PRESENT ARMS: DISPLAYING WEAPONS IN MUSEUMS

A Thesis
Submitted to
the Temple University Graduate Board

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
MASTER OF ARTS IN HISTORY

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May 2018

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ABSTRACT

Museums have always had and displayed weapons, including firearms. As museums have evolved, so too has exhibit design and practice. However, many weapons displays have not kept up with changing practices, and many of them are now irrelevant, have limited audiences, or are unhelpful to the broader public. Simply displaying weapons by type or as art is not enough anymore, and keeping them in storage does not take advantage of their potential. Also, many museums are increasingly trying to become places for public discourse about current issues. They often create exhibits meant to be relevant to today and promote discussions about controversial topics. Many museums are also trying to make their collections and objects more accessible to the public. Innovative displays of firearms could help them accomplish both these tasks.

The battle over gun control and gun rights is often more of a shouting match than reasoned discourse. Museums could use historic firearms as an opportunity to help facilitate a more responsible conversation about the issue. These firearms are typically not as emotionally charged as modern guns, and could be used as a pathway into the gun debate if displayed creatively.

Guns, historic or not, are often not very approachable objects for many people. This can be for a variety of reasons, including their associations with masculinity, power, and nationality. Museums should experiment with new ways to display firearms that can make them more approachable and accessible to broader audiences, and ideally to the entire public.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In today's museums, there is often a disconnect between displayed firearms and the museum's audience. Often, these displays are only accessible to firearm experts, and are rarely made relevant to the average visitor. This is in part because many firearms displays cling to past methods and have not been updated.

Meanwhile, America is embroiled in a vicious gun debate. This debate is generally irresponsible, and often takes the form of digital yelling matches. It is also very emotional and accusatory, with little common ground between the two sides. Museums could promote a more responsible debate using 18th century firearms. They do not provoke the same immediate and polarizing emotional reactions that modern weapons, such as the AR-15, do. This also benefits museums, as unused firearms in collections storage will get some use, while the museum gains relevance to a national issue. It also allows museums to revisit current displays and think about new ways to display weapons, and new ways to connect broader audiences to weapons, skills which will help them in future displays as well.

The benefits to museums with firearms aside, it is also important from a public history perspective to engage the gun debate through a firearms exhibit. Ian Tyrrell notes how the widening divide between traditional academic history and the public fueled the development of public history, and this is the case with firearms now.[1] Historians have recently done history which is directly relevant to national debate on guns—for example, histories of the context surrounding the Second Amendment and new ideas about General

[1] Tyrrell, 13-8.

Gates' real aims at Concord—but public consciousness of these events are still surrounded in mythology, and the new histories have not reached them. Given the direct relevance of the history of 18th century firearms to today's debate on guns, it is imperative for public historians, especially those in museums with firearms collections, to create an environment for diverse audiences to engage with that history and with each other.[2]

Of course, public history's inclination to tell everyone's story has gotten it embroiled in controversy often. Connecting the story of America's guns in the 18th century to such a polarizing topic as today's gun debate is sure to invite controversy.[3] This does not mean it should be avoided, and museums which do are failing to respond to the needs of public. Public historians like Eugene Dillenburg argue that museums are public institutions meant to serve the good of the broadest possible public, and not just a small fraction of it.[4] This is why it is so important to make gun displays more accessible. As I demonstrate, many gun displays are accessible to a few only. While it may not be possible to make a fully accessible gun exhibit, museums could do a much better job.

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[2] Michael Frisch took the idea of reducing this divide and bringing the public into the history-making process even further in his work, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990). He argues that historians share authority on history with the public. Previously, most professional historians claimed authority from their education and methods. Frisch argued that instead historical authority belongs to and can come from anyone, that anyone is an authority on their own history, and that historians share it with them whether we like it or not. Most public historians acknowledge this by making better attempts to include everyone when they tell history, which is part of the reason for public history's insistence on maximum accessibility and telling everyone's story. This also plays out in public historians' favor for mediums such as exhibits and objects that are easier for most audiences to connect to, understand, and converse about than history monographs.

[3] As public historians brought hidden histories more to light which clashed with the traditional, glorified histories told about America, they became embroiled in controversy often. Ken Yellis discusses a few of these episodes, including the failed Enola Gay exhibit, in his article "Fred Wilson, PTSD, and Me: Reflections on the History Wars," *Curator: The Museum Journal* 52, no. 4 (2009): 333–348. He discusses how the Enola Gay exhibit failed, but also how Fred Wilson's exhibit really got people to think while using very few words.

[4] Eugene Dillenburg, "What, If Anything, Is a Museum?," *Exhibition*, no. Spring (2011): 8–13.

I tackle this issue in three parts. In chapter one, I look at past weapons displays, in part to probe the roots of current displays. Then, in chapter two, I look at current displays. In both chapters, I examine displays for strengths and weaknesses that can be applied to new displays. This leads to chapter 3, where I propose general principles to follow when displaying firearms in order to better engage visitors and promote access for broader audiences. I also propose an exhibit designed to improve the state of the gun debate. I argue that creating visitor experiences with 18th century firearms can give both sides some common ground and mutual understanding on which to build responsible debate.

However, exploring the complexities of weapon displays is made difficult by the differing definitions of the term weapon. Some use it to describe only objects designed to be used against others in war. Some insist a gun used for sport be called a gun, and a gun used for war be called a weapon, regardless what either was initially designed for.[5] Some say any object used to harm others becomes a weapon, such as a frying pan used in a murder. Some refer to any object used for destruction as a weapon, even if all that is being destroyed is a paper target.[6] I think it is best to be specific, and refer to weapons by their specific type (musket, bayonet, grenade, etc.) whenever possible. Since I discuss several types of firearms as well as several edged weapons, however, I use the broader term weapon here to include firearms, swords, bayonets, etc. designed for use in war or in peace and those that can be used for both.

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[5] The army uses specific terms for each weapon—so a tank is a tank, a rifle is a rifle, and a 240B is a 240B. The only thing called a gun is an artillery piece. Gun is never used to refer to a rifle.

[6] Cambridge Dictionary defines a weapon as: any object used in fighting or war, such as a gun, bomb, knife, etc. Dictionary.com: 1. any instrument or device for use in attack or defense in combat, fighting, or war, as a sword, rifle, or cannon. 2. anything used against an opponent, adversary, or victim. Merriam-Webster: 1. something (as a club, knife, or gun) used to injure, defeat, or destroy 2. a means of contending against another. "Weapon Meaning in the Cambridge English Dictionary," accessed April 19, 2017, http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/weapon, "Weapon | Define Weapon at Dictionary.com," accessed April 19, 2017, http://www.dictionary.com/browse/weapon, 1. "Definition of WEAPON," accessed April 19, 2017, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/weapon.

Some basic information on weapons terminology, both in the 18th century and now, is also warranted for before a long discussion of them. The first common firearms in North America were operated by matchlock, where pulling the trigger causes a burning slowmatch to descend upon a pan of black powder, which explodes, igniting powder in the pan and then the barrel, thereby propelling the ball out. Most 18th century firearms were operated by flintlock, where pulling the trigger causes a flint to strike a steel frizzen, creating sparks that ignited black powder, which propelled the projectile. This was superseded in the 19th century by the percussion lock, which on pulling the trigger smashed a small cap full of fulminate of mercury, igniting the powder in the barrel. Regarding ammunition, ball projectiles were lead balls of varying sizes, always smaller than the diameter, or caliber, of the barrel. Shot projectiles were multiple smaller balls loaded and fired together.

There were several types of firearms. A musket was a heavy, durable, smoothbore weapon designed for conventional European line warfare. It was easy to load, fire, and clean. Muskets could always mount bayonets. A socket bayonet fits around the barrel of a weapon, and had a long, triangular blade. It was also designed for line warfare, which usually included melee combat. Muskets are similar to true assault rifles in purpose—both are designed to be the standard infantry firearm of their day. In the gun debate, the term assault rifle is often used to describe civilian versions of military rifles like the AR-15, but the latter are semi-automatic only.[7] True assault rifles, like the M16, M4, or AK-

[7] Semi-automatic means pulling the trigger fires one bullet and loads the next bullet. Fully-automatic means pulling the trigger fires and reloads bullets continuously until they run out or the trigger is released. Burst means pulling the trigger fires a set number of bullets in sequence (usually 3). Manual firearms have to be reloaded by hand for every shot (ex. a musket or bolt-action rifle). In the US, most civilians can only legally buy manual and semi-automatic firearms. These can be modified to be fully automatic with devices like bump stocks.

