FRIENDS OF FRANKLIN: CONFLICTED TRANSATLANTIC INTERPRETATION OF BENJAMIN FRANKLIN IN LONDON

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ABSTRACT

In 2006 Benjamin Franklin House opened in London just in time for Franklin's 300th birthday. The opening represented decades of work by interested parties in England and the United States determined to "save" Franklin's only extant home. Individuals on both sides of the Atlantic raised interest, funds, and—as it turns out—tempers over the legacy of Franklin and how we remember him and his contributions to science and politics.

This study situates Franklin House's institutional history within public history scholarship toward understanding how founding visions and funding strategies impact house museums over time, particularly in an international context. In the case of Benjamin Franklin House, Lady Mary Bessborough, a dominating socialite, aristocrat, and Franklin enthusiast with connections in both England and the United States, fought long and hard for a house museum that would exhibit furnishings associated with Franklin in a traditional period display. Meanwhile, others interested in connecting Franklin's scientific inquiry to England's national core curriculum designed and put into place a cutting-edge house museum largely absent of objects that relies on theatrics, lighting, and audio projections in its interpretation today.

This study identifies opportunities for public historians to learn from the efforts at Benjamin Franklin House in developing international connections and histories for the public. The thesis explores the benefits and pitfalls of fundraising, collaboration, global and international public history, object-based and object-less interpretation, and the role of innovative technology in historic house museums as it identifies possibilities in the future of the field.

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This project exists because of the people who supported me through the process. Thank you to all of you. To Meg and Erica at Glen Foerd, who went above and beyond any internship supervisors and shared their passion for that beautiful mansion on the Delaware with me. To my advisor Seth Bruggeman, who pointed me to Ben Franklin House in the beginning, offered much-needed enthusiasm and advice throughout the project, and constantly challenged me to consider things in new ways.

To my family, blood and chosen, for listening to me talk about Ben Franklin and house museums constantly for the past twelve months, and for providing much needed distractions from those aforementioned topics. Especially to Travis, who smiled and motivated me through all of the highs and lows over the past two years and who stands as the comforting presence I look forward to reaching at the end of every day.

And finally to my parents, who dragged me to tour churches, museums, and historic homes from before I could walk and watched as I began to appreciate, and then enjoy, and then relish in these trips. They instilled a love of learning in me, patiently encouraged me through every step of my education, and pushed me to follow my passion. I am eternally grateful for their endless support.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Mary Bessborough encountered London's 36 Craven Street—the only remaining home of Benjamin Franklin—for the first time in the late 1950s. Born Mary Munn in 1915 to an affluent Philadelphia family, Bessborough (known as "Lady Mary" after marrying the tenth Earl of Bessborough in 1948) had relocated to London where she became enamored with the house.[1] Its neglected and crumbling structure dismayed her, however, and in 1977, after years of fundraising, she founded the Friends of Benjamin Franklin House, the "London Friends," to restore it. Bessborough's conservative opinions concerning house museums and fundraising, however, caused clashes between her and the project's British leadership. Throughout the process, Bessborough insisted on the importance of American support in the project, especially after she returned to Philadelphia in the late 1990s.[2] Although differences with British leadership led to the restructuring of both the London Friends and its supporting American charities numerous times, Bessborough remained involved until the restoration was completed in 2006.[3]

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[1] Vernon Clark, "Mary Bessborough, 98; helped preserve Franklin's home," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 18 April 2013, Accessed 20 April 2013, http://articles.philly.com/2013-04-18/news/38619268_1_world-affairs-daughter-lady-mary.

[2] Minutes from Meeting, 8 September 1997, Folder 1, Box 3, Friends of Benjamin Franklin House, U.S. (FBFHUS) Records, Collection 3118, Historical Society of Pennsylvania (HSP); Three American charities supported the London Friends: The American Friends of Benjamin Franklin House (1979-1983), American Friends of Franklin Committee, renamed American Friends of Franklin Trust in 1993 (1987-1995) and Friends of Benjamin Franklin House, United States (1992-2008).

[3] "The American Connection," *The Craven Street Gazette*, Autumn 1998, 3. Folder 1, Box 10, FBFHUS Records, HSP. FBFHUS Records, HSP.

The long deteriorating relationship between the British and American charities involved in the preservation of Benjamin Franklin House reveals different perspectives on public history practice over time and across national lines. Those differences became particularly evident during two project phases. Fundraising for Phase I of the restoration, for instance, which focused on structural repairs, took almost two decades owing to transatlantic miscommunications and unclear channels of authority. [4] Disagreement over the interpretation of the museum during Phase II, especially concerning the role of objects and the use of innovative technology, caused a power struggle between project members on either side of the Atlantic. Bessborough in particular preferred traditional house museum interpretation: eighteenth-century artifacts in an eighteenth-century house with an object-based tour. The London Friends wanted a science center with hands-on activities befitting the National Curriculum, and endorsed by their largest funder: the Heritage Lottery Fund.

The roots of these conflicting perspectives, as they figured in the development of Benjamin Franklin House, reveal the complexities of public history work, especially across a large geographic space. And yet, public history scholarship tells us very little about the transatlantic exchange of ideas about house museums, and the possible advantages to international relationships between museums. Toward filling the gap, this paper examines a significant transatlantic conflict concerning the development of one house museum, and the struggle over interpretation of an international figure: Benjamin Franklin. In particular, I focus on competing funding strategies, especially the significance of public versus private funding; the role of objects in house museums; and

[4] "Turning the House into an innovative museum," *The Craven Street Gazette*, Summer 1999, 1. Folder 1, Box 10, FBFHUS Records, HSP.

the use of innovative interpretive programming. An examination of the conflict between the British and American charities exposes the lag between the rise of particular trends in academic history and application of those trends in public history practices.

I began this project with the intention of focusing on the international context of Benjamin Franklin House. I believed examining the actions of and relationship between charities supporting a common cause from different sides of the Atlantic would provide a model for more global public history work in the future. But as I researched and wrote, the story of the development of Benjamin Franklin House continually returned to the remarkable influence of passionate, amateur (in the world of historic house museums) individuals. In particular, I could not overlook the unquestionable impact of Lady Mary Bessborough on the project. I was drawn to the strong female character of Bessborough within the first hours of research, both impressed and frustrated with her stubbornness and unending devotion to 36 Craven Street. I felt a connection to her; she lived just blocks from me when she passed away in April of 2013, and I appreciated how her saucy sense of humor emerged as I dug through decades of archival material. As I analyzed the sources, I realized that nearly every public history project has a Bessborough-like character (or several). This thesis does wrangle with the possibilities of internationalizing public history work, but focuses more so on the impact of motivated individuals and what they signify within the field of public history.

CHAPTER 2

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN HOUSE IN CONTEXT

Before I examine why the development of Benjamin Franklin House caused such evident conflict, it is useful to examine how the project fits into public history practice. Public history is difficult to define. Indeed, I have personally sat through hours of graduate courses devoted to attempting to define the term public history. While many public historians use the "I know it when I see it" rule to identify successful public history practices, I prefer to apply two criteria that I believe are vital to create successful, meaningful, public history work. An explanation of these criteria, and how they apply to Benjamin Franklin House, helps us understand why, out of thousands of house museums, I chose 36 Craven Street for this case study.

The first of these criteria is collaboration. Public history is a field contingent on collaboration—between various professionals and community members alike. It is important to remember that the actions of each collaborator involved in a public history project have repercussions, often beyond an individual's intended goals. The impact of individuals on the field of house museums and the necessity of collaboration is evident in the cross-Atlantic story of Benjamin Franklin House. The project sparked the interest of numerous amateurs and tested their abilities to collaborate across a vast geographic space. Bessborough's involvement with Benjamin Franklin House was not unique; public history projects often invoke interest in non-professionals with a personal or emotional connection to the venture. With collaboration comes flexibility. If this case study of Benjamin Franklin House displays one thing, it is that public history work is a process. Throughout that process, things change, goals and opinions evolve, and the end

result may not resemble the initial idea. Collaboration itself, budget restrictions, legal complications, and time restraints, among other things, can cause this evolution. As I discuss later in the paper, the initial plans and the end results for Benjamin Franklin House varied significantly.

The second of the criteria for successful public history work is making an impact. Public history work should have an impact on something, whether socially, culturally, civically, or within an academic discipline. It should be innovative—not just in the use of technology—but in causing individuals to consider a topic in a new way. The relationship between those individuals involved in the planning of the Benjamin Franklin House who acted in agreement with these criteria and those who did not is an especially interesting aspect of this case study.

In recent years, academic historians have emphasized international perspectives in their work, yet most studies in the field of historic house museums—sites that, according to a well-known study, the public trusts as a source of history more than any other—frequently neglect global perspective.[5] Conversations pertaining to the field of house museums that *do* include an international perspective generally compare museums pertaining to the same subject, located in different nations.[6] Few, if any, historians or museum professionals have examined the development of a single house museum in a transatlantic context.

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[5] Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

[6] For example see Angela Phelps "Remembering John Muir, the Trans-Atlantic "Father" of Wilderness Conservation," 27-47 in *Born in the U.S.A.: Birth, Commemoration, and American Public Memory*, ed. Seth Bruggeman (Amherst and Boston, 2012).

The United States is oversaturated with historic house museums. Following the Civil War, wealthy white Americans attempted to save the past through preservation in their struggle with industrialization and the changes in daily life that came with it. This first wave of preservation lasted from the 1870s until around World War I, and the expansion of the National Park Service caused a second wave in the United States beginning in the 1930s. The bicentennial celebrations in the United States caused another wave in the late 1960s, including a rise of living history interpretation. Heritage tourism followed this wave in the 1990s and sparked another revival in historic preservation. Between 1960 and 2000, Americans created over six thousand house museums—an average of one museum every three days.[7] The flooding of the museum community with historic house museums far outpaced both interest and adequate funding in the sites towards the end of the twentieth century. Many historians agree that these problems persist today and search for plausible solutions. Museum professionals agree that the interpretation at most house museums has remained the same since their founding, though the world outside the museums has changed significantly. These historians call for a reevaluation of dated interpretation and a shift in focus to more socially relevant subjects.

In her book *New Solutions For House Museums: Ensuring the Long Term Preservation of America's Historic Houses*, Donna Ann Harris criticizes historical interpretation at house museums that remain focused on great figures and decorative arts. As Harris asserts, "the house itself is a dead artifact without active interpretation to bring

[7] Patrick H. Butler, "Past, Present, and Future: The Place of the House Museum in the Museum Community," in *Interpreting Historic House Museums*, ed. Jessica Fay Donnelly (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2002), 18.

it to life for visitors."[8] She explains that most individuals involved in the operation of a historic house museum, whether board members, staff members, or volunteers, become emotionally invested in the site and struggle to address obvious problems with the interpretation.

