most “sense” when considering the way in which all the exhibit halls work together.

If this course of action is taken, specific signage should be produced which reiterates the Museum’s continued involvement in natural history and science, perhaps with information about the on-staff ornithologist and the Dill property, which is designated as a wildlife sanctuary. Over time, new cases should either be built or purchased, and the style of signage should reflect modern science. It may even be helpful to incorporate an environmental preservation message into this exhibit, considering current trends and thought regarding the issue. In fact, the use of rhetoric that reflects environmentalism may even be profitable.

The option of elimination is certainly one which will be met with some degree of resistance. To ask the Museum to essentially eliminate the Nature exhibit may be asking too much. As mentioned, it is a significant portion of the rich history of the Museum and a significant portion of the Museum’s current activities (the natural history collection is in continued use for research purposes by scientists all over the country). If the Museum chose to

eliminate this section as a permanent exhibit, there will always be options for temporary exhibits to be constructed that highlight different portions of the collection (“Birds of Africa” or “The Manigault Skeleton Collection,” for example). This way the Museum could continue to utilize this incredible collection of specimens, but make room for the South Carolina Lowcountry exhibit to continue past the turn of the 20th century.

All of these options serve several purposes, but have a common practical effect: the creation of additional space in the third large hall. After this space is free, the only things left in the hall are the artifacts displayed in the “Early Days” exhibit. As mentioned in the recommendations for the South Carolina Lowcountry exhibit, it is strongly suggested that the history of the Museum be incorporated into the history of the Lowcountry, seeing as their success is not mutually exclusive, besides being remarkable and easily capitalized-upon. If those recommendations are followed, the “Early Days” exhibit may not even exist in its own right. Rather, its contents may be distributed throughout the South Carolina Lowcountry exhibit according to accessioning date or curator. I will assume that this is the manner in which the recommendations have been taken, which creates an entire empty hall with which to work. This will become a continuation of the South Carolina Lowcountry exhibit.

The South Carolina Lowcountry Exhibit – Hall III

With the recommendations previously laid out now “in place,” a new hall is free and more information may now be displayed. This new hall may do several things. It may create a little bit of room for the previous historical exhibits to be expanded upon, though hopefully these exhibits can retain their current size through the creative use of available technology.

Optimally, this hall would be used for the continuation of the South Carolina Lowcountry exhibit and would take the visitor into the 21st century. Topics which should be addressed (bearing in mind the theories of rhetoric, visual rhetoric and revisionary history as previously discussed) should include: the revitalization of the Lowcountry after the Civil War, scientific and intellectual life in the Lowcountry, the push for gentrification in the Downtown area and the Museum’s involvement, the effect of the Civil Rights movement upon the area, and the development of the Lowcountry region into a multicultural, international city which is continuing to boom. The creation of such an exhibit may garner much community excitement, particularly with the mention of the Fortune 500 companies that have ties to Charleston (Blackbaud, Google, etc).

The creation of such an exhibit will also provide a more complete vision of how Charleston and the Lowcountry has participated in the worlds’ stage over its entire history. The implementation of such an exhibit will most

certainly be time consuming and may take several years to put into place, but with planning and appeals to the greater Charleston community, may become an incredibly rich continuation of an already remarkable history of both the Museum and the Lowcountry.

Technological Options

With the rapid production of new forms of technology, and with this technology becoming more readily available, educational institutions have a wealth of options to not only engage the audiences they serve, but also to provide a greatly expanded bank of information with little material output. Americans, and members of other Western nations, are becoming more accustomed to digital automation and the process of receiving endless information quickly, as well as having choices of which information to receive. The desired effect of the addition of technology to the redesigned Charleston Museum exhibit space would be to provide additional information in a space-saving format, allowing for more information to be displayed in the current available space. Technological tools in the exhibit space will also create positive publicity buzz and attract non-traditional museum-goers (ex. Gen-Y individuals). Through the addition of these devices, the story of the Lowcountry can be told in countless voices, all dependent upon the audience's preferences and educational goals.