47, which can fire semi-auto or full-auto or burst, are not legally available on the civilian market in the United States. While the differences between true assault rifles and their civilian versions are not widely discussed, they still remain very similar in design, and the differences may not be big enough to warrant much consideration. This paper will refer to both true assault rifles and civilian versions of them as assault rifles.

Returning to the 18th century, fusils were shorter, lighter, less durable, and smaller caliber than muskets. Some were designed to hold bayonets and be used by officers, who did not need muskets in line combat. Some were designed for trade or personal use, and often could not mount bayonets. In this paper, fusil will refer to military fusils only, while fuzee will refer to civilian or trade fusils only.

Fowlers were primarily for hunting ducks, and were quite large, long, and heavy. They were unable to mount bayonets, although some owners later modified them to accept that bladed weapon. They could shoot either ball or shot, but were intended to be exclusively civilian weapons. More expensive fowlers sported extensive decoration, but basic fowlers could also be obtained for less money. Today, shotguns fill the role of fowlers. Like fowlers, they can fire ball, called a slug, or shot, but typically fire shot. They are used for hunting duck, although they are also used extensively for clay shooting, which mimics hunting wildfowl, and for home defense. The methods of duck hunting with fowlers and shotguns are different, but they still serve a similar purpose.

Rifles were very different. American colonists developed a variant called the long rifle, also known as the Pennsylvania or Kentucky rifle. These weapons had grooves in the barrel to impart spin to the ball, making them much more accurate at long ranges. They also took much longer to load, however, and could not mount bayonets, making

them suitable primarily for hunting medium to large game. They were small caliber, and lighter and less durable than muskets. They were unsuitable for the average infantryman in line warfare; however, they were employed successfully by both American skirmishers and German Jaegers during the American Revolution, which led to the development and adoption of the Baker rifle in the British Army. Once the Minie ball made rifles quick to load, they superseded smoothbores on the battlefield during the Civil War and eventually developed into many forms, including assault rifles and hunting rifles. However, since their primary 18th century purpose was hunting, the modern firearm most closely associated with them would be any type of civilian hunting rifle.

Contract muskets were made by gunsmiths for government use, often to issue to the militia. State governments started issuing musket contracts during the Revolution. Usually the contracts specified a certain pattern, such as a modified British long-land pattern or modified French Charleville pattern. Committee of Safety muskets were similar to contract muskets, except they were extra-legal, before the American colonies officially declared independence. Contract muskets were regulated by stamps (or imprints) showing state or federal ownership and stamps showing the musket had been proofed—which means test fired. Firearms privately owned by whites were not regulated.

It is very difficult to say anything meaningful about the gun debate in just a few sentences, as it is very difficult to say anything in the gun debate in a few sentences. Many studies have been done on gun violence and the effects of different gun control measures, and many statistics have been compiled. Most of the detailed studies are done

by criminologists. There are so many factors to take into account, however, that they often conflict with each other.[8]

An excellent summary of these studies was done by Philip Cook, Anthony Braga, and Mark Moore. They outlined several perspectives, summarized gun-rights advocates as claiming "gun ownership serves to reduce crime rather than increase it" and that they have a right to own guns anyway. They summarized gun control advocates as "pointing to the reductions in fatalities engendered by the proposed reform" and arguing gun owners should be willing to relinquish some of their rights to achieve these benefits.[9]

The authors explained that public health advocates are concerned primarily with guns' ability to wound and kill. They argued those advocates focus equally on preventing accidental deaths and suicides as preventing crime, and that they seek control measures to reduce all deaths, criminal or not. They place no value on sporting uses of guns.[10]

Welfare economists, on the other hand, are focused on the criminal uses of guns rather than suicides or accidents, and that all policies should be evaluated by costs and benefits. Therefore, if enforcement of a policy has tremendous cost but barely reduces gun crime, then the policy is bad, but if the policy is cheap to enforce and greatly reduces gun crime it is good. This group argues the cost-benefit analysis is the best tool to evaluate policy.[11]

The final group outlined by these authors put rights and responsibilities above all else, and argue Americans have the right to own guns, as defined by the Second

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[8] Andrew J. McClurg, David B. Kopel, and Brannon P. Denning, *Gun Control and Gun Rights: A Reader and Guide* (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 2-3. The authors suggest there is truth on both sides, therefore readers should conduct a cost-benefit analysis when determining their positions in the gun debate.

[9] Philip Cook, Anthony Braga, and Mark Moore, "Gun Control," in *Crime and Public Policy*, ed. James Q. Wilson and Joan Petersilia (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) 257-292.

[10] Ibid, 269-70.

[11] Ibid, 270.

Amendment. They argue guns should be placed in the proper context of the "appropriate relationship between the individual, the community, and the state." They agree that the right to own guns is subject to reasonable restrictions, like the right to free speech, but vary on the extent of those restrictions.[12]

Of course, the gun debate extends beyond the academy. It rears its head at family gatherings, in social media, and other places besides. This is where it gets messy: these forums are often very limited, which results in studies and statistics getting pulled way out of context, being barely understood by those employing them, or getting reformatted into simple memes. Gun violence is far too complex to be explained or solved on Twitter or with a meme. These debates also tend towards emotion over reason, and often become nothing more than digital screaming matches.

For the average person with a job or jobs and other life obligations, there is not nearly enough time to become an expert on and solve the gun debate (if there even is a solution). This paper has no hope of solving the debate or comparing statistics, or even enabling the public to solve the debate. It does hope to find a way to use 18th century firearms to make the debate more productive and rational.

[12] Ibid, 270-1. Aside from outlining the debate, they tackled the validity of various studies and statistics by comparing and analyzing them. From there, they dive into the theory behind various policy options. This is a great place to get started for an in-depth foray into the academic side of the gun debate. For a multidisciplinary list of books on the gun debate, see Caroline Light and Lindsay Livingston, "Gun Studies Syllabus," *Public Books* (blog), April 12, 2018, https://www.publicbooks.org/gun-studies-syllabus/.

CHAPTER 2

PAST GUN DISPLAYS

Weapons displays have come in many different forms over the years. The first weapons displays were quite different from today's museum displays. Changes include several major things, including what is being displayed, how weapons are being displayed, the audiences for these displays, and the messages communicated by each display.

However, to get context on the developments in weapons displays, it is important to first look at the changes in museums in general. Like weapons displays, most museum collections originated as private collections which were gradually opened to a wider public. Museums also gradually changed from simple displays of collections with no organization and no message into increasingly sophisticated exhibits. The first collections were disorganized, and simply meant to impress the viewer with how much cool stuff the collector has managed to acquire. In America, though, Charles Willson Peale is largely considered to have created the first true public museum. His arrangement was taxonomical, with each object in its rightful place by scientific structure, an order that many other museums would emulate. Peale also hung portraits of the founders above the food chain of animals below, suggesting the natural order culminated with men like Washington. By using this method, he pointed the way towards the museums of today.[13]

[13] David Boswell and Jessica Evans, eds., *Representing the Nation: A Reader: Histories, Heritage, Museums*, 1st edition (London New York: Routledge, 1999) 378-9; Gabrielle Lanier, "The History Museum," Harrisonburg, VA, 2014.

Some other early museums were not so serious. PT Barnum's "museum" included lots of fantastical creatures, which were in fact hoax specimens. Barnum's focus was on making money, not any attempt to reveal truth or interpret history or the natural world. This in part led to the development of dime shows, which were small displays of novelties visitors could see for a small fee. Meanwhile, private collections began to open up, while public collections were created by philanthropists and others interested in promoting history. Alongside this, national governments created museums as well. These followed in Peale's footsteps, with taxonomical, highly arranged exhibits of specimens, containing very little labeling. Many weapons displays still use this method.[14]

Gradually, longer, more interpretive labels were introduced. This meant fewer items were put on display, but they were more fully explained. Going into the 1940s and beyond, museums got more attention, and became increasingly more professionalized as the field of public history developed. Many history museums also started to focus more on common and vernacular objects with the rise of social history, although some museums (like Mercer's museum) already did this.[15] Unfortunately, many vernacular firearms (aside from military firearms) have not survived, and many firearms displays still focus on elite firearms.