Harris claims that of the two hundred and seventy-five house museums in the Philadelphia area, where many individuals involved in the planning of Benjamin Franklin House lived, over one hundred are examples of eighteenth-century domestic architecture and tell stories of enormously wealthy men.[9] Harris argues that, as of 2007 when she published her book, of these two hundred and seventy-five sites less than ten interpret any other kind of history, such as that of women, African Americans—especially slaves, who oftentimes worked at the sites—or working class individuals employed there.[10] Those involved in the operation of house museums struggle to maintain their sites and often fail to realize that their historical interpretation is no longer relevant to current museumgoers.

In addressing issues that face house museums, other scholars suggest embracing technology to convey messages and keep pace with the technology-obsessed public.[11] Polly McKenna-Cress and Janet Kamien comment on this in *Creating Exhibitions: Collaboration in the Planning, Development, and Design of Innovative Experiences*.

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[8] Donna Ann Harris, *New Solutions For House Museums: Ensuring the Long Term Preservation of American's Historic Houses*, (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2007), 9.

[9] Harris, *New Solutions*, 9.

[10] Harris, *New Solutions*, 9.

[11] See Cary Carson, "The End of History Museums: What's Plan B?" *The Public Historian* (2008), 9-27.

Though not referring to historic house museums specifically, the authors urge museum professionals not to design exhibits—or entire museums in the case of Benjamin Franklin House—without collaboration. They assert that in an era where knowledge is at our fingertips, "visitors are increasingly demanding innovation beyond what they can find on the Internet themselves, and museums must rise to that challenge."[12] Even after this point, however, McKenna-Cress and Kamien remind museums professionals of the profound effect on visitors of authentic objects connected to real stories.[13]

Other historians take a different approach when commenting on the current state of historic house museums. Rather than suggest improvements for the future of house museums, historians Patricia West and James W. Loewen comment on how visitors must consider house museums in order to understand the information they present. In *Domesticating History: The Political Origins of America's House Museums*, West studies four unique house museums to prove that their interpretation—and even their existence—reflect the social and political environment at the time of their founding.[14] West argues that to truly understand the content of a museum, one must understand the context in which it was created.

James W. Loewen discusses a similar theme in *Lies Across America: What Our Historic Sites Get Wrong*. Loewen examines numerous historic sites, memorials, and historic markers in proving that every historic site—including historic house museums—

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[12] Polly McKenna-Cress and Janet Kamien, *Creating Exhibitions: Collaboration in the Planning, Development, and Design of Innovative Experiences* (Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley, 2013), 7.

[13] McKenna-Cress and Kamien, *Creating Exhibitions,* 135.

[14] Patricia West, *Domesticating History: The Political Origins of America's House Museums* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1999), xii.

tells two different stories: "one is its manifest narrative—the event of person heralded in its text or artwork. The other is the story of its erection or preservation."[15] Both comment on the age-old question: Is history objective?

Still, some historians go further, and suggest that the problem of failing house museums can*not* be solved through changing the content of tours, exhibits, or programming. These scholars suggest adaptive reuse—searching for new uses for old houses that ensure their preservation and protection for generations to come, a process known as de-museumizing.[16] Those involved in the founding of Benjamin Franklin House did the opposite; previous owners adapted 36 Craven Street into an office space *before* the creation of the museum.

Tim Benton and Nicola J. Watson examine a recent trend in museum practice in the United Kingdom in Susie West's larger study on heritage, *Understanding Heritage in Practice.* Benton and Watson explain that in Europe, especially in the United Kingdom, governments view museums as cultural assets that serve the public interest.[17] They describe this method of government in the UK, which began in the 1980s, when Benjamin Franklin House remained in the planning phases, saying that museums were "required to demonstrate their effectiveness in satisfying the visiting public rather than

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[15] James W. Loewen, *Lies Across America: What Our Historic Sites Get Wrong* (New York: Touchstone, 1999), 22.

[16] For case studies and examples see Harris, *New Solutions for House Museums* and Carol Stapp and Kenneth C. Turino, "Does America Need Another House Museum?" *History News* (2004), 7-11.

[17] Tim Benton and Nicola J. Watson, "Museum Practice and Heritage" in *Understanding Heritage in Practice,* ed. Susie West (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2010), 129.

simply conserving what they have, acquiring more and carrying out research."[18] Benton and Watson also question the authenticity of objects in museums, because an object becomes frozen in time the moment a museum accessions it. The object loses its exposure to market forces.[19] Further, with a focus on the conservation and interpretation of objects, museum professionals must concentrate their time, energy, and money on the care of the objects, while other aspects of the museum—including programming—go neglected.

Scholars provide many suggestions on how to ensure the future of historic house museums, and even how to better understand them, but none suggest the potential in creating a broader global narrative or creating relationships internationally to expand interest and relevance. One author, Angela Phelps, does compare two house museums related to one historic figure in "Remembering John Muir, the Trans-Atlantic 'Father' of Wilderness Conservation." Phelps examines how individuals who shared a single motive—opening a museum that celebrates John Muir in a house he once lived—ended up with completely different interpretation.[20] Government agencies operate both museums, one in Dunbar, Scotland and the other in Martinez, California. In Dunbar, site of Muir's birthplace, the motive resulted in a modern museum that focuses on science education and lacks a physical experience. In Martinez, the same motive resulted in a

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[18] Benton and Watson, "Museum Practice and Heritage," 129.

[19] Benton and Watson, "Museum Practice and Heritage," 131.

[20] Angela Phelps, "Remembering John Muir, the Trans-Atlantic "Father" of Wilderness Conservation," in *Born in the U.S.A.: Birth, Commemoration, and American Public Memory*, ed. Seth Bruggeman (Amherst and Boston, 2012), 43.

period house that resembles what Muir experienced there.[21] In the case of Benjamin Franklin House, Americans hoped to offer a similar interpretation as the Americans offer at the John Muir site in Martinez. What causes this trend in traditionalism in the United States?

Phelps discusses the possible reasons for the difference, including the funding source at the Dunbar site—the Heritage Lottery Fund, the same significant funder at Benjamin Franklin House—which emphasizes authenticity and requires museums to abandon any furnishings that are not completely genuine. Phelps also suggests that the period presentation is more appropriate in the United States because more visitors are familiar with John Muir and do not require the introduction offered in Dunbar.[22] But we know that the challenge of museum professionals is to create the unexpected and to allow visitors to interact with a subject in a new way that challenges their prior knowledge. Does a house full of furniture that existed during John Muir's life provide a challenge to knowledgeable visitors? Which interpretation is more successful, or does their success vary depending on the audience?

As this brief overview shows us, historians' views on historic house museums tell us much about Benjamin Franklin House. Consider, for instance, the role of its committed, though amateur, project leaders. As Harris tells us is all too common, these contributors, particularly the Americans and especially Bessborough, allowed their emotions to overpower reason in decisions concerning interpretation. Preservation minded individuals impacted the museum significantly, as they chose to put their energy

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[21] Phelps, "Remembering John Muir," 37.
[22] Phelps, "Remembering John Muir," 45.

into morphing the project into their own vision rather than placing egos aside and acting with the best interest of the house in mind. The development of the Benjamin Franklin House displayed the difficulty in interpreting a house museum in a socially relevant way, and proved the process of creating a museum is not as simple as some historians suggest.

Some individuals involved in the planning of Benjamin Franklin House chose not to collaborate, though the process of collaboration remains at the core of successful public history projects. There is no one perfect way to create a museum, but as McKenna-Cress and Kamien explain, compromise is key to a successful end result. The model that Bessborough favored focused on the collection and care of objects, while the United Kingdom shifted the focus of museums to visitor satisfaction, attendance, and participation beginning in the 1980s. European trained museum professionals involved in the planning of Benjamin Franklin House understand the shift in focus and display their understanding through non-traditional interpretation. Members of the supporting American charities, including Bessborough, resist compromise over innovative technology-based programming and the role of objects in Benjamin Franklin House. Like most women of her class and generation, Bessborough discouraged innovation and favored heavily object-based interpretation.

As both West and Loewen remind us, history is never objective, even when interpreted at a museum. One must question the motives, political or otherwise, of Bessborough and other individuals intent on preserving and creating a museum at 36 Craven Street. I examine these motives further later in the paper. The views of these historians tell us about Benjamin Franklin House as a historic house museum, but do not

comment on the museum in an international context. I chose Benjamin Franklin House as my case study, out of the thousands of house museums existing today, because it allows me to display the complexities of public history work, especially across such a vast geographic space.

CHAPTER 3

LADY MARY BESSBOROUGH: AN AMERICAN IN LONDON

Understanding the Franklin House story requires that we begin with Bessborough, whose roll recalls the thousands of upper-class American women born in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries who involved themselves with early public history projects—especially historic preservation and the founding of house museums. These women preserved historic sites across the United States and, in doing so, essentially invented guidelines for this type of work. Their approach became the preferred method of historic preservation and interpretation at American house museums for decades and, if Bessborough's case is any indicator, they persist today.[23]

Bessborough's interest in preservation reflected her upbringing as an "American aristocrat." Born in 1915 to Charles and Mary Astor Paul Munn, Bessborough descended from one of Philadelphia's most prominent families: the Drexels.[24] She lived at Woodcrest Mansion in Radnor, Pennsylvania during her early childhood. Bessborough's parents relocated to Paris in 1920. She attended school in Paris and England and spent the remainder of her life traveling between the United States and Europe. She married Frederick "Eric" Ponsonby, Viscount Duncannon—who became tenth Earl of Bessborough when his father passed in 1956—in Paris in 1948 and lived the life of a distinguished aristocrat. Later in life, Bessborough joined the National Society of the

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[23] "Mount Vernon Ladies' Association: A Brief History," George Washington's Mount Vernon, accessed 5 January 2014, http://www.mountvernon.org/visit-his-estate/general-information/about-mount-vernon/mvla/history.

[24] Mary Countess of Bessborough, interview by Paula Marantz Cohen, *The Drexel Interview*, 24 November 2009, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VkWkRDF-pGk.

Colonial Dames of America, an association that prides itself on being "a leader in the field of historic preservation, restoration and the interpretation of historic sites."[25]

Bessborough's interest in Craven Street likely owed to the lack of a surviving building in Philadelphia that Franklin actually lived in. There are certainly no lack of Franklin landmarks in Philadelphia. The Benjamin Franklin Parkway and the Benjamin Franklin Bridge bear his name, as well as the University of Pennsylvania's stadium, Franklin Field. Statues of Franklin litter the city, from the life-size bronze rendering tucked away in the tiny Coxe Park to the infamous sculpture of Franklin relaxing on a bench at the University of Pennsylvania. Philadelphia is also home to the Benjamin Franklin National Memorial, located in the rotunda of the Franklin Institute. With the mission statement "In the spirit of inquiry and discovery embodied by Benjamin Franklin, the mission of The Franklin Institute is to inspire a passion for learning about science and technology," the Franklin Institute, one of the most popular museums in Philadelphia, is a memorial to Franklin in itself.[26]

Also located in Philadelphia is Franklin Court, where Franklin's Philadelphia home once stood before being demolished in 1812. Since 1976, the National Park Service has presented the area as Franklin's former home. The site includes a "ghost structure," which is an oversized skeletal representation of Franklin's house in

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[25] "The National Society of The Colonial Dames of America", The National Society of The Colonial Dames of America, Accessed 4 October 2013, http://www.nscda.org/site3/index2.php.