I have mentioned many times the necessity to be cognizant of the Museum's available resources and its ability to raise funds. However, considering the limited amount of space available versus the cost of building a new facility, the investment in technological updates may prove to be very cost-effective in the long run.

The replacement of the LCD screens in the first hall of the South Carolina Lowcountry exhibit have been mentioned, but that is the only reference to available technology in the space. I would like to propose the purchase of hand-held devices which will augment the visual displays without necessitating the installment of periodic computers or additional screens.

Stationary technological learning devices pose several problems. First, they necessitate standing in one place for a prolonged period of time, whether watching something on a screen, or listening through a telephone. Visitors often become bored quickly and would like to move on through the exhibit. Second, especially with touch-screens and telephone listening devices, the spread of germs is a potential threat, which may be off-putting to some visitors. Even some mobile listening devices pose issues: they do not provide a venue for additional visuals, and they exclude the hearing-impaired.

Therefore, I suggest the purchase of several iPods to be used within the space. Downloaded in each iPod are audio and visual files which correspond to the exhibit. For those who are hearing-impaired, the iPod may display text

versions of any audio material, and vice-versa for those who are visually-impaired (with the exception of pictures). Also, the size of each section of the exhibit may not necessarily need to be altered, for any additional visuals or text may simply be downloaded onto the iPod and accessed according to a guide given with the iPod. For example, the accompanying brochure guide may give a brief explanation of the additional materials, and may list a key by which to access them. On the walls of the exhibits (or in the cases) may appear a number which corresponds to the key.

The use of this technology, which is rapidly becoming common, will provide a wonderful additional resource to visitors, without having the unwanted effects of traditional technological displays. Visitors may listen to audio and wander about, sit down on one of the periodic benches to look at visuals, and the earbuds which accompany each device will be disposable, thereby cutting down on potential infection. The integration of this type of technology into the exhibit will most surely draw visitors because of its novelty, but will retain them because of its value.

Conclusion and List of Recommendations

The Charleston Museum is an incredible institution with a rich, interesting past and what could be a dynamic future. The start of that future is the implementation of the recommendations which I have laid out in this chapter. As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, many of the

recommendations are open to interpretation, and I have not dictated changes in minute detail. A museum is a space in which collaboration takes place in its design as well as its visitation, and I seek to respect that in my recommendations. I will now provide a list of my recommendations for easy reference.

- Implement a consistent style throughout the South Carolina Lowcountry exhibit. This may include but is not limited to setting approved colors, typefaces, and signage arrangements. These may vary slightly from section to section, but must be accompanied by appropriate signage to avoid confusion.
- Provide auxiliary statistical information regarding regional cultural makeup, slave trading, and other viable subjects. These should be presented in graphic form, pleasing to the eye and effective in communicating their message.
- Provide auxiliary information regarding humanistic aspects of life in the South Carolina Lowcountry. This would include colonist-Native American relations, slave life, and post-Civil War life and race relations, among others.
- Choose one option for the Nature exhibit: elimination, relocation, or extreme downsizing.

- Include history of the Charleston Museum throughout history of the Lowcountry.
- Create continuation of the South Carolina Lowcountry exhibit to occupy the newly-freed third hall.
- Consider the option of purchasing iPods for access and educational use within the museum.

I feel that the implementation of these recommendations on any scale may have a myriad of positive effects for the museum. A creation of a democratic and inclusive exhibit will vault the museum's status as a historical museum and create positive publicity amongst its peer museums as well as in the Charleston community. Making the exhibit space cohesive will aid visitors in navigating and thus learning from the exhibit, providing them with a much more rich experience. Adding to the South Carolina Lowcountry exhibit up to the current day will help the museum connect more with the business community and may lead to greater funding. Finally, the integration of iPod technology into the exhibit space may open the doors to audiences that may have previously found museums off-putting.

It is my hope that my recommendations are as realistic as possible, and though they require a great deal of planning, can be implemented. It is my desire to see this museum regain the glory it once had, and continue to grow as a gem in Charleston.

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