Most weapons collections were originally stockpiled in arsenals as massive reserves of weapons for national or royal armies. These collections were meant to be functional for combat in the event of large-scale war if the weapons currently in service were insufficient. However, several European countries began opening their armories to private tours, at first given only to visiting dignitaries and princes. This may have been

[14] Lanier.
[15] Ibid; Marjorie Schwarzer, *Riches, Rivals & Radicals: 100 Years of Museums in America* (Washington, D.C.: American Alliance of Museums, 2012) 8-25.

intended to impress them, and remind them of the power of the host nation. These early tours often had no attempt at interpretation as we know it today, but were simply displays of the power contained in the armories as they stood in readiness for war. The Royal Armouries in England provide a good case study and example of this type of weapon display.

Like most armory displays, the Royal Armouries initially provided tours by invitation only, and only for the wealthy and powerful. However, it began to slowly open to wider audiences in 1660, when it opened to the general public for a considerable entrance fee. Its collection was first housed in the Tower of London, although additional buildings were soon built to house additional exhibits. Visitors would be escorted through the exhibits by a warden, who provided narration throughout the tour. Some of them recorded their experience in travel guides and letters. Many of them described the armory as disorganized and the tour narration as inaccurate, and claimed the guides simply made stuff up during the tour. They also considered the armory tour to be inferior to many of the others around Europe.[16] They do not comment about anything unusual or special

[16] Information from the Royal Armuories, can be found online at the following parts of their website: "Admission Fees | Royal Armouries," accessed February 17, 2018, https://royalarmouries.org/visit-us/tower-of-london/things-to-see/line-of-kings-explore/line-of-kings-visitors/admission-fees; "Explore: Line of Kings | Royal Armouries," accessed February 17, 2018, https://royalarmouries.org/visit-us/tower-of-london/things-to-see/line-of-kings-explore; "Figures of the Line | Royal Armouries," accessed February 17, 2018, https://royalarmouries.org/visit-us/tower-of-london/things-to-see/line-of-kings-explore/line-of-kings-figures-of-the-line; "Introduction | Royal Armouries," accessed February 17, 2018, https://royalarmouries.org/visit-us/tower-of-london/things-to-see/line-of-kings-explore/visit-us/tower-of-london/things-to-see/line-of-kings-explore/line-of-kings-visitors/introduction; "Royal Armouries | Royal Armouries," accessed February 17, 2018, https://royalarmouries.org/visit-us/tower-of-london/things-to-see/power-house/institutions-of-the-tower/royal-armouries; "Royal Armouries | Royal Armouries," accessed February 17, 2018, https://royalarmouries.org/visit-us/tower-of-london/things-to-see/power-house/institutions-of-the-tower/royal-armouries; "Timeline | Royal Armouries," accessed February 17, 2018, https://royalarmouries.org/visit-us/tower-of-london/things-to-see/line-of-kings-explore/line-of-kings-timeline; "Visitors | Royal Armouries," accessed January 13, 2018, https://royalarmouries.org/visit-us/tower-of-london/things-to-see/line-of-kings-explore/line-of-kings-visitors/single-object/389; "Visitors | Royal Armouries," accessed January 13, 2018, https://royalarmouries.org/visit-us/tower-of-london/things-to-see/line-of-kings-explore/line-of-kings-visitors/single-object/392; "Visitors | Royal Armouries," accessed January 13, 2018, https://royalarmouries.org/visit-us/tower-of-london/things-to-see/line-of-kings-

being done here, so it is probable that the other armories of Europe provided similar tours, except of higher quality. But what would a visitor to the Royal Armouries see on a tour?

The highlight of the tour was the Hall of Kings, which displayed the armor of several English kings and nobles. The armor was fitted to wooden mannequins, often astride wooden horses. Afterwards, visitors would be escorted through the armory itself, which contained enough small arms to equip several thousand men. This is where the firearms would be displayed. As visitors noted, the whole area was disorganized, as might be expected from a stockpile of weapons. However, by 1698, the small arms were housed in a separate building and organized in artistic patterns, with artillery being displayed on a separate floor. As the armory lowered fees into the 1800s, it began to reorganize and add labels to its exhibits. These drew criticism from academics for their inaccuracies, and eventually the armory invited experts to improve the labeling and the displays.[17]

Since the primary focus of the armory was the Hall of Kings and their royal armor, the armory's display seemed designed to emphasize the glory of the English crown. The focus was not on the armor itself, either as fine art or craftsmanship, but on the glory and power of the men who once wore the armor. The small arms and firearms contained in the next room also support this. Unlike the armor of the kings, they are not meant to reflect the glory of their users, who would have been members of the lower classes. They were not so carefully displayed as the armor. Instead, they were meant to

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explore/line-of-kings-visitors/single-object/394; "Visitors | Royal Armouries," accessed January 13, 2018, https://royalarmouries.org/visit-us/tower-of-london/things-to-see/line-of-kings-explore/line-of-kings-visitors/single-object/387.

[17] Ibid.

show sheer volume, and emphasize the power of the king who could summon so many to fight for him. The artillery, which included artillery captured in battle by the British Army, also serve to emphasize the power of the king and his forces. This focus on the king and royalty, however, was not a factor in the earliest American displays of weapons.

As in Europe, before museum displays of weapons became prominent, arms and armor were accumulated in private collections. These were not originally functional collections, however, as full suits of armor were not used for warfare in the English colonies. Instead, they were curated by private collectors, who bought arms and armor in Europe and brought them to America to appreciate them not as symbols of power and royalty, but as art. They were more interested in the armor itself over the original users of it.[18]

One of the first displays of weapons was at the War Department, which had a small museum of its own before 1859. This museum included a large collection of mostly American firearms, including every military model musket, some foreign military firearms, and sporting weapons. The museum was shut down at the beginning of the Civil War because the department needed the extra space for the war effort, and the guns were deposited into storage, before eventually being transferred to the Smithsonian Institution.[19]

Firearms were also displayed in different contexts outside of museums. For example, they were displayed in trade catalogs, which primarily served to advertise

[18] Steven A. Walton, "Armour and Arms in American Museums," in *ICOMAM 50: Papers on Arms and Military History, 1957-2007*, ed. R. Douglas Smith (Leeds: Basiliscoe Press, 2007), 1-3.
[19] "ARMS OF ALL NATIONS: Two Collections Turned Over to National Museum. WILL BE EXHIBITED THERE One Has Been Accumulating in the War Department Since 1861 and Was Stored in a Cellar -- The Other Is the Gift of an Army Surgeon and Includes Many Historic Curios.," *The Washington Post (1877-1922); Washington, D.C.*, August 30, 1903.

particular firearms to potential buyers. Obviously, the focus of these displays was on advertising and selling the guns. The real questions here are, what characteristics were they trying to sell, and how did they go about it?

In 1881, the Marlin Firearms Company published a four-page leaflet advertising their new repeating rifle, as well as several of their Ballard rifles. The first two pages were devoted to the new repeating rifle, and claimed it had addressed and solved all the common problems with repeating rifles. They detailed the advantages it had: durability, strong metal, simplicity in design, few parts, and easiness of assembly. These all imply previous repeating rifles broke often because they were too complex. The ad also devoted considerable space to explaining how the new action meant there was no chance for premature explosions. Finally, the ad stated that this repeater was accurate because all Marlin rifles were. Besides the large amount of text, there were three sketches—a small sketch showing the overall view of the rifle, then two larger sketches showing the inner workings of the rifle's action.[20]

It is interesting to note the similarities and differences between the Marlin leaflet and museum displays. Like museums, which often rely heavily on label text to explain their objects, the Marlin catalog also relied heavily on text to sell the gun, unlike modern print ads, which use very little text. Unlike museums, Marlin had all of its depictions of its guns pointing left. In displays of 18th century firearms, they usually point right so the visitor can see the lock, which is always on the right side. 1880s rifles, however, look the same from both sides, so it did not really matter which direction they were displayed. However, except for the sketches of the action, Marlin chose to face all the rifles the

[20] Marlin Repeating Rifle, 1881, Hagely ID I20091119_Marlin, Trade Catalogs and Pamphlets Collection, Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, DE.

same way.[21] Most museums do the same, even for post 18th century firearms. Why are they so rarely displayed in an alternating pattern? Perhaps it has something to do with gun safety—on any range, guns must always be kept pointing the same direction, downrange. It is possible this idea has crept into gun displays and advertisements.

The second page of the leaflet is where the two sketches of the action appeared. Marlin used these in ways museums never do. First, the drawings and explanation of the action's mechanism was used to alleviate concerns about reliability by showing the design differed from past designs. It also supported the claims of simplicity, ease of use, and safety made on the first page. Second, they included directions for disassembly and reassembly, also to support their claims from the first page.[22] Perhaps a good museum activity could be to disassemble and reassemble replica firearms.