[26] "Mission and History: The Franklin Institute's Mission," The Franklin Institute, accessed 7 April 2013, http://www2.fi.edu/shared/history.php.

Philadelphia.[27] Because no known historical records of the architectural plans of the house exist, America's bicentennial celebration in 1976 inspired the construction of architect Robert Venturi's interpretation of the former row home. With the ghost structure, the site also includes the United States Postal Museum, The Franklin Print Shop, and the Franklin Museum, all devoted to educating visitors about Franklin's accomplishments.[28]

So, even though Franklin's Craven Street home was the only one remaining when Bessborough encountered it, its singularity had not protected it from the rigors of time. Rather, it required serious structural repairs by the 1950s. Residents of 36 Craven Street from Franklin's era to the 1970s made significant changes to the building that led to structural damage. At some point in the nineteenth-century, an individual cut through the original diagonal braces to add a second doorway on the second floor, which caused the entire building to sag dangerously.[29] Years of water damage caused extensive harm to the structure and the facing brick on the front wall pulled away from the house four full inches.[30] The house endured two bombings during World War II that led to replacement of the rafters, windows, and the roof. Residents constructed an addition during the

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[27] "Franklin Court," National Park Service, accessed 7 April 2013, http://www.nps.gov/inde/planyourvisit/franklin-court.htm.

[28] "Franklin Court."

[29] "Rebuilding the Past," *The Craven Street Gazette*, 1998, 2. Folder 1, Box 10, FBFHUS Records, HSP; This refers to the second floor as Americans know it, one floor above ground level. British terminology would refer to this level as the first floor.

[30] "Rebuilding the Past," FBFHUS Records, HSP.

Victorian era and damaged original floors and paneling. The house required much work in order to restore it to the home Franklin knew.

Bessborough worked independently for nearly two decades to generate interest in the Benjamin Franklin House restoration project among donors in both the United States and the United Kingdom. She organized the London Friends, which met monthly beginning in 1977 and received official charitable status in 1978.[31] Bessborough held the position of a founding Governor and her husband, Lord Bessborough, served as Chairman of the Board. The charity made ownership of the house its highest priority. At the time, the British Rail owned 36 Craven Street and rented the property to an organization called the Science Policy Foundation.[32] Frank Hudson, a member of the London Friends in the late 1970s worked for the U.K. firm of Smith Kline, a company that frequently donated to charitable causes.[33] Thanks to a generous donation from Hudson's employer, the London Friends managed to obtain a one hundred and fifty year lease of 36 Craven Street from the British Rail in 1978.[34] The organization still intended to own Benjamin Franklin House outright, though, and so it continued to raise money for this goal and to make essential structural repairs.

Bessborough took charge and began the search for donors in the United States. On January 31, 1979 the London Friends formally began its American foray when it unanimously agreed to create a foundation for "The American Friends of Benjamin

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[31] Minutes from Meeting, 8 March 1978, Folder 1, Box 1, FBFHUS Records, HSP.

[32] Minutes from Meeting 2 December 1971, Folder 1, Box 1, FBFHUS Records, HSP.

[33] Minutes from Meeting 29 November 1979, Folder 2, Box 1, FBFHUS Records, HSP.

[34] Minutes from Meeting 20 December 1978, Folder 2, Box 1, FBFHUS Records, HSP.

Franklin House."[35] United States tax restrictions, which denied tax refunds for donations made to foreign charities, deterred American corporations from donating large funds to the London Friends. The London Friends therefore formed the American charity as a completely separate entity, rather than a committee of the London Friends, as was initially planned, to appeal to American corporations.[36] Thus the American Friends of Benjamin Franklin House existed solely to financially support the efforts of the London Friends.

Remarkably, Bessborough chose to join the Board of Directors of the American Friends *and* remain a Governor of the Board in London.[37] She received much criticism for her decision, as other Governors of the London Friends believed her leadership positions in both charities constituted a conflict of interest, and skewed the original intent of keeping the organizations separate. Yet no clear bylaw existed at that point to forbid Bessborough's involvement in the American Friends or provide consequences for her actions. Bessborough remained insistent that she have a hand in both organizations. She held her ground even when American lawyers became involved in 1979. The lawyers worried that Bessborough's involvement threatened to violate United States charity laws.[38] Bessborough instructed the lawyer of the London Friends to respond that her involvement "would be purely to facilitate communications and in particular the

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[35] Minutes from Meeting 31 January 1979, Folder 2, Box 1, FBFHUS Records, HSP.

[36] Minutes from Meeting 3 April 1979, Folder 2, Box 1, FBFHUS Records, HSP.

[37] Minutes from Meeting 3 April 1979, FBFHUS Records, HSP.

[38] Letter from A. Kerr and G. Downing to Bessborough 4 October 1979, Folder 2, Box 1, FBFHUS Records, HSP.

supervision" of the American Friends. With that, she continued to serve on both boards.[39]

Governors of the London Friends decided that the American charity was not able to meet its financial expectations in the early 1980s. The formal dissolution of the first American charity occurred at a board meeting of the London Friends in November 1983. The London Friends announced that when the IRS amended its charity law in 1978, it began taxing donations to charities located outside of the United States.[40] This caused the London Friends to lose a small percentage of the funds donated from the American Friends, which the London group considered unacceptable. As a temporary solution, the London Friends placed the American charity under the guardianship of the Colonial Dames of America's parent chapter in New York.[41] This allowed the London Friends to avoid IRS mandated restrictions and to maintain tax-deductible status.

Despite the difficulties raising adequate funds in the United States, the project's British leadership managed to acquire the freehold of Benjamin Franklin House. Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher granted the London Friends freehold, or complete ownership, of 36 Craven Street under British law in 1989.[42] Holding complete ownership of the property allowed the London Friends to focus solely on raising funds for the first phase of restoration. The London Friends again turned to the United States for help. The second American charity formed to assist the London Friends, the American Friends of

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[39] Minutes from Meeting 2 November 1979, Folder 2, Box 1, FBFHUS Records, HSP.

[40] Minutes from Meeting 23 November 1983, Folder 3, Box 1, FBFHUS Records, HSP.

[41] Minutes from Meeting 23 November 1983, FBFHUS Records, HSP.

[42] "The American Connection," *Craven Street Gazette,* FBFHUS Records, HSP.

Franklin Committee, proved more successful than the first charity. And again, the American charity existed solely to support the London Friends financially. Its officers had no role in matters of preservation or interpretation. It was an ideal situation for the London Friends, but less so for members of the American committee who were growing increasingly unsatisfied with being on the periphery.

Because of confusion among donors regarding which charity controlled their donations, an American board member suggested a co-ownership or co-management arrangement between the charities. But instead, the London Friends simply renamed the American committee. To clear up any confusion among donors and, more importantly, members of the American charity, over who owned the Benjamin Franklin House restoration project, the London Friends renamed the committee the American Friends of Franklin Trust.[43] Matters worsened. Although several Governors of the London Friends resided in the United States and participated in all votes, their role seemed to diminish. In July of 1993, American board member Alan Dye claimed that members of the London Friends neglected to inform him of board meetings, which left him unable to cast informed votes.[44] Dye was not alone. President of the Trust Jane de Graff Sloat claimed that the Governors of the London Friends held a meeting in the summer of 1994 and did not inform the American Trust: "one distinctively gets the feeling that there is movement under foot not to cooperate with the American Committee."[45]

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[43] Purpose Statement 1991, Folder 3, Box 30, FBFHUS Records, HSP.

[44] Letter from Alan Dye to Bessborough, 9 July 1993, Folder 5, Box 30, FBFHUS Records, HSP.

[45] Letter from Jane Sloat 1994, Folder 1, Box 5, FBFHUS Records, HSP.

At the same time, the London Friends desperately needed financial assistance and began to search for an alternative arrangement. It courted the prestigious Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufacture, and Commerce (RSA), with which it shared an interest in Anglo-American relations and Enlightenment ideals. Benjamin Franklin himself had joined the RSA while in London, and therefore a formal relationship between the London Friends and the RSA seemed an obvious choice. The organizations officially formed a partnership in 1995. The American Trust recognized the merge as a further insult to its attempt at partial ownership. Why, they asked, did the London Friends find the RSA a suitable partner, but not their own supporting charity? Several American Trust board members resigned from their positions because of the merge and voiced their opinions freely. In 1995, for the second time, Trustees of the London Friends dissolved the American charity they themselves formed.[46]

However, the London Friends recognized a third and final American charity: Friends of Benjamin Franklin House, United States (FBFHUS) immediately upon the dissolution of the previous American charity.[47] Unlike its predecessors, members of the London Friends—Bessborough specifically—formed FBFHUS to provide not only financial assistance, but assistance with surveys, studies of the house, and the planning of the second phase of restoration. Why the London Friends formed FBFHUS for assistance beyond its financial support after the failure of its two predecessors is questionable. It is possible that the British leadership recognized that discouraging the previous American charities' involvement caused problems, and believed collaboration with FBFHUS would

[46] Letter from Bessborough to Peter Cowling, 2 September 1995, Folder 3, Box 5, FBFHUS Records, HSP.

[47] Letter from Bessborough to Cowling, 2 September 1995, FBFHUS Records, HSP.

prove more productive. It is more likely, though, that the London Friends felt pressure from Bessborough and other board members who resided in the United States. No matter the reasoning, the London Friends established a third American charity that intended to provide more input than its predecessors.

This arrangement seems to have set Bessborough and the London Friends on a path to success. Indeed, the organization completed Phase I of its preservation plans soon after the introduction of FBFHUS in 1998. Phase II, however, which involved developing an interpretive schema for the house, triggered years of disagreement that threatened at times to derail the entire project. As we will see, Bessborough and FBFHUS favored a traditional house museum approach, reminiscent of the work of the Mount Vernon Ladies. Bessborough proposed to furnish the house with eighteenth-century pieces as completely as possible under the budget constraints.[48] Elsewhere, she suggested "a smartly framed wording, like a print hanging over the fireplace or near the door, informing visitors what the room was used for in Benjamin Franklin's time."[49] The London Friends, alternatively, proposed an innovative, theatrical experience that focused on Franklin's life rather than his objects. Its approach, devised in consultation with funders, exhibit designers, museum professionals, educational advisors, and the public—ultimately triumphed.[50] The museum opened in 2006 nearly completely void of objects.