The next two pages discussed Marlin's Ballard rifles. They were described as being extremely accurate, as shown by the many shooting matches marksmen had won using them. Compared to the new repeating rifle, these had little text, which consisted of short descriptions, optional extras, and prices. Overall, these rifles were treated like proven products that require little marketing. The discussion of accuracy and shooting matches pitched these rifles mostly towards sportsmen, especially target shooters.[23]

Continuing with the sportsman's theme, the Sportsman's Exhibition in 1895 set up a firearms history exhibit. In an ad, the exhibition organizers requested donors to come forth and loan various types of objects for display, including boats, heads of game, bows, and of course, firearms. The firearm requests were quite specific, including flintlocks, percussion locks, Pennsylvania or Kentucky longrifles, blunderbusses, pistols, sights, and

[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid.

levels. These were to show the development of firearms, specifically sporting firearms, over the past 200 years or so.[24]

Being a sportsman's exhibition, there would also be various vendors with exhibits set up to sell their products, including a shot tower constructed by a promotion-conscious ammunition company to show the process of shot manufacturing. In this context, surrounded by enthusiasts, the history of firearms exhibit appears to have been focused on heritage and legacy, celebrating the sportsman and the firearms he once used to hunt. The old firearms, although they now possess significant monetary value in their own right, supported the display and encouraged sale of new firearms at the exhibition.[25]

Returning to regular museum displays, the Smithsonian Institute acquired a large collection of firearms in 1903. This collection included the entire collection from the War Department mentioned earlier. The museum also intended to gather more firearms to stage the largest firearms display in North America. The museum collected colonial guns from England and various colonial factories and gunsmiths, as well as displaying the entire line of American firearms from Springfield and Harpers Ferry.[26] Like most of the historical collections in the National Museum, the guns were arranged chronologically to show evolution of firearms to the current day. The museum also displayed a number of foreign firearms, including Italian Garibaldi guns used in the wars for unification, and English elephant gun, pepperboxes from Germany, and various Arabic guns. This made the national museum's display less nationalistic than most displays, which highlighted only American firearms. In 1903, it was also seeking the standard firearms in use by all

[24] "THE SPORTSMAN'S EXHIBITION.: Prospectus of the Show to Be Held in Madison Square Garden Next Month.," *New York Times*, 1895; "THE SPORTSMEN'S EXPOSITION.: What Has Been Given and Is Still Desired for the Coming Exhibition.," *New York Times*, 1895.
[25] "THE SPORTSMEN'S EXPOSITION."
[26] Springfield and Harpers Ferry were the main United States Army arsenals.

nations, probably for a comparative study of the state of firearms technology around the world at the turn of the 20th century.[27] This suggests that collecting firearms and preserving them for the future was a big priority for the museum at that time. This also reflects the museum's desire to trace the history of various industries from their "primitive" origins to modern Western achievements.

At the same time it received the War Department collection, the Smithsonian also received a private collection of weapons found in the Philippines. These included a set of Japanese armor, a Spanish helm from their conquest of the Philippines, a set of indigenous armor, and various other indigenous weapons. These would have been displayed together to show what "primitive" societies looked like and highlight the achievements of modern civilization. As trophies of imperialism taken in the conquest of the Phillipines, they also symbolized supposed American superiority and Philippine inferiority.[28]

Perhaps the firearms exhibit with the strongest message reviewed here was the Exhibition of Firearms shown at the Museum of Fine Arts (MFA) in Boston in 1910. This exhibit was clearly designed to argue for the superiority of American firearms, even in the 1700s. Like the Sportsman's Exhibition, and many later displays, this exhibit began by showing the evolution of firearms from matchlock, to wheellock, through the various types of flintlock. The display also included Pennsylvania rifles, probably the single 1700s firearm most associated with America, as well as American-made muskets from

[27] "ARMS OF ALL NATIONS"; "United States National Museum, 1881-1911," Smithsonian Institution Archives, June 20, 2013, https://siarchives.si.edu/history/featured-topics/baird/united-states-national-museum-1881-1911.
[28] Ibid.

the Harpers Ferry and Springfield arsenals. Finally, a set of American pepperboxes and revolvers were shown side by side with European models.[29]

The display labels, however, claimed American gunsmiths were highly regarded, when this was simply not true, as wealthy colonists regularly imported what were considered to be better quality and more expensive weapons from Europe and especially England. The labels also claimed American rifles, Pennsylvania rifles in particular, were better than any rifles to come out of Europe. This was a matter of usage—while the length of Pennsylvania rifles allowed firers to shoot more accurately and generated more power out of slow-burning black powder, the shorter barrels used in German jaeger rifles and the English Baker rifle still provided great accuracy but also allowed for easier movement, especially in wooded terrain. Exhibit labels claimed the Springfield and Harpers ferry muskets were superior to those of Europe, without acknowledging their designs were originally based on the French Charleville musket. Finally, the labels asserted American pistols were better as well, citing the pepperboxes and revolvers on display.[30] They might have been right about revolvers, but still failed to take Queen Anne pistols into account when discussing pre-1800s pistols. Overall, the display was highly nationalistic, which would bar most modern audiences.

Despite the nationalistic and somewhat erroneous message, it was clearly communicated. The content of the labels was clearly supported by the arrangement of the display and the choice of displayed objects. It was obviously meant to be professional, but the influence of any exhibitor who loaned the weapons was allowed to run wild, as if the museum gave him the space and let him do whatever he wanted. Of course, this was

[29] "An Exhibit of Firearms," *Museum of Fine Arts Bulletin* 8, no. 46 (1910): 29–29.
[30] Ibid.

and is often done for artists in small art museums. That may be alright for an art display, but it presents problems for a history display. However, it is interesting that an art museum tackled firearms in an exhibition, when such institutions typically prefer arms and armor.

This could be explained in part by the rise of the arts and crafts or decorative arts movement. The arts and crafts movement came out of reactions against industrialism and Victorian society. Before the arts and crafts movement, the decorative arts were considered much lower status and class than the fine arts. The arts and crafts movement sought to elevate that genre to same level. Once curators started to join the movement, museum displays found a new focus on displaying handmade items and emphasizing the craftsmanship in many objects, including firearms. This can explain why these guns, which were not considered fine arts like arms and armor, were suddenly eligible for display.

One of the followers of the arts and crafts movement was Henry Mercer, who built the Mercer Museum in 1916. He believed in the do-it-yourself principles of the movement to such an extreme that he built his house, tile factory, and museum himself using poured concrete and no architect. His handmade, craftsman ideals extended into an interest in American craftsmanship and handmade objects that dated from before industrialization. Consequently, he collected a wide variety of pre-industrial American objects including firearms and put them on display at his museum.

Mercer considered everything to be a tool suiting a particular human need. He therefore organized his collections by need and tools to achieve that effect.[31] Of course,

[31] *What Is This Place? Understanding the Mercer Museum*, exhibit, Mercer Museum, Doylestown, PA, visited January 14, 2018.

because some tools can be used for various needs, this was not a perfect system, and firearms especially did not fit well in his organization.

Mercer originally categorized firearms in several different areas. At one point, they were categorized under food in the subcategory hunting, which is still imprinted above the gun display at the Mercer museum today. However, his organizational chart also shows them under government, in the subcategory military. Both of these categories fail to take into account some of their other uses as tools of crime, self-defense, sport, and pest control. In the end, lack of space forced Mercer to compromise, and he included all firearms together to show the craft of gunsmithing.[32]

Mercer's display, because it focused entirely on American objects, was fairly nationalistic, even if it did not explicitly argue American crafts were better than those of other nations. Mercer also displayed the tools of the gunsmithing trade alongside his weapons, which highlighted the creators of the weapons instead of the users.[33] His focus on the creators of the firearms and other tools in his museum emphasized craftsmanship.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art (MET) in New York put on an exhibition of arms and armor in 1931. The stated aim of the exhibition was to gather from private sources the finest suits of armor in the United States collected over the past 20 years. This was meant to stimulate interest in the field of art and in the highest metal craftsmanship, taking some steps towards Mercer. Like the Royal Armouries's Hall of Kings, the focus was on suits belonging to specific elites, but also on the art historical details of those suits. Swords, polearms, and firearms were also included in the exhibit, but these were only notable examples of high art or otherwise elite weapons. The firearms displayed

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[32] *Gunsmithing & Weapons*, exhibit, Mercer Museum, Doylestown, PA, visited January 14, 2018.
[33] Ibid.

included pistols owned by George Washington, as well as Scottish all-steel pistols, other fancy pistols made in Bresica[34], and some with unusual mechanical features.[35] Again, this shows emphasis on the art component of firearms, and on elite firearms.