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[48] Mary Bessborough, "18th Century Programme towards Perpetuity, the Procedure of a tour of 36 Craven Street, 2001," Folder 7, Box 5, FBFHUS Records, HSP.

[49] Bessborough, "18th Century Programme," FBFHUS Records, HSP.

[50] "Benjamin Franklin House Application to Heritage Lottery Fund, September 1999," Folder 9, Box 10, FBFHUS Records, HSP.

In the following chapters, I will examine what this conflict tells us about public history in an international context. In chapter four, I take a deeper look at the story of Benjamin Franklin House through the role of funding in the project. Fundraising strategies and funding sources frequently play a significant role in the final result of public history projects, and Benjamin Franklin House is no exception. In chapter five, I explore in depth the conflict over interpretation between the British and American charities supporting the project, and examine what factors affected their varying opinions. I describe the end result of the years of conflict in chapter six, explaining my own observations while visiting the museum. Each chapter works to further explore the affects that individuals have on the project and the possibilities for more global collaboration in the field of public history.

CHAPTER 4

FUNDING FRANKLIN

This section examines how one particular complexity of public history work across a vast geographic space impacts outcomes: funding. In public history work, the individuals charged with project planning must consider the preferences of their potential funders in order to ensure adequate funding and thus the completion of their work. In this chapter, I intend to retell the story of Benjamin Franklin House through the lens of funding in order to understand specifically how funding shapes public history outcomes. The London Friends and its supporting American charities struggled for decades to raise funds for the restoration of Benjamin Franklin House. Disagreements between individuals involved in the fundraising efforts wasted time, energy, and money. The nearly twenty year path to the completion of Phase I of restoration demonstrated one difficulty in public history work, and in the development of house museums specifically: the decisions of the most domineering individuals often prevail, even if not made with the best interests of the project in mind. We know that this individual is Bessborough in the case of Benjamin Franklin House.

As we've seen, Benjamin Franklin House sparked interest in British and American individuals alike. Few, if any, of the individuals involved in the early stages of fundraising had experience in museum work. Members of the London Friends agreed to form an American charity to support their fundraising. Bessborough led the efforts and traveled between the United Kingdom and the United States often to conduct business on behalf of Benjamin Franklin House. Bessborough hoped that her involvement in both charities would help her maintain some form of control over the project, and her plan

worked—at least temporarily. Bessborough's transatlantic efforts caused her to become a central and impactful player in the project. I will return to this topic and examine Bessborough's intents for her involvement in the American charity further later in this paper.

Bessborough began active fundraising efforts in the United States around the time the London Friends received official charitable status from the British government in 1978. Other members of the London Friends attempted to professionalize their fundraising efforts across the Atlantic. In 1977 the vice-chairman Maurice Goldsmith suggested that the London Friends take their American appeal farther and hire a professional in the United States to collect funds on behalf of the project. At this suggestion, Bessborough told Goldsmith that she preferred to keep all administrative work in the United Kingdom and the matter was settled.[51] Rather than hire an individual to represent the London Friends in the United States, Bessborough herself frequently traveled to Philadelphia and Washington, D.C. and attempted to secure possible donors, including the American Philosophical Society and the Franklin Institute, neither of which contributed to the effort.[52] This was an expensive choice and demonstrated the impact of each person involved in a public history project. The relationship between the London Friends and its supporting American charities may have succeeded had the London Friends followed Goldsmith's advice.

Not only did the London Friends not follow Goldsmith's advice, in 1980 Bessborough asked vice-chairman Goldsmith to resign with little explanation. Addressed

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[51] Minutes from Meeting 27 September 1977, Folder 1, Box 1, FBFHUS Records, HSP.

[52] Minutes from Meeting 8 March 1978, Folder 1, Box 1, FBFHUS Records, HSP.

at a monthly meeting on May 6, 1980, "Mr. Goldsmith reluctantly understood the reason for this request for his resignation due to conflict of interest."[53] Goldsmith did not appear in documentation between 1977 and 1980, except in attendance at meetings. His infraction remains unclear, but it is likely that the London Friends, specifically Bessborough, chose to remove him from the organization rather than tolerate his different ideas. As we've seen, compromise and collaboration are key to successful public history projects, even in the funding stage of the process. The lack of these vital components in the early years of the planning of Benjamin Franklin House contributed to the difficulties associated with the opening of the museum.

As we have already seen, the London Friends formed its first supporting American charity in 1979.[54] The British organization created The American Friends of Benjamin Franklin House as a completely separate charity for tax reasons that they hoped would attract American corporations.[55] The first American charity that the London Friends formed existed solely to financially support the mission of the London Friends. Members of the London Friends understood that Benjamin Franklin House interested many Americans, but chose not to involve the American Friends in the planning process. Again, the London Friends missed an opportunity for collaboration that could have changed the process of their project greatly. Members of the London Friends remained so concerned with funding sources that they overlooked other potential contributions from their transatlantic supporters.

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[53] Minutes from Meeting 6 May 1980, Folder 1, Box 1, FBFHUS Records, HSP.

[54] Minutes from Meeting 31 January 1979, Folder 2, Box 1, FBFHUS Records, HSP.

[55] Minutes from Meeting 3 April 1979, Folder 2, Box 1, FBFHUS Records, HSP.

We know that Bessborough chose to join the Board of Directors of the American Friends, while still remaining a Governor of the London Friends.[56] Bessborough as a link between the charities could have helped create a positive relationship and an avenue of idea sharing. But the London Friends, Bessborough included, stuck with their original intentions and frowned upon any non-monetary contributions from the American Friends. Instead of using Bessborough's position in both charities in its favor, other Governors of the London Friends protested her involvement in the American charity.[57] Members of the London Friends believed that the American Friends were not meeting their expectations financially and dissolved the charity in 1983.[58] Before the first phase of restoration even began, an American charity in support of the cause was formed and dissolved because they did not meet the expectations of the London Friends. But members of the London Friends did not see the potential in American support and denied involvement to interested individuals because the British charity remained concerned solely with funding sources.

The London Friends completed little work and raised minimal funds in the following several years. Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's granting the London Friends freehold of 36 Craven Street under British law rejuvenated the fundraising effort.[59] The London Friends formed the second supporting American charity, American

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[56] Minutes from Meeting 3 April 1979, FBFHUS Records, HSP.

[57] Letter from Kerr and Downing to Bessborough, 4 October 1979, Folder 2, Box 1, FBFHUS Records, HSP.

[58] Minutes from Meeting 23 November 1983, Folder 2, Box 1, FBFHUS Records, HSP.

[59] "The American Connection," *Craven Street Gazette,* FBFHUS Records, HSP.

Friends of Franklin Committee, around this time. To spark interest in the new American Committee, Bessborough explained in a letter to possible American donors that the American Friends of Franklin Committee "formed in Washington to assist in developing working plans to create the Benjamin Franklin International Center."[60] Bessborough exaggerated the involvement of the American Committee to potential donors and the letter contributed to confusion among Americans about the role of the American Committee within the project.

The mission statement of the American charity included four points describing its role in the founding of Benjamin Franklin House. The first three points all involved funding: to raise funds on behalf of the Friends, UK for the restoration and preservation of Benjamin Franklin House, to provide funds for the creation of a Benjamin Franklin International Center, and to "provide appropriate, accountable management of funds by the US committee on behalf of American contributors."[61] Only the final point suggested the involvement of the American Committee in any part of the project other than fundraising: to assure the survival and restoration of the Franklin House. The mission statement of the London Friends was, "Friends of Benjamin Franklin House is a registered charity whose purpose is to educate the public about the life and works of Benjamin Franklin through maintaining his former residence in this country at 36 Craven Street, London WC2N 5NG as a museum."[62] The mission statements of the two charities

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[60] Letter to American Contributors, Folder 1, Box 5, FBFHUS Records, HSP.

[61] Mission Statement of the American Friends of Benjamin Franklin House Committee, Folder 5, Box 30, FBFHUS Records, HSP.

[62] Governors Report, 1991, Folder 1, Box 2, Friends of Benjamin Franklin, U.S. Records, Collection 3118, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

emphasize their respective roles, but the success of the American Committee in raising funds to support the mission of the British charity caused many Americans to believe that the Committee co-owned Benjamin Franklin House. In reality, the London Friends owned the property, formed the American Committee to help fund its restoration efforts, and gave the American Committee little input in the planning process.

Members of the American Committee considered their position in the project unsatisfactory and at times infuriating. American Committee board member Alan Dye voiced his concern in 1992 in a letter to Bessborough and Stephen Sinnot, the Managing Director of the London Friends. Dye explained the awkwardness felt among American board members when potential donors asked them if the American Committee owned the house. He asserted, "I think it is going to be necessary to tell the large donors that the people to whom they are giving the money are able to control its expenditure and the operation of the resulting museum on some legal basis other than just cooperation with a charity 3,000 miles away."[63] Dye identified the problem: the American Committee held no control over the actual use of contributions it received. Donors disliked their lack of control over how exactly the charity spent their money. The relationship made it difficult for the American Committee to sustain itself. As we've seen, Dye suggested a compromise that could have led to a harmonious relationship between the two charities, but the London Friends rejected his suggestion and instead renamed the American charity to prevent further confusion. The newly named American Friends of Franklin Trust

[63] Letter from Dye to Bessborough and Stephen Sinnot, 1 December 1992, Folder 5, Box 30, FBFHUS Records, HSP.

displayed the charity's sole association: financial support.[64] The London Friends preferred to threaten their relationship with one of their largest contributors rather than compromise. Members of the London Friends overlooked the possible advantages of collaboration with members of the American Trust and further alienated them in subsequent years.

The London Friends saw a time of transition in the early 1990s. Bessborough gave up her position as Chairwoman to Evangeline Hunter-Jones, another founding Governor, in 1992. In 1994 the London Friends reached a point of desperation. English Heritage, a powerful organization that "exists to make sure the best of the past is kept to enrich our lives today and in the future," served the London Friends with an urgent and compulsory repairs notice for 36 Craven Street.[65] With few options left, Hunter-Jones approached the RSA about the formation of a partnership. Part of the mission of the RSA is "in the light of new challenges and opportunities for the human race our purpose is to develop and promote new ways of thinking about human fulfillment and social progress which speaks directly to our strapline -- 21st century enlightenment."[66] Because the RSA owned a building around the corner from 36 Craven Street that the London Friends rented for office space, the two organizations already maintained a relationship. Even before their involvement in the Benjamin Franklin House, the RSA gave an annual award called the Benjamin Franklin Medal, "awarded annually, alternately to citizens of the United

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[64] Purpose Statement 1991, Folder 3, Box 30, FBFHUS Records, HSP.