In Europe, the aftermath of World War I caused many changes to firearms displays, especially in the messages those displays conveyed. Instead of focusing on elite weapons and older weapons, museums like the Imperial War Museum in London chose to display the weapons of the common soldier from the recent war. These displays sought to illustrate battlefield horrors, in order to discourage future wars and ensure the Great War was the last major war.[36] This was the first times guns were used to promote peace.

After World War II, the American public experienced an increased interest in the Wild West. As Westerns became increasingly popular, and always featured firearms, historian Carl Russell responded by writing *Guns on the Early Frontiers* in 1957. His book shared some similarities with museum displays, as it featured specific firearms and told stories about them while engaging broader historical narratives about guns.[37] It was also influential among curators, and can be used as an example of what gun displays were like at the time. So how does Russell display firearms?

Like previous displays, Russell was still very interested in the creators and manufacturers of firearms. However, while he organized subsections of his book's chapters by manufacturer, and devoted a great deal of text to them, he primarily organized his book's chapters by the people using the guns. The primary users he

[34] Bresica was considered to contain some of the finest pistol gunsmiths in the world.
[35] Stephen V. Grancsay, "A Loan Exhibition of European Arms and Armor," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 26, no. 8 (1931): 182–87.
[36] Frederick P. Todd, "The Military Museum in Europe," *Military Affairs* 12, no. 1 (1948): 36–45.
[37] Carl Parcher Russell, *Guns on the Early Frontiers: A History of Firearms from Colonial Times Through the Years of the Western Fur Trade* (University of Nebraska Press, 1980).

discussed were the Indians, traders, trappers, and soldiers. Interestingly, when he discussed the Indians in broad terms, he usually described them as being "armed" or "supplied" with firearms, but when he wrote about specific incidents, he described situations where they obtained guns despite strict government prohibitions against it, rejected guns of poor quality, demanded better weapons while trading, and waged war when their supply was cut off. What he described was an active role in obtaining firearms, rather than passively being supplied or armed. Russell also wrote a lot about how users influenced gun design. He discussed the preference of Indians, traders, and settlers for short, light guns such as the fuzee. That firearm eventually became the standard for all guns manufactured for trade.[38] Overall, the primary focus on users by Russell was new for gun displays.

The format of Russell's textual display was a framework of narrative for each user group, supported by subcategories of gun types further broken down by manufacturer and then individual guns. These guns were featured in sketches of either the whole gun or specific details, then described extensively with captions. The surrounding text then contained stories about each gun which supported the overall narrative for each chapter. For example, in his chapter on the personal weapons of the traders and trappers, Russell discussed Colt revolvers. He began with two sketches of the revolver with detailed notes on the specific gun he sketched. Then, he described the exact dimensions and calibers these revolvers were manufactured in. He then proceeded to tell the story of how a wagon train under Kit Carson was attacked by Kiowa and Comanche Indians. The whites used Colt revolvers to devastating effect, killing over one hundred men while losing only one. He concluded the section by claiming the Colt was what "marked the

[38] Ibid, 4-25, 47, 103-9.

turning point in Indian warfare…by giving the white man superiority."[39] While his conclusion is debatable, it is easy to note how this narrative could be quickly adapted to a museum display. Because the book was limited in scope to the frontier, then limited further to only four user groups, it did not account for the many other uses of guns discussed in prior exhibits or the many criminal uses of guns rarely discussed in gun displays even today.

In weapons displays, what went on display made a big difference in how it was displayed. Arms and armor made up a large part of these displays, and they were often treated in a fine art context. American Revolutionary era weapons were often treated in a celebratory fashion because of their connection to the founding of the United States. The audience for sporting weapons was very limited, and they were primarily displayed in a context of the commercial activity surrounding sales of new firearms and related equipment.

Over time, creators of firearms displays have become more aware of the messages they send through their displays. Firearms displays have taken many different forms, from displays at exhibitions, to displays of royal power, to displays of progress, art, and technology, and to displays of peace. They, like most museum displays, have become increasingly more public instead of private. Finally, while many weapons displays still show mostly elite weapons, there have been more displays of common firearms over time. However, recent firearms displays have not kept up with other museum displays in practice and ideas, and are often limited to a very targeted audience rather than a broad one.

[39] Ibid, 92-6.

CHAPTER 3

CURRENT GUN DISPLAYS

Examining the state of weapons and firearms display in museums today allows much room for critique and ideas for improvement, but also reveals some approaches worth replicating. However, before exploring specific museums, it is helpful to consider a typology of firearms displays. These include several approaches. The first and oldest style is what I call the gallery display. These consist of many many weapons lined up in rows or columns, with little to no interpretation, and only very limited caption labels identifying basic details about the weapon. It requires a guide, visitor expertise, or long, hard focus to learn much from. The second, and very similar, style is the art historical display. This focuses on craftsmanship, materials, maker, and artistic details and rarely discusses function. These displays are made up almost entirely of elite weapons owned by the rich individuals and institutions, and were usually ceremonial in nature or meant to display wealth and power. Rarely do they include common weapons used by poor hunters or soldiers. The third type is the military museum display. These usually display weapons alongside uniforms and soldier accoutrements. The interpretation looks at the tactical functions of the weapons or the soldier experience, or sometimes both. Sometimes, the weapons, uniforms, and equipment is just provided as a visual and not explored for their own stories. The last type of displays I call supportive displays. These occur when non-military history museums include weapons in their exhibits. Often, they are displayed to support other content in an exhibit that is not primarily about them. These often have the

most creative uses of weapons and methods of display. Each of these types of displays is represented by the various museums discussed below.

The PMA primarily has high quality, fine art European arms and armor on display, organized generally by country of origin. The labels generally state only basic facts about the weapons, such as creator and materials used. The vast majority of the weapons on display are elite weapons, and common, everyday weapons are few and far between. There is a bright spot, though: a display of common bills and halberds peasant fighters would have used has a label mentioning that these weapons were common among civilians, and that they could be used to in combat. The PMA would be on the right track here if they extended this type of display and label throughout their display of weapons. Unfortunately, even within the display of common weapons are very ornate halberds which overshadow the rest.[40]

Figure 1. Elite wheellock rifle at the PMA. Photo credit: Derek Engle.

[40] *Kretzschmar von Kienbusch Galleries*, exhibit, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, visited February 5, 2017.

Regarding their firearms, the situation is even worse. The only firearms on display are a few ornate, elite wheellocks for hunting. The display makes no attempt to connect these to a modern audience, and provides no clear indication of their relevance to today. They are simply displayed with references to their artistic characteristics. The labels go into great detail to explain the materials and processes used. Words like engraved, punched, gilded, made, and blued make up almost all of the verbs in the labels. The phrase "For use on foot in the hunt" is the only indication of how these guns were used.[41]

Nearby these German wheellocks is a display of Pennsylvania rifles. Unfortunately, while there appears to be mountings for two of them, none were on display. This could be for a variety of legitimate reasons, such as preservation or loan, but sadly there is no signage explaining their absence. However, the description on the label makes it clear that the weapons are very much elite versions of the longrifle. They are similar to the wheellock labels in description, however, they do not even mention that the rifles were used for hunting.[42]

The PMA misses several opportunities here. The guns could obviously be used to discuss the role of hunting in Europe and how different it was from hunting in America, especially if they were compared to a rather plain wheellock like the one on display in the NRA museum, or the crude mountain rifle in storage at Valley Forge. A connection could even be made to the role hunting plays in the gun rights debate today. However, neither of these are really part of the PMA's art historical approach, although they miss opportunities in that area as well. One of the wheellocks includes motifs of fruit and fowl. Surely these could be explained in the context of European/German hunting and culture?

[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid.

Some museums which could display firearms simply do not have them in their collections. The American Swedish Historical Museum is one of these. While the museum deals with life in the New Sweden colony, which did involve firearms, none are on display. However, it would be unfair to criticize the museum too much over this, as it only has swords in its collection, and has no firearms to display.[43] Perhaps if museum staff were convinced of the need to display weapons, they would be able to acquire one for their collection or get one on loan. This situation is probably not unique among smaller museums, especially historic house museums. Despite this, at least two of these museums in Philadelphia do display weapons.

The first of these is Cliveden. Cliveden has three firearms, and it displays them leaning against a column, just as the Chew family displayed them for generations.[44] This is almost perfect: civilian-owned weapons, displayed in the way they were displayed by the owners. It provides a great opportunity to talk about civilian ownership and uses of weapons on a tour, including in this case their use as symbols by the family to connect their property with the past. It also breaks down some of the barriers in traditional displays.

Perhaps the most noticeable is the lack of a physical barrier, as the guns are not blocked behind glass or a barricade but simply resting on a column in the open.[45] This is quite a bold move from a security, preservation, and safety standpoint. Without proper supervision by the tour guide, children could easily hurt themselves on the locks of the guns or someone could steal one. Even visitors touching them create conservation risks. The display breaks down intellectual barriers as well.

[43] Tracey Beck, "Re: Weapons in Collections," email, April 20, 2017.
[44] Cliveden, Museum, Germantown, PA, visited February 7, 2017.
[45] Ibid.

Figure 2. Muskets at Cliveden. Photo credit: Derek Engle

Being situated in home environment makes the flintlocks relatable to many more people. This makes them less intimidating, as they seem to transform into common household objects like tables and chairs. They blend in so much, in fact, that some visitors might not even notice their presence without other visitors asking questions about them. Since the site is tied to its Revolutionary War history because of its role in the Battle of Germantown, however, the muskets inevitably get interpreted primarily as

military weapons in the context of that war. On a typical tour, the guide will discuss the muskets briefly depending on audience interest. On a children's tour, the guide discusses the muskets more in depth, but will focus on how they were used in battle during the Revolution.[46]

The Betsy Ross house also has a musket on display. However, it is not used to discuss civilian ownership and uses of firearms. Like Cliveden, the Betsy Ross house is beholden to its Revolutionary War history. Whether or not she sewed the first American flag, Ross did make ammunition (cartridges) for the Continental Army, like many other Patriot women, and the house includes a display about this. The musket in this display is there solely to show how muskets worked, and why cartridge-making was such an important activity. However, the Ross family owned and used a weapon for civilian purposes. A probate inventory on display confirms this.[47] Although the context of the site may excuse a dedicated display for civilian weapons, there should still be one on display as part of the group of household items, perhaps leaning against a wall somewhere.

Of course, the idea of military firearms in the home is pertinent to current concerns, and is not fully exploited of by either Cliveden or the Betsy Ross house. Since historic house museums are struggling, perhaps one should explore the idea of military weapons in the home. It could discuss how little that occurred in the 18th century and how that compares to civilian versions of military firearms in the home today. An exhibit on this could spark more responsible debate, but even if not at least the house museum was able to make itself more relevant.

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[46] Carolyn Wallace, Cliveden, interview by Derek Engle, February 7, 2017.
[47] *Women at Work in Revolutionary America*, exhibit, Betsy Ross House, Philadelphia, visited April 5, 2017.

The Philadelphia History Museum (PHM) displays several weapons. However, all the weapons on display are 19th century models. They include John Brown's musket, a pike seized in Brown's raid, and three swords. The musket and pike are displayed next to a portrait of Brown, and the ensemble discusses Brown's past as a resident of Philadelphia. The display also mentions how controversial his actions were, and asks visitors to consider if he was a hero or a traitor. The weapons are treated incidentally to Brown, as objects of interest associated with him. However, since they were used in Brown's raid, they demonstrate a highly unusual "civilian" use of weapons. The display itself is difficult to access however. While it is not behind glass, it is so far up on the wall that the weapons are hard for visitors to see and impossible for them to examine.[48]

Another weapon displayed by the PHM is the Meade sword. It is a presentation sword made of silver, gold, steel, and even diamonds, an ornate weapon not suitable for combat. This sword was presented to Major General George Meade after his victory at Gettysburg by the citizens of Philadelphia, who raised money to buy it out of appreciation for his saving the city. The sword tells the story of a grateful city. The other two swords on display are on the lower floor in the exhibit on Philadelphia history. One is another presentation sword, and the other is a field sword. Both are from the Civil War. The swords are used to tell the story of Philadelphia manufacturing in support of the war effort. The display of the field sword next to the presentation sword shows the difference between elite and common weapons.[49]

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[48] *City Stories: An Introduction to Philadelphia*, exhibit, Philadelphia History Museum, Philadelphia, visited March 28, 2017; *The Ordinary, the Extraordinary, and the Unknown: The Power of Objects,* exhibit, Philadelphia History Museum, Philadelphia, visited March 28, 2017.
[49] Ibid.

In an interview, Kristen Froehlich, Director of the Collection and Exhibitions, said that the PHM will not shy away from displaying weapons if they are part of the story the museum is telling, and examining the exhibits confirms this. Her main concern about displaying weapons is security—rightly so, as these weapons are highly valuable. She even pointed out that the Quakers also had guns.[50] They were pacifists, and would not use them on people, but they still needed them for civilian uses. The PHM probably would not be averse to acquiring more weapons for their collection, and would probably be willing to acquire weapons on loan if necessary. Combine this with their already decent weapons collection and their willingness to display weapons so long as they fit into a relevant story, and the result is a good candidate to house a different kind of firearms exhibit.

The National Museum of Jewish History (NMAJH) has two weapons on display, a Charleville musket on loan from the Museum of the American Revolution, and a handgun carried in World War II by Lieutenant Robert List, a Jewish officer in the United States Army. The musket is standing upright in a clear case, with a very simple label describing it as a musket. It is attached to a wall in the center of the room. Most of the interpretation in the space has to do with how the American Revolution affected the rights of American Jews, and the majority of the objects on display are letters and other paper artifacts. The exhibit does not discuss the conduct of the war or any Jewish soldiers, and it appears the musket is more for decoration than anything else. The way the exhibit case is attached to the panel makes it look more like an afterthought than a

[50] Kristen Froehlich, PHM Collections 2, interview by Derek Engle, April 19, 2017.

planned part of the display, and the caption label describing it simply as “Musket” reinforces this idea.[51]

Figure 3. Musket at NMAJH. Photo credit: Derek Engle.

The handgun display seems much more planned out. It is displayed with the personal property of LT List, including his helmet and uniform. Like the musket, however, the pistol, as an object itself, is given very little interpretation, as the label for it describes List rather than the weapon. It is also labeled, simply, pistol.[52] The display itself has several advantages. Being shown alongside List’s other personal effects, such as photographs, provides context for visitors. While many people no longer carry physical

[51] National Museum of Jewish History, Philadelphia, PA, visited January 25, 2018.
[52] Ibid.

photographs around, it is easier for visitors to relate to carrying a gun around when it is displayed next to other personal items..

More interesting, however, is a video display in the same area. It shows several things, including combat footage featuring various weapons firing, from tanks to machine guns to rifles. However, it also plays interviews of Jewish soldiers.[53] One woman interviewee recounts going through weapons qualification with the M1 Garand when she joined the army.[54] Using her discussion of her personal experience with the rifle is great for several reasons. First, it is a primary source visitors can easily engage with. Second, her story and the way she tells it is much more relatable for the average person than the typical gun display. While a big firearms exhibit might not be super relevant to the overall mission of NMAJH, her story and similar stories could provide a great link between firearms and women and reach a broader audience.

Sometimes it is possible to find firearms displays in surprising places. The Wells Fargo Museum is one of those places. The entire museum is actually pretty decent despite what most historians might expect. On display there are several weapons. The first is a carriage shotgun. This would be carried by the "shotgun messenger" on a bank carriage to protect the treasure box from robbers. There are also three revolvers. All of the weapons are displayed with two treasure boxes. This display focuses on the civilian uses of weapons relating to crime and corporate security. The label discusses these firearms as only one part of the security plan, which was focused on deterrence. It mentions how the use of private detectives to catch robbers was meant to discourage future robberies, and reduce the need to ever use the shotgun and revolvers. This is one of the few labels that

[53] Ibid.
[54] The Garand is not easy to load or fire and is a terrible rifle for first-time shooters.

actually discusses, in depth, the role of the firearms displayed.[55] Perhaps this is because the average visitor would not expect to see firearms in a bank museum.

Figure 4. Revolvers and treasure box at the Wells Fargo History Museum. Photo credit: Derek Engle

The method of the display also works very well. By arranging the shotgun, revolvers, treasure boxes, and shotgun messenger's uniform together, the exhibit makes it clear what the guns are for. A visitor could glance at the display, without reading the label, and easily make the connections between the objects and gain a basic understanding of their purpose. Contrast this to the PMA, where the display alone does not convey that their firearms were used for hunting, or that most of the arms and armor on display were primarily ceremonial. Of course, shotguns and revolvers were used for many other purposes, but this exhibit successfully displays them in the context relevant to the museum and in an intuitive manner.