[65] "What We Do," English Heritage, Accessed 20 April 2013, http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/about/interactive/.

[66] "Mission," Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce, Accessed 20 April 2013, http://www.thersa.org/about-us/mission.

States and the United Kingdom, who have 'forwarded the cause of Anglo-American understanding.'"[67] The RSA seemed an appropriate choice when the English Heritage forced the London Friends to search for assistance with urgent, mandatory repairs.

The partnership with the RSA meant further changes in the leadership of the Benjamin Franklin House project and the beginning of more serious conflicts. Following Hunter-Jones's initial request for help with urgently needed repairs, RSA Executive Director Christopher Lucas attended a meeting of the London Friends. On 12 September 1994, Lucas explained the interest of the RSA in five clear terms. The second term, "the RSA would not be interested in running the restored house simply as a museum. A more visionary continuing purpose would have to be devised," became the first clear challenge to the interpretation of 36 Craven Street.[68] Considering the struggles between American charities and the London Friends from their inception, the London Friends may have questioned this point. But Lucas followed this point up with two appealing statements. First, that "if control was passed to the RSA, the RSA would not want to see either the Friends of Benjamin Franklin House of the American Franklin Friends Trust disbanded."[69] He followed this point up with the clear statement: "nevertheless, the RSA would have to be properly in control of all aspects of the venture."[70] The London Friends likely agreed to essentially give control of the project to the RSA, while they refused any

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[67] "Benjamin Franklin Medal 1999," *Craven Street Gazette,* Summer 1999, Folder 1, Box 10, FBFHUS Records, HSP.

[68] "Attachment to RSA letter to Lady Bessborough, 5 October 1994," Folder 8, Box 6, FBFHUS Records, HSP.

[69] "Attachment to RSA letter," FBFHUS Records, HSP.

[70] "Attachment to RSA letter," FBFHUS Records, HSP.

form of input from its supporting American charities, because the order from English Heritage left them with no other option.

Lucas's third term, which regarded funding, probably resonated the strongest among the Governors: "English Heritage saw the RSA's involvement as an important new influence on an eventual successful outcome."[71] Further, Lucas reported that English Heritage confirmed in a letter that if the RSA became involved in Benjamin Franklin House, English Heritage would make a grant of about two hundred thousand pounds towards Phase I of restoration. The partnership with the RSA ensured a lump sum towards Phase I and the support of an established and respected organization.

A letter from Christopher Lucas, director of the RSA, in June of 1994 explained the situation to Bessborough. He wrote, "Everyone seems to be united in the wish to see the house saved and restored. With such a strong and united common purpose, I feel the RSA would stand a good chance of succeeding." Lucas listed five individuals, including a representative from English Heritage, a lawyer for the London Friends, and several Trustees of the London Friends who supported the partnership. Lucas stated that he needed Bessborough's advice and experience as he took on the project and that the partnership was inevitable.

Members of the American Trust took the partnership as an insult to their involvement, as the London Friends quickly agreed to give the RSA power, while denying their own supporting charity any. Several American Trust board members resigned from their positions because of the merge and voiced their opinions freely. Polly Carver Duxbury, for example, resigned and revoked her large pledge because of the

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[71] "Attachment to RSA letter," FBFHUS Records, HSP.

relationship with the RSA. She claimed, "I now realize the mission is merely a dream, that association with the RSA will mean that the house is saved, but that it will not be readily accessible to the public, and that any programs will be under the aegis of the RSA."[72] Like members of the London Friends, Duxbury could not view a new relationship positively and overlooked the advantages of collaboration in public history work. President of the American Trust and Governor of the London Friends, Jane DeGraff Sloat, had similar views. Sloat resigned from her post as Governor in 1994 and explained of the Trust, "we took great pride in participating in the plans for the overall vision of restoring the house as a living memorial to an American icon, a most fitting American responsibility."[73] She continued to explain that the change in the initial plans for the house caused her to resign. Sloat's letter directly spoke about the control of the London Friends over the Benjamin Franklin House; Sloat felt that Americans should have been responsible for the restoration of the house. With the partnership between the RSA and the London Friends, Sloat saw that the London Friends preferred the responsibility remain in London, and felt that it was a direct insult to the Americans involved. Again individuals involved in the project disagreed over control, rather than accepting support and understanding the process of public history work, in which flexibility is key. Sloat left the project rather than continue to struggle for acceptance of any American input. This displayed the complexities of completing a project across such a large geographical space, and caused the loss of another international relationship for the London Friends.

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[72] Letter from Polly Carver Duxbury to Bessborough, October 1994, Folder 3, Box 5, FBFHUS Records, HSP.

[73] Letter from Jane DeGraff Sloat to Bessborough, June 1994, Folder 3, Box 5, FBFHUS Records, HSP.

The London Friends did not respond kindly to the reaction among members of the American Trust. For the second time, Trustees of the London Friends dissolved the American charity formed for their support. In a letter to Peter Cowling of the RSA, Bessborough stated, "we UK Governors have definitely formed a partnership-with-a-historic-link with the Royal Society of Arts…due to this final situation and decision I now announce our 'closing of books' with the American Friends of Franklin Board of Directors."[74] In the same letter, Bessborough directed that the American Trust immediately transfer all funds to the London Friends.

Bessborough mentioned the formation of a new charity in Philadelphia in the same letter—FBFHUS she formed three years prior in 1992. Unlike its predecessors, Bessborough formed FBFHUS to not only provide financial assistance, but to assist with surveys and studies of the house and planning the phases of the restoration. Perhaps the London Friends learned from their first failed attempts at squashing the input of American charities, but more likely this dissimilarity was probably due to Bessborough's direct involvement in the formation of the charity. Unlike the creation of the first American charities, both formed to provide a tax-deductible link between U.S. donors and the London Friends, Bessborough and Robert Landsiedel, the future Executive Director of FBFHUS, formed the final American charity to support the London Friends in numerous ways, including the decision-making process involved in completing restoration of the house and the creation of a museum. The third American charity began with great potential to create a successful international relationship.

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[74] Letter from Bessborough to Cowling, 2 September 1995, Folder 3, Box 5, FBFHUS Records, HSP.

In October of 1998, Phase I of the restoration—which made essential structural repairs and stabilized the house— was completed. Many donors supported Phase I, which cost about £850,000 or $1.3 million. But with a grant of £529,000, the largest supporter was the Heritage Lottery Fund, a national organization that aimed to "sustain and transform a wide range of heritage through innovative investment in projects with lasting impact on people and places."[75] Parliament established the Heritage Lottery Fund in 1994 to support projects that emphasize the local, regional, and national heritage of the United Kingdom. Heritage Lottery Fund grants remain extremely competitive today, and involve an intense application process. The London Friends successfully completed Phase I without conflict. Everyone involved in the restoration process agreed that the house must be structurally sound before the property could be utilized.

The planning of Phase II led to the question of how exactly to interpret the life of Benjamin Franklin in London and who owned the right to answer that question. When this question arose in 1999 Bessborough lived in her hometown of Philadelphia, where she moved at some point after the death of her husband in December of 1993. Though she remained a Governor of the London Friends, Bessborough was not physically present at most UK meetings and became more invested in the interests of FBFHUS. Throughout the 1990s, three individuals served as Honorable Chairman to the organization, each with different views on the future of Benjamin Franklin House. These new chairmen, especially Sir Robert Reid, who served as chairman from 1997 through 2008, challenged the traditional views of Bessborough and FBFHUS.

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[75] "About Us," Heritage Lottery Fund, Accessed 20 April 2013, http://www.hlf.org.uk/aboutus/Pages/AboutUs.aspx#.UXLVZitATGI.

Questions of interpretation moved to the center of the conflict. FBFHUS raised funds and Bessborough attempted to use these funds to gain control over the final interpretation at the museum. The London Friends lost many opportunities at international relationships, which would have affected the final outcome and the continued success of Benjamin Franklin House. Individuals on both sides of the Atlantic refused to compromise in the first two decades of planning. Following the completion of Phase I, The Heritage Lottery Fund, which funded the majority of Phase II, and new staff members swayed the direction of the project. In sections four and five, I will discuss interpretation further, including the effects of the funders on the final outcome.

CHAPTER 5

INTERPRETING AN INTERNATIONAL FIGURE

As we've seen, the planning of Phase II led to the question of how exactly to interpret the life of Benjamin Franklin in London and who owned the right to answer that question. The early plans for Phase II took ideas from the traditionalists like Bessborough and the more forward thinking funders and newcomers to the project. Bessborough and FBFHUS stuck with the idea of an eighteenth-century house with eighteenth-century furnishings and a traditional (some would say worn out) house museum interpretation. Members of the London Friends, newcomers—including Dr. Márcia Balisciano who the London Friends hired as Director of Benjamin Franklin House in 1999—and advising funders all favored an original approach focused on technology that honored Franklin as an innovator.[76]

The Summer 1999 issue of *Craven Street Gazette*, the semi-annual newsletter of Benjamin Franklin House, explained "the completion of Phase I of the restoration of Benjamin Franklin's home at 36 Craven Street brings a fresh challenge – to turn the House into an innovative interactive museum and educational centre that will utilize the latest technology to recreate Franklin's life and achievements, particularly those of his London years."[77] The same article detailed ideas for Phase II, including the plan to purchase period furnishings so that the home looked as it did in Franklin's time. These plans took pieces from the differing ideas of various individuals. Over time, however,

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[76] "New Director for Benjamin Franklin House," *The Craven Street Gazette*, Summer 1999, Folder 1, Box 10, FBFHUS Records, HSP.

[77] "Turning the House into an innovative museum," *The Craven Street Gazette*, Summer 1999, 1. Folder 1, Box 10, FBFHUS Records, HSP.

members of the London Friends and FBFHUS stuck to their preferred interpretation and though the plans began with a compromise, conflicts surfaced almost immediately.

While living in Philadelphia, Bessborough remained a Governor of the London Friends but became more invested in the interests of FBFHUS. With her position in Philadelphia and strong relationships with fellow Americans, Bessborough conflicted with Reid and other London Governors over how best to interpret Benjamin Franklin in the context of his Craven Street home. Bessborough raised issues over the future of the house with Phase II still in the fundraising stage. She attended meetings of the London Friends via telephone and reported London updates to FBFHUS.

At a meeting of FBFHUS in 1999 in Philadelphia, Bessborough expressed concern over the renovations and claimed the plans of the London Friends would create a "Disneyland" in an eighteenth-century house.[78] Ideas raised at meetings of the London Friends suggested "state of the art visitation with living history, video, audio conversations, and an approach more focused on technology with interactives involved."[79] Director Balisciano explained in a 2013 conversation with me that she and the board of the London Friends started with what interested Benjamin Franklin himself—he was an innovator and a radical thinker, so they aimed to honor his memory through a technological and innovative visitor experience.[80] But Bessborough disagreed; she explained at the October 1999 meeting of the London Friends that the ideas of the organization about the final phase of restoration involved too much mechanization of a

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[78] Urgent Fax to Nick Watson, Folder 5, Box 5, FBFHUS Records, HSP.

[79] Minutes from Meeting, 5 March 1999, Folder 1, Box 3, FBFHUS Records, HSP.

[80] Márcia Balisciano, in discussion with author, London, England, 21 November 2013.

small eighteenth-century house and that it was too expensive to complete.[81] Bessborough continued to voice her concerns about interpretation at nearly every meeting in both the United Kingdom and the United States from 1997 through the opening of the museum in 2006.

Bessborough took her protest further when FBFHUS applied for a one hundred thousand dollar grant from the William Penn Foundation in 1999. In the application, the group stated that Phase II was to complete conservation of the house, which included the creation and installation of educational technology and furnishing the rooms with period pieces. The compromised plan still remained at this point. On the application, FBFHUS claimed that 36 Craven Street's "rescue will ensure that future generations will be able to recognize the enduring symbols of American tradition that define our nation."[82] FBFHUS viewed Benjamin Franklin House as an American symbol and preferred to create an example of the original American house museum.

FBFHUS raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for the restoration of 36 Craven Street through similar grants and American donors. But as the London Friends displayed their differences in opinions for the plans for Phase II, FBFHUS began to withhold the funds from the London charity.[83] The London Friends requested transfer of funds from FBFHUS repeatedly, and Bessborough repeatedly responded curtly. In response to one

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[81] Minutes from Meeting of FBFHUS, 13 October 1999, Folder 1, Box 3, FBFHUS Records, HSP.

[82] Grant Letter to William Penn Foundation, Folder 1, Box 3, FBFHUS Records, HSP.

[83] Minutes from Meeting 23 September 2002, Folder 2, Box 2, FBFHUS Records, HSP.

request, Bessborough simply stated, "we will see about that."[84] Bessborough questioned the accounts of the London Friends in 2001 and claimed that certain funds remained unaccounted for, including a donation of £57,128 from FBFHUS.[85] After an insufficient explanation from Chairman Reid, Bessborough hired a lawyer in 2002 and reported the London Friends to the United Kingdom Charity Commission for inappropriate use of funds.[86] The London Friends knew Bessborough was responsible for the report and questioned her numerous times. Bessborough never admitted to her actions and the UK Charity Commission soon investigated the London Friends, found everything in order, and cleared the London Friends.[87]

Bessborough convinced the Charity Commission her issue with the London Friends concerned funds, but the root issues remained the interpretation of Benjamin Franklin's life. Anonymous supporters of Bessborough sent Baroness Margaret Thatcher an urgent fax during this conflict that requested her support with the Charity Commission. The first three paragraphs of the fax concerned the interpretation: "Lady Bessborough and her friends strongly feel that the restoration should be simply restoring the House as near to its original as possible…an 18th century approach with an 18th century historical look in mind."[88] The fax continued to explain that the majority of the

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[84] Minutes from Meeting 30 January 2003, Folder 2, Box 2, FBFHUS Records, HSP.

[85] Letter from Bessborough to Bob Reid, 14 March 2002, Folder 4, Box 6, FBFHUS Records, HSP.

[86] Letter from Reid to Anita Kelly, 18 June 2002, Folder 5, Box 5, FBFHUS Records, HSP.

[87] Letter from UK Charity Commission to Stone King, 8 July 2002, Folder 5, Box 5, FBFHUS Records, HSP.

[88] Urgent Fax to Nick Watson, FBFHUS Records, HSP.

Governors disagreed with an eighteenth-century approach, and stated that the London Friends considered the preferred approach of FBFHUS "a dead museum."[89] The fax failed to even explain Bessborough's complaint to the Charity Commission, but requested that Thatcher contact the Charity Commission about these issues. Thatcher agreed, and in her brief letter to the Charity Commission claimed, "I understand that the present plans for a 21st Century, high-tech 'make-believe' presentation of the House threatens to alienate many of the Charity's supporters and is in conflict with the Charity's original intention at its inception."[90] Bessborough's request displayed her intentions: to gain control of the interpretation of Benjamin Franklin's home in London. She tried to use a former Prime Minister, the most powerful connection she had, to influence of the project. Bessborough's plan failed, but wasted the time, money, and energy of both charities supporting Benjamin Franklin House. The situation displays the difficulties in creating, or even changing, a house museum, and the impact (intended or not) that one individual can have on the entire project.

Members of FBFHUS continued to impact the project as plans for Phase II continued to differ from their own ideas. Bessborough and Executive Director of FBFHUS Robert Landsiedel suggested in 2002 that Chairman of FBFHUS Mary Mather resign immediately.[91] Mary Mather explained in her resignation letter, "it is the

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[89] Urgent Fax to Nick Watson, FBFHUS Records, HSP.

[90] Fax from Margaret Thatcher to UK Charity Commission, Folder 5, Box 5, FBFHUS Records, HSP.

[91] Letter from Mary Mather to The Executive Committee of FBFHUS Folder 4, Box 3, FBFHUS Records, HSP.

perception of the majority of the Executive Committee that my ideas for the preservation and interpretation of 36 Craven Street, The Benjamin Franklin House in London, were not entirely those of the U.S. Committee. This being true, it is appropriate that I should step aside as Chairman."[92] Mather continued to describe the situation, in which members of the Executive Committee hired outside legal council as consultation for Mather's possible resignation. She scolded the group for their actions in dealing with the London Friends and seemed relieved to resign. FBFHUS chose to isolate interested and involved Americans whose opinions differed from their own rather than compromise over the interpretation of Franklin's London life. The group cared only about its own opinions and did not understand that collaboration leads to the most successful museum experiences.

Governors of the London Friends continued fundraising and planning through these conflicts and lost patience with FBFHUS. Members of the London Friends and Balisciano did not give up on their idea to invent a technology-based interpretation, but the question of the use of objects also appeared. Bessborough claimed that an innovative experience would be too expensive to incorporate, when in reality the expense to fill the house with eighteenth-century furnishings, particularly any authentic Franklin artifacts, would be astronomical. Bessborough held, and literally owned in her opinion, a collection of artifacts related to Benjamin Franklin's life in London. The collection included a valuable marble bust of Franklin that Thomas Jefferson once owned, a leather purse Franklin owned during his time in London, a Franklin medallion, and a letter

[92] Mather to The Executive Committee, FBFHUS Records, HSP.

Franklin wrote to his sister while he lived on Craven Street.[93] Each artifact was donated to the London Friends, but placed in the care of Bessborough until the London Friends could provide a safe and secure place for the objects in 36 Craven Street.[94]

When Bessborough began to act against the Governors of the London Friends, the Governors agreed to claim the artifacts and store them in a Scottish bank vault until the completion of Phase II. But Bessborough refused to transfer the artifacts to the London Friends and even refused to disclose to the other Governors where she stored the artifacts. Members of the London Friends repeatedly questioned Bessborough about the artifacts from 2002 to 2004, but she never revealed any information about the objects. At a meeting of the UK Governors in July of 2002, Bessborough responded to the usual questioning, saying the artifacts belonged "to the true and loyal friends of Benjamin Franklin."[95] She expressed dissatisfaction about the plans for Phase II, particularly the idea of a student science center and withheld the artifacts to retain some control of the future museum. Eventually both Bessborough and the London Friends hired lawyers to help settle the situation, and FBFHUS records at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania show no evidence of a conclusion to the issue.[96]

While Bessborough and FBFHUS struggled to maintain a traditional house museum interpretation, Reid and other governors—including his wife, Lady Joan Reid,

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[93] Statutory Declaration of Proof of Ownership, Folder 9, Box 33, FBFHUS Records, HSP.

[94] Letter from Bessborough to Reid, 27 September 2004, Folder 9, Box 33, FBFHUS Records, HSP.

[95] Minutes from Meeting 23 July 2002, Folder 2, Box 2, FBFHUS Records, HSP.

[96] See Conclusion for additional information.

an expert on Benjamin Franklin—made progress in Phase II. As early as 1999 Sir Reid emphasized the importance of incorporating a science program into the interpretation and beyond the walls of the house. He believed that teaching Franklin's own experiments was vital, both to teach about the historic figure of Benjamin Franklin and to follow the National Curriculum, thus securing a future steady audience of school groups.

Reid established a Science Advisory Group and educational consultants to ascertain how plans for the house could link to National Curriculum—which would not only appeal to the Heritage Lottery Fund when applying for their second large grant, but would ensure the income from school programming when the museum opened.[97] Though Reid's interpretation considered the future of the museum through ensuring their plans met grant requirements and appealed to a steady, paying audience, school groups are served free of charge today. Bessborough remained concerned with remembering Franklin through recreating, to the best of her ability, how Franklin lived. She was more concerned with historical authenticity than creating a socially relevant interpretation to ensure the survival of the museum.

While Bessborough and other members of FBFHUS believed that a twenty-first century interpretation would misrepresent Benjamin Franklin, Reid considered the survival of the museum rather than a "correct" interpretation of Franklin. In 2004 the London Friends applied for a second grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund. The Lottery Fund favors organizations with significance in local, regional, and national heritage that

[97] Minutes from Meeting 12 December 2000, Folder 1, Box 2, FBFHUS Records, HSP.

intended to enhance intellectual access through interpretation.[98] The objectives of the London Friends changed from Bessborough's preferred interpretation to an interpretation that appealed to potential funders and the British government as a cultural asset.

On the Benjamin Franklin House application to the Heritage Lottery Fund, begun in 1999, only the first objective matched the original intentions of Bessborough and the London Friends of the 1970s: "to preserve the heritage and present Benjamin Franklin House to the public as a living museum."[99] The other objectives involved providing an education science center with hands-on experiments, creating relationships between Anglo-American inner-city children, and providing research facilities for Franklin-related scholarship. The application included five pages that detailed how the Benjamin Franklin House intended to fit into the National Curriculum, and thus appeal to a steady audience and ensure future income. All of these points attracted the Heritage Lottery Fund to the project, and in the summer of 2004 they awarded the London Friends one million Great British Pounds—about two-thirds of their estimated costs for Phase II.[100] Benjamin Franklin House opened its doors to visitors on January 17, 2006—Franklin's 300th birthday—with an interpretation that many people, including myself, believe Franklin himself would likely appreciate.

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[98] Benjamin Franklin House Application to Heritage Lottery Fund, September 1999, Folder 9, Box 10, FBFHUS Records, HSP.

[99] Application to Heritage Lottery Fund, September 1999, FBFHUS Records, HSP.