The Mercer Museum today has several gun displays. The first and most obvious is the gunsmithing display. This is the only of the three firearms displays which is set up as

[55] *Guarding Gold*, exhibit, Wells Fargo History Museum, Philadelphia, PA, visited January 16, 2018.

Mercer might have done it. Like most of the tool displays, it is set up in its own alcove. The modern map, however, calls the case Gunsmithing & Weapons, while the letters sealed in concrete by Mercer call it hunting. This reflects the changes Mercer made to his categorization of objects, but also the changes made more recently. The display showcases a variety of American-made firearms and gunsmithing tools, and Mercer's emphasis on craftsmanship has survived in the exhibit to this day. However, the current exhibit also showcases several swords, which, as one visitor remarked, seem out of place.[56]

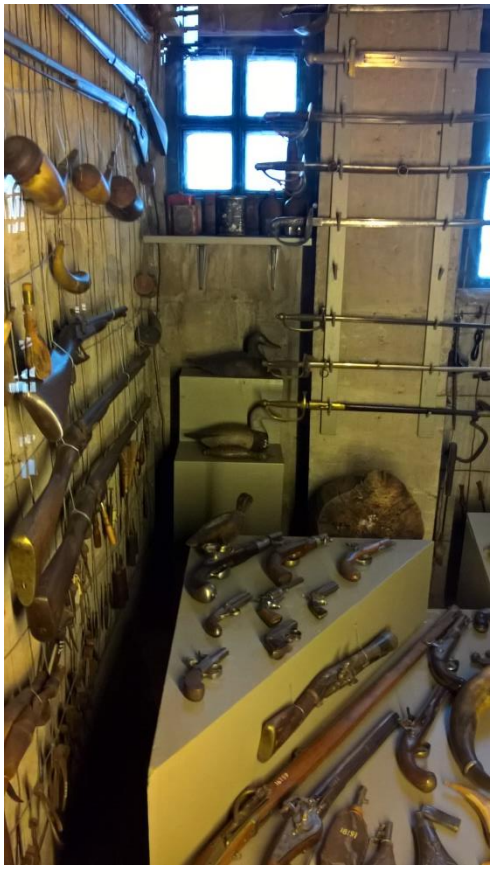

Figure 5. Gunsmithing display at the Mercer Museum. Photo credit: Derek Engle.

The label in this exhibit is similar to all the labels in the Mercer museum—very long, in small print, and hard to see. It discusses the advent and evolution of the firearm

[56] *Gunsmithing & Weapons*, exhibit, Mercer Museum, Doylestown, PA, visited January 14, 2018.

up to the percussion lock, a common theme among firearms displays. It also highlights the use of guns by the colonists for food, defense, and eventually independence from Britain.[57] However, none of this matters, as very few, if any, visitors read the long labels in the Mercer museum.[58]

The objects on display seem more like a loosely relevant collection than anything meant to support an argument or tell a story. The firearms included hunting weapons, like Pennsylvania rifles, military weapons, like muskets and swords, and self-defense weapons like muff pistols. Various hunting accoutrements were on display, from a hunting bag to duck decoys. Gunsmithing tools were also on display. This assortment could tell a variety of narratives, if they were labeled so that visitors actually knew what everything was.[59] The objects are also displayed chaotically, with no apparent design other than what could fit in what spaces.[60] This is a bit overwhelming and makes it hard for visitors to pick out and focus on specific objects, and easy for them to miss the more unique firearms the Mercer museum has. They could tell some great, and underexplored, stories with those firearms, perhaps in their changing gallery.

The second display of firearms at the Mercer museum is perhaps a perfect example of all that is wrong with gun displays. It consists of a variety of guns stacked above each other with almost no labels and interpretation. It is only interesting to those who already have an interest in guns, and does not draw or engage a broader audience. Even for a gun enthusiast, it is not very helpful, as it only has very simple object labels

[57] Ibid.
[58] I did not observe a single visitor read a label in any of the alcoves. They mostly just glanced at the objects, pointed out to their group any that sparked their interest, then moved on.
[59] The label does attempt to do this, but the objects are no longer where they are depicted in the label's drawing.
[60] Ibid.

describing the type of firearm, some of which are wrong anyway.[61] It might be useful to show how guns evolved over time, except it is not in the right order for that. The only good thing about this arrangement is that it could allow the viewer to compare different types of firearms—for example, to see how much longer a fowler is than a musket, or how light and short a fusil is. However, without interpretation or explanation of any kind, even that is not helpful for the average visitor.

Figure 6. Column of guns at the Mercer Museum. Photo credit: Derek Engle

The final display has the Mercer museum's most interesting and creative use of firearms. Sadly, it is hidden away in a far corner of the museum, and only the enterprising visitor will find it. The display includes various weapons relating to crime and punishment in early America, including a full-size gallows. Alongside a flintlock pistol and musket are a hatchet, blackjack, bludgeon, and various handcuffs. Both the firearms were claimed, presumably by the donors, to have been used in crimes. The pistol was left behind after an attempted burglary, while the musket was dropped by Abraham Doan, an

[61] *Firearms*, exhibit, Mercer Museum, Doylestown, PA, visited January 14, 2018.

outlaw in Bucks County.[62] More concrete knowledge of these weapons' ties to the criminals could strengthen the display, however, they can still stand in for the actual weapons used. This is the only museum visited to discuss the use of 18th century firearms in crime. Although it is clearly a more recent installation, it discusses the guns solely as tools of crime and leaves it at that. This presents the opportunity to create a much more expansive exhibit on gun crime and gun violence instead, which is badly needed.

Valley Forge National Historical Park has a large collection of firearms and weapons. However, only a few of them are on display. Currently, the Valley Forge firearms display consists of two parts—the standard firearms stacked above each other but also an interactive display. The main display bears unfortunate resemblance to the worst display at the Mercer museum in its design. However, instead of questionable labels, the display uses laminated cards which can be picked up and read. This has caused all manner of problems, from cards being taken and returned to the wrong exhibits, to cards being stolen.[63] It at least allows visitors to read the labels with relative ease.

The firearms on display are from several sources: the typical British, French, and American muskets used in the Revolution, a Pennsylvania rifle, and a German Potzdam musket. The interpretation on the labels also supplies the typical Revolutionary War site discussion of where the rebels got their weapons from and the differences between them. Unsurprisingly, they are all military firearms.[64] If Valley Forge had a rotating gallery, perhaps they could put on a broader firearms exhibit with the extensive firearms

[62] *Tools of Crime...and Punishment*, exhibit, Mercer Museum, Doylestown, PA, visited January 14, 2018.
[63] *Determined to Persevere*, exhibit, Valley Forge National Historical Park, King of Prussia, PA, visited July 30, 2017.
[64] Ibid.

collection they possess. In any case, the park is building a new visitor center, which is an opportunity to redesign the exhibit, both in terms of presentation and interpretation.

The interactive display consists of a replica musket attached to a platform by u bolts in such a way that visitors can lift the musket up but not take it. This allows visitors to feel the weight of the weapon, but in a very constrained way. However, it does help visitors better understand the object. Another interactive display is the park's firing demonstrations of replica muskets and artillery.[65] This is a staple of many outdoor military sites, and is always popular with visitors. It is one of the easiest ways to get them engaged with firearms, probably because it engages four of the five senses—visitors see the flash, smoke, and recoil, hear the boom, smell the burnt powder, and, with artillery, sometimes can feel the small shockwave.

Both these interactives allow visitors to experience firearms with their senses. However, they are still limited in that. What if this was expanded? What if, in a controlled environment, visitors could pick up and carry a replica firearm, or even fire one?

By far the largest collection of firearms discussed here belongs to the National Rifle Association's (NRA) museum. There are several problems with their displays, but the biggest problem is the location and association with the NRA. This causes many problems for the museum, as it shapes the audience in inescapable ways. It repels people who think the NRA is evil or distasteful, and attracts the typical firearms audience. The association with the NRA also means no matter how professional, sincere and objective the museum may try to be, it would still be carefully scrutinized and assumed by many to be completely biased. Of course, to some extent museum funders and boards always

[65] Ibid.

influence museums and their exhibits. The average visitor often does not consider this, which is a different problem, but because the NRA is at the center of so much political controversy many visitors are likely to assume they are either completely trustworthy or completely untrustworthy without performing a careful examination.