[100] "Britain's Heritage Lottery Fund Awards Grant of nearly £1 million," *The Craven Street Gazette,* Summer 2004, Folder 1, Box 10, FBFHUS Records, HSP.

CHAPTER 6

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN'S LEGACY IN LONDON

Edmund Morgan said that Benjamin Franklin often lamented that he was born too soon.[101] The individuals involved in the planning of Benjamin Franklin House had the opportunity to plan the interpretation of their museum in the twenty-first century and took advantage of the possibilities this allowed them. Professionals at existing house museums know how difficult implementing significant changes in the interpretation, collection, and even programming can be. Budgets, creative differences, and inflexible board members cause difficulties similar to those Bessborough and FBFHUS created for Benjamin Franklin House. So, what manner of interpretation and programming resulted from these differences?

The end result of the interactions between members of supporting charities, funders, and involved museum professionals differed greatly from Bessborough's initial vision of Benjamin Franklin House. The conflicts between interested parties did not alone affect the final interpretation of Benjamin Franklin's life in London, however. Benjamin Franklin House holds the highest heritage rating in England—Grade I—because of its "extensive original features, including: 14 fireplaces, ceilings, panelling, shutters, floors, and a central staircase which Franklin claimed to use for daily exercise!"[102] Because of its significant Grade I listing, the local council, the City of Westminster, and English Heritage required their approval of all designs—and all future

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[101] Edmund S. Morgan, *Benjamin Franklin*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), ix.

[102] "Benjamin Franklin House Bringing History to Life," Pamphlet collected during author's November 2013 visit.

work—on Benjamin Franklin House.[103] The museum is unusual among the numerous Georgian house museums scattered around the city of London, many of which contain period furnishings and object-based interpretation. Against the preferences of Bessborough and other members of FBFHUS, Benjamin Franklin House opened in 2006 with very few objects and an innovative, theatrical historical experience.

The main attraction at Benjamin Franklin House is the Historical Experience—a look at the house through live interpretation, sound, lighting, and visual projection that uses Franklin's own words to teach the visitor about his almost sixteen years in London.[104] Designers and staff believe the tour "removes the traditional distance between visitor and the past and illuminates a unique moment in AngloAmerican history."[105] The Historical Experience creates the feeling of a theatrical show, rather than a traditional guided house museum tour. After a brief introduction video and spiel from an intern or volunteer, an actor playing Polly Hewson, daughter of Franklin's landlady, enters the room and accompanies visitors through the rest of the house. The scene is set on Franklin's last night in London on the eve of the American Revolution. The actor interacts with audio dialogue as images are projected on the wall. Different topics that Franklin addressed in correspondence or his personal writings are explored on each floor; "food, health, botany, and daily living in the basement kitchen; social and personal

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[103] Balisciano, in discussion with author, London, England, 21 November 2013.

[104] All information about the current tours is from my own experience as a guest on both the architectural tours and the Historical Experience in November 2013. For further information about the trip, please see the appendix at the end of this paper.

[105] Márcia Balisciano, "Benjamin Franklin and Public History: Restoring Benjamin Franklin House," Accessed 4 February 2013, http://www.benjaminfranklinhouse.org/site/sections/news/MBArticle.pdf.

relationships, musical inventions and political tension on the ground floor; scientific work, political triumphs and woes, and a hurried return to American in the face of the looming War of Independence on the first floor."[106] The staff, designers, and script consultants aimed to display Franklin's humanity and give a sense of the man he really was, including his character flaws, while in London.[107]

Benjamin Franklin House Director Dr. Márcia Balisciano joined the project in 1999 and with her brought fresh ideas concerning the future of 36 Craven Street.[108] Balisciano joined the project with an educational background in American history, international relations, and American economics, and professional experience in both business and cultural project management.[109] Simply put, Balisciano gets things done. She joined the project and realized Benjamin Franklin House needed to stand out from the other Georgian house museums in London. But final decisions concerning interpretation remained undecided as late as 2000, when Robert Landsiedel, Executive Director of FBFHUS requested an update as to the progress at Benjamin Franklin House. Sir Bob Reid, Chairman of the London Friends at the time, replied that the script for the tour had been agreed upon and the group completed a walk through with actors and

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[106] "Historical Experience," Benjamin Franklin House, Accessed 4 February 2014; http://www.benjaminfranklinhouse.org/site/sections/about_house/historical.htm

[107] Balisciano, in discussion with author, London, England, 21 November 2013.

[108] "New Director for Benjamin Franklin House," *The Craven Street Gazette*, FBFHUS Records, HSP.

[109] "New Director for Benjamin Franklin House," *The Craven Street Gazette*, FBFHUS Records, HSP.

sound and light engineers.[110] Reid then confronted the issue at hand: "there has been a great debate about how best to present the house. The bottom line is that it must be a live attraction to command the revenues we need."[111] Generating revenue remains a concern as of the end of 2013; Balisciano asserted that keeping the museum open, which costs between three-hundred and three-hundred and fifty thousand pounds annually, has proved more difficult than raising the funds for the initial opening of Benjamin Franklin House.[112]

Balisciano explained that she and the board hoped to honor Franklin's memory by including innovation and technology into their interpretation, as they believed Franklin would have wanted it.[113] The group accomplished this goal as best they could under time constraints—planning for the tour took place between 2000 and 2004, while implementation occurred between 2004 and the proposed opening of the museum in 2006—restrictions of statutory bodies, and budget limitations. A nearly million pound grant from Heritage Lottery Fund in early 2004 sparked the final stage of fundraising and design work began. Almost three decades of fundraising, planning, conflicts, and design led to the Historical Experience, which "employs live interpretation and leading edge sound, lighting and visual projection to tell Franklin's rich London story in his own

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[110] Letter from Reid to Landsiedel, 4 December 2000, Folder 2, Box 3, FBFHUS Records, HSP, 2.

[111] Reid to Landsiedel, FBFHUS Records, HSP. 2.

[112] Balisciano, in discussion with author, London, England, 21 November 2013.

[113] Balisciano, in discussion with author, London, England, 21 November 2013.

words."[114] The interpretation remains somewhat shocking to museum visitors today, although the majority of reviews on popular sites like TripAdvisor are positive.

Chairman Reid explained the situation of the London Friends board at the beginning of the planning phase of the Historical Experience: "this has its critics but the compromise is that the House can be presented either live or silently simply by switching the system on or off. In time, the market will decide on its own preference."[115] Reid pointed to an important aspect of the Historical Experience: it is not permanent. Eight years after the opening of the museum and the market has apparently still not spoken. As of 2014, the staff turns off the multimedia components on Monday afternoons and offers architectural tours for visitors more curious about the house itself.

The architectural tour runs a visitor £3.50, while the Historical Experience is double the price at £7 a person. An unpaid education intern (in the case of my tour, a talented recent graduate of performance) gives the architectural tour, while a costumed, contracted actor leads the Historical Experience. The architectural tour begins in a basement room containing the Craven Street Bones, a small display case with the artifacts that Bessborough once withheld, a few chairs and projection screen, and the sign explaining the absence of objects throughout the house.[116] The tour begins with a brief introduction to the house and an explanation of the Craven Street Bones and then moves to the basement kitchen. Each room in the house, including the kitchen, is completely

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[114] Balisciano, "Benjamin Franklin and Public History."

[115] Letter from Reid to Landsiedel, 4 December 2000, Folder 2, Box 3, FBFHUS Records, HSP.

[116] The Craven Street Bones refer to human bones discovered buried in what is now the seminar room in the basement of 36 Craven St. during the restoration project. Historians believe doctor William Hewson, son-in-law of Franklin's landlady Margaret Stevenson, performed medical autopsies, which were illegal during that time, and buried the remains.

lacking of objects, except one or two (non-authentic) pieces meant to portray the use of the room during Franklin's time.

The architectural tour focuses on history as a process, and discusses 36 Craven Street through time, including descriptions of Phase I of restoration and what caused the damage to the house. The architectural tour also places the house into context, describing the evolution of the neighborhood and the place of 36 Craven Street within it. The tour is not without its Franklin anecdotes (did you know beef made his back itch?) and ends in the Student Science Centre where the guide invites guests to play a replica of Franklin's glass armonica. The architectural tour is more traditional than the Historical Experience, but still offers visitors informative entertainment through a refreshingly non-object based interpretation. The staff hopes to introduce an audio self-guided tour for visitors who prefer to experience the house in a more traditional way.[117]

Besides the ability to simply switch the multimedia off, the board and directors also designed the Historical Experience to be easily adapted in the future. Balisciano herself mentioned that the theatrical experience could be reinvented relatively easy and inexpensively.[118] The technology is already in place; to implement a new interpretation would require only a new script and audio recordings. An actor portraying Polly Hewson leads the Historical Experience today. But what if the interpretation of Franklin's life in London is reconsidered through the perspective of Peter, the slave Franklin brought with him from Philadelphia? This potential excites Balisciano, who hopes to radicalize the museum even further in the future.

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[117] Balisciano, in discussion with author, London, England, 21 November 2013.

[118] Balisciano, in discussion with author, London, England, 21 November 2013.

The Student Science Centre is located on the third floor of Benjamin Franklin House and caters to visiting school groups. Each component of the Student Science Centre is designed to support the Key Stage Two level of the National Curriculum.[119] School groups are invited to the museum free of charge (even public transportation is free of charge to school groups during the day in London), which allows Benjamin Franklin House to spread Franklin's ideas of innovation, curiosity, and creation to even disadvantaged areas. The Student Science Centre is made up of three rooms: the Demonstration Room, the Medical History Room, and the Discovery Room.

The Demonstration Room features three hands-on experiments that Franklin worked on while in London. Teachers choose one experiment based on their curriculum and the Education Manager, Stephen Wilson, leads a demonstration. Each demonstration, whether on canal depths, electricity, or the glass armonica and sound waves, includes dramatic audio-visual segments.

The Discovery Room again incorporates technology into teaching about Franklin's life and work while in London. A video game in the Discovery Room emphasizes social history of the Georgian Period. The game teaches children briefly about certain objects, including washboards and the Craven Street Bones. The game then challenges the player with a short quiz about the objects. Upon successful completion of the quiz, the student is rewarded with an interactive video game involving the object. For example, I learned about a washboard, took a quick quiz on the object, and then furiously cleaned an animated shirt on a virtual washboard using my index finger.

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[119] The term Key Stage Two refers to four grade levels, for children between the ages of seven and eleven years.

The Medical History Room involves more free-play based exercises, all concerning medical history. This section of the Student Science Centre focuses on the work of William Hewson, husband of the Polly Hewson portrayed by actors during the Historical Experience. Hewson lived at 36 Craven Street at the same time as Franklin and performed medical experiments during that time. The bones discovered in the former garden of the home are thought to be from autopsies performed by Hewson. One activity in the Medical History Room is a dress-up game, but instead of simply dressing in a Georgian costume, children dress in a body suit and their classmates work together to place organs and bones in the correct places. Another activity involves following directions to connect "blood vessels" on a figure of a human body; when everything is connected correctly, the figure's brain lights up.

School groups visiting Benjamin Franklin House also join Polly Hewson on the Historical Experience, similar to the adult tour, but more interactive. Polly talks directly to the students and treats them as if they were servants beginning work at the house during Franklin's time. A handful of children are given Georgian costumes to wear during the Historical Experience. Each student that visits Benjamin Franklin House with his school experiences all four interactive programs: the Demonstration Room, the Discovery Room, the Medical History Room, and the Historical Experience. Each of these activities is geared towards a different style of learning, with the hope that they "stimulate inquisitiveness, creativity and critical thought."[120]

Benjamin Franklin House also provides several types of programming for school children who cannot visit the museum with their classes. One of these programs is Ben's

[120] Student Science Centre, Benjamin Franklin House, Accessed 4 February 2014, http://www.benjaminfranklinhouse.org/site/sections/about_house/ssc.htm

Travelling Suitcase. In this program, the education staff brings Franklin related objects and supporting activities to local schools. Like in the Demonstration Room, the program offers three choices of activities to teachers, including inventions, arts and design, and politics and citizenship—which is designed for older school students. Benjamin Franklin House also hosts an annual science fair, where students are challenged to answer questions that Franklin explored while in London through displaying their own experiments.

Sister Schools is another program supported by the education department at Benjamin Franklin House. The program pairs a primary school in London with an elementary school in the United States and offers teachers lesson plans, activities, and collaboration ideas, as well as ideas for further learning opportunities. Again, the lessons link to the National Curriculum and focus on lessons about science inquiry and citizenship. Big Lottery Fund, a large funder in the United Kingdom that focuses on community-based needs, funds the program. Sister Schools began in 2011 and has been successful; the Education Manager explained that he learns more each year what works and what doesn't, and is still learning the correct level of support needed for the most effective and enjoyable experience.

The interpretation and programming at Benjamin Franklin House differ greatly from those first imagined by interested individuals in the 1970s. The staff, designers, board and other individuals involved in the planning of Phase II allowed for a non-traditional house museum experience in order to honor Benjamin Franklin as an innovator. The decisions regarding the interpretation and programming caused conflict among interested parties, with traditionalists holding out for an object-based

interpretation found at so many house museums in both the United States and United Kingdom. But the conflict resulted in a creative, inventive experience for visitors that allows them to gain a sense of Benjamin Franklin as a human being.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

The evolution of Benjamin Franklin House from a crumbling, dilapidated townhome to an innovative house museum displays the many complexities of public history work. The large geographic space over which this project took place exasperated these complexities and provided an ideal case study for examining the challenges facing house museum professionals today. Individuals, whether wealthy, conservative non-professionals or driven, devoted directors, have a tremendous impact on the success of house museums. The case study of Benjamin Franklin House displays the significance of leadership in public history projects and, while their intentions are nearly always good, how those leaders can both hinder or help the project immensely.

This conclusion was especially evident to me when I flew to London to visit Benjamin Franklin House and speak with staff members in November of 2013. Upon entering the Seminar Room, where tours begin, jetlagged and jittery, I was absolutely stunned to see a display case holding the very objects I discussed earlier, which Bessborough withheld from the London Friends for years. Many public historians note the significance of individuals in the museum profession. This is especially the case in the field of historic house museums. Individuals become emotionally invested in rescuing a house because of a personal connection to the area, the history of those who once resided in the house, or a strong urge to preserve the past for future generations. Many house museums would not exist today without the help of specific individuals who discovered the houses or poured their hearts into saving a structure because they believed it was worth saving.

As we've seen, in the case of Benjamin Franklin House, this individual is Lady Mary Bessborough. Her connection to Philadelphia, and specifically, another Philadelphian who lived in London, aristocratic upbringing, and conservative views on preservation sparked the movement to save and restore Ben Franklin's London home. But Bessborough also obstructed the process and caused conflicts concerning the distribution of funds and the final interpretation. The examination of her involvement in the founding of this house museum raises the question of the impact of individuals, especially non-professionals, in public history work. Public history projects must stress collaboration, as the opinions and knowledge of one individual cannot create a successful interpretation. Bessborough controlled the project for years and denied input from others. What would Benjamin Franklin House look like today had Bessborough welcomed varying opinions and realized the importance of collaboration? Many historic house museums encounter similar tenacious characters, often in the form of irrational board members. Further studies on these individuals, and how museums professionals should handle them, is necessary. We must develop a strategy to handle situations in which individuals will stop at nothing to achieve their vision, when that vision is not in the best interest of the historic house.

Ben Franklin's house in London drew individuals from both sides of the Atlantic determined to help preserve 36 Craven Street and teach future generations about Franklin as the first true American ambassador. We've seen that these cross-Atlantic groups differed in their opinions about the process to reach those goals. Their differences caused this project to miss the opportunity for international collaboration and a long-lasting international relationship. Few, if any, public history projects span such a large

geographic space. Public history work is generally localized and frequently lacks global perspective. Many public history projects could become even more meaningful from offering a global perspective. We know that academic historians stress the significance of international perspectives in their work, and public historians must follow their lead in order to remain relevant. Mary Mather ended her resignation letter, which I discussed in chapter five, with an insightful thought: "we know the very real differences in the way things are done in each country. But, different paths can meet quite easily in a common destination. There are many successful Anglo-American organizations…I can only hope that the U.S.-U.K. efforts to preserve 36 Craven Street will have such success." We know, however, that Mather's hopes for a successful international relationship did not come to fruition. But the museum is still open today and the opportunity for future international relationships does still exist. I urge Benjamin Franklin House, and other house museums with the opportunity for international collaboration, to take part whenever possible.

As in the case of many museums, efforts are now focused on keeping the museum operating. Balisciano stated that she hopes for deeper international relationships in the future. International collaboration and global perspectives do not always apply to public history work, but when they do, they must be explored further. International collaboration can allow for new, evocative public history work that stimulates a more global perspective through public engagement. Public historians must take international relationships seriously and realize the potential in the future of public history work with this new perspective.

APPENDIX A
RESEARCH METHOD

I encountered the Friends of Benjamin Franklin House, U. S. collection at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania through a suggestion from my advisor in the spring of 2013. I was enrolled in a research seminar at the time; the theme of the class was international history. I hoped to write about a topic relating to public history, but was having trouble locating sources that applied to both public and international history. As we've seen, public history work is predominantly localized. This made the hunt for a topic—and sufficient archival records—difficult. So when my advisor suggested I check out the Friends, U.S. records, I quickly headed to HSP. After completing many hours of research and submitting a lengthy paper on Benjamin Franklin House, as well as interning at a historic house museum in Philadelphia, I decided to focus my thesis on house museums and use Benjamin Franklin House as a case study.

The Friends of Benjamin Franklin House, U. S. collection at HSP is made up of fifty-nine boxes that include the minutes from the majority of Friends meetings from 1971 – 2008, correspondence, architectural plans, financial records, publications, fundraising event plans, and grant applications. For the purpose of this thesis, I focused primarily on the meetings minutes, correspondence, publications, and grant applications. These sources allowed me to understand the relationship between all four charities and the individual members of those charities.

Mary Bessborough donated the collection to the Historical Society of Pennsylvania and I kept this in mind as I sorted through the many boxes. The collection seems to offer a comprehensive look at the development of the Benjamin Franklin House,

but the collection reflects Bessborough's choices and, like all archival materials, is objective. Because of this, and because I could not justify writing a master's thesis about a museum I never visited, I flew to London in November of 2013 to continue my research.

During my trip to London I visited as many house museums as I could manage, focusing on Georgian period houses but squeezing a handful of Victorian era homes as well. All of these historic house museums contained objects. Many of these house museums favored an object-based interpretation. Several of the museums I visited, including Benjamin Franklin House, banded together in 2008 to form "London Shh…" (Small historic houses). Nine small house museums in central London banded together to encourage more visitors to their lesser-known historic sites in a city full of tourist attractions. Each museum operates independently, but encourages visitors to experience other Shh… museums. Staff members pass out London Shh loyalty cards to visitors, which the visitors then collect stamps from each museum on; visit five or more participating houses and receive a goodie bag. This is an example of collaboration in the museum community. By banding together, the Shh… houses display to visitors what makes their museums unique and exciting among the other small historic houses in London.

I visited many house museums in London, but remained focused on Benjamin Franklin House as a case study. Director Márcia Balisciano graciously agreed to speak with me about her experience at the museum. Upon meeting, she immediately explained to me that she would not speak about the obstructive actions of Bessborough, but would instead focus on the present and future plans for the museum. Her passion for Benjamin

Franklin House is obvious. Balisciano also introduced me to the education manager, Stephen Wilson, who briefly demonstrated the three choices of experiment in the Student Science Centre, explained the Sister Schools program, and toured me through the Discovery Room. I joined two older couples on the Historic Experience and spoke to three volunteer interns afterwards. I took thorough notes, especially considering that many of the final decisions regarding interpretation remain absent from the HSP collection.

I arrived in London on a Monday and my meetings at Benjamin Franklin House were scheduled for that Thursday. Knowing that the architectural tour only runs on Mondays, I took a train from Heathrow Airport, dropped my suitcase at the hotel, and hopped on the tube towards the Strand. Butterflies floated in my stomach as I approached 36 Craven Street, snapped a few photographs, and knocked on the front door. An intern greeted me and guided me to the seminar room in the basement. The room contains a projection screen that plays an introductory video, a sign addressing the lack of objects in the house, and, as I mentioned in the conclusion, a display case with a handful of Franklin-related objects—including the leather purse, medallion, and letter from the dispute with Bessborough.

Benjamin Franklin House accession records show that Bessborough donated the objects to the museum in 2009, three years after the museum opened and one year after the dissolution of FBFHUS.[121] I previously mentioned that the Friends, U. S. records did not show evidence of a conclusion to the dispute. The Historical Society of Pennsylvania collection ranges from 1956 to 2008, when the members of FBFHUS dissolved the

[121] Sally James, email to author, 18 March 2014.

organization. So Bessborough likely did not purposely omit the resolution of the artifact conflict from the archival records. Rather, the conflict remained unresolved in 2008 when Bessborough donated the collection to the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

The trip to London, especially my interactions with staff and volunteers at Benjamin Franklin House, allowed me to further understand the development of the museum. Archival collections are often a wealth of information, and the Friends, U. S. collection in particular displays the opinions and emotions of many individuals involved in the planning process. Still, actually experiencing the sounds, smells, and sights that inspired Americans and British alike to preserve 36 Craven Street proved an invaluable step in the research process.

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