Worse still, the museum is housed inside the NRA headquarters building in Fairfax, Virginia. The building is not easy to reach by car, and harder to get to by public transit. Its location in the suburbs of Fairfax also hurts its ability to draw visitors. Visitors must seek it out, and the most likely to do that are gun enthusiasts. It would do better if it was closer to the National Mall or some other heavily visited area. While that would not completely solve its image problem, it could pick up a much more diverse audience. The building also provides other barriers, as it is hard to find the correct entrance and visitors have to check in with building security before they can go to the museum.

Visitors enter the museum and are immediately in the Petersen gallery. It is problematic for many reasons, first of which is the décor. The whole room looks like a hunting lodge, complete with tusks, a fireplace, lots of exposed wood paneling, arrangements of guns, a hunting painting, and models of animals. All in all, it is a masculine space—not the best for attracting a broad audience. Also, there are guns everywhere, so much so that it is completely overwhelming. Visitors would need to have a detailed knowledge of and appreciation for firearms for any of it to be useful. The firearms are organized by region, for example, all the British guns are together, and by manufacturer for the American guns.[66] It is an interesting approach which seems more fit for a catalog than a museum. It is unclear why the museum has taken this approach.

[66] *The Robert E. Petersen Gallery*, exhibit, National Firearms Museum, Fairfax, VA, visited January 28, 2018.

The actual displays make heavy use of mirrors. While this is a helpful solution for seeing the different angles of the firearms, the overall effect is to make the room more overwhelming, as there appears to be twice the number of guns.[67] Perhaps a better solution to showing all angles of a firearm would be to put it on a rotating mount, if one could be made which prevents damage to the gun. In any case, the Petersen gallery can serve a purpose, especially for gun experts. However, it definitely should not be the first room visitors enter, and should probably be kept off to the side somewhere. On the other hand, it could be cleverly interpreted as an object itself. It could explore questions such as, what does it say about gun displays and gun culture? What messages does it reinforce? After leaving the gallery, visitors then proceed somewhat chronologically through firearms history.

Figure 7. Petersen Gallery hunting lodge decor, NRA museum. Photo credit: Derek Engle

The next exhibit covers a familiar topic, the evolution the firearms. However, the NRA museum goes more in depth than other museums that cover this topic and has

[67] Ibid.

actual examples for each stage of development. After a discussion of the unknown origins of gunpowder, they display one of the oldest handgonnes in Europe and each type of firearm in succession until reaching the percussion lock. The design of this display is quite different. Instead of being in exposed cases, the guns are visible through small windows into the wall. It appears to be hard for curators to access, but it makes for smooth, integrated display, which is much easier to take in than the rows of guns and mirrors. Unfortunately, the windows are too small, and limit visibility of the objects. The discussion of changes in guns over time provides a good opportunity for object focused labels which reference specific parts of each firearm, causing visitors to look back and forth between the labels and the guns.[68] However, this opportunity is not fully realized here. The closest the museum gets is its discussion of firearms as art objects—which the art museum does not actually do.

Perhaps the best display in the NRA museum comes next, and it interprets firearms in colonial America. The labels include a concise discussion of how they were essential to survival and their various uses. They discuss how guns initially gave the colonists a military advantage over Native Americans, and then how guns became central to the fur trade. They mention how trading guns to the natives was initially illegal, but governments were so unsuccessful at curtailing the trade that they made it legal and taxed it instead. Restricting the trade of guns to the natives was, of course, an early form of gun control. However, the museum does not discuss it as such, missing a chance to connect with the audience.[69]

[68] *Old Guns in a New World*, exhibit, National Firearms Museum, Fairfax, VA, visited January 28, 2018.
[69] Ibid.

In any case, the exhibit display reinforces the labels well. It is a diorama showing a scene of the wilderness with a colonist holding a matchlock, defending himself from a bear. In the middle is a stump covered in furs and some firearms. While the colonist hunting a deer might be more representative of everyday occurrences, the display allows visitors to get a sense of what the labels are saying without reading them. After reading, the visitor can look at the display, then notice the arrangement of guns and furs and make the connection between the labels and the objects. The whole exhibit is tucked away in a corner though, and visitors could easily miss it.[70]

Figure 8. Firearms in Colonial America display in the NRA museum. Photo credit: Derek Engle.

The next exhibit in the museum is about the Revolutionary War. It is the only place in the museum which references gun control. One is in a label discussing arms seizure in by the British Army before the start of the war, and the other is a panel on the 2nd amendment. The first begins by mentioning the Coercive Acts, highlighting the quartering of British soldiers in private homes. It discusses how British officers were

[70] Ibid.

alarmed at colonial militia drills and decided to seize weapons by entering private homes in Cambridge and taking their firearms. It explains that this caused the colonists to form committees of safety and create the minutemen. The discussion here is remarkably sparse—there is much more information to work with here than is included. It is also misleading, and perpetuates much of the mythology surrounding the start of the American Revolution. After all, the powder and supplies General Gage seized in Cambridge were Massachusetts government property, and he was within his rights as governor to take them. They were not stored in private homes, but in the Cambridge magazine. The British also seized two cannon in town as well, but they did not enter private homes to take private firearms from colonists as the museum's display suggests.[71] The display does not discuss Loyalist and Patriot perspectives on why the powder and artillery should or should not have been relocated.[72] Really, the museum could do a whole exhibit on General Gage's attempts to secure the militia's artillery and colonial attempts to claim it themselves: so why not? Colonial discussions about who the powder and artillery really belonged to—the government, the militia, or the people—could be an avenue into productive discussions on current ideas about gun control.

As it stands, the display as a whole is barely coherent. The relevance of the guns on display is not made clear in any of the labeling, and their caption labels have nothing to do with the main display label. This could be remedied by simply explaining, in the caption labels, that these long-land pattern muskets are both one of the types of firearms the British were seizing and the firearm the British army was using to force colonists to

[71] J. L. Bell, *The Road to Concord: How Four Stolen Cannon Ignited the Revolutionary War* (Yardley, PA: Westholme Publishing LLC, 2016), Ch. 1; David Hackett Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride* (Norwalk, CT.: Easton Press, 1996), 42-3.
[72] *The Road to American Liberty*, exhibit, National Firearms Museum, Fairfax, VA, visited January 28, 2018.

give up their guns. This problem of coherence extends throughout the rest of the museum, as will be discussed later.

Now, however, it is time to examine the one label that explicitly discusses gun control. It is titled, "The Metamorphosis of an Amendment," and shows the original language of the second amendment with two progressive drafts and the final wording. It also includes quotes from Patrick Henry, Richard Henry Lee, James Madison, and George Mason all supporting the idea that an armed populace is essential to preventing a tyrannical government. There are no anti-gun quotes included, which leaves visitors wondering if this is a deliberate omission or if there are none to find. In the interest of promoting a healthy discussion, it would benefit the museum to dig up more diverse quotes about guns, from a more diverse audience—did Abigail Adams have anything to say about them? What about slaves and free African-Americans who were not allowed to own firearms in most states? The only argument made by this label is that guns were considered necessary by some as a defense against tyranny.[73] None of the other pro-gun arguments many consider to stem from the second amendment, like personal defense and survival, are referenced here. None of the anti-gun arguments, such as types of firearms not covered under the second amendment and coverage only applying to those in the militia are either.

The label also fails to provide the historical context to the creation of the Second Amendment. For something entitled "The Metamorphosis of an Amendment," the label is lacking. The amendment was created primarily to manipulate public opinion and ensure

[73] Ibid.

the ratification of the Constitution, but the label does not engage with this at all.[74] More discussion of this will follow in chapter 3 with my suggestion for a display on the amendment. Overall, the panel is limited and incorrect in its coverage of gun control as is the museum as a whole. It seems as if the NRA is not interested in having big discussion of gun control in its museum. It is also possible museum staff are trying to avoid the controversy their bosses are embroiled in or think the museum is not a good place for political discourse.

Before leaving the Revolutionary War section, a deeper look at its design is in order. Much of the rest of the museum has the same flaws evident in this section. As mentioned before, the objects and object labels in the arms seizure display do not support the display's main label. This is the case for the other displays in this exhibit as well. One case, for example, includes an English doglock, French model 1746, Queen Anne pistols, and German Jaeger rifle, and two French and Indian War paintings.[75] All are objects a firearms enthusiast would enjoy seeing. However, that is their only connection to each other. Each object individually could be connected to the American Revolution, but the object labels fail to do that, leaving it up to the visitor who may not have enough knowledge of firearms history to do it.

The next case, titled "Arms of the American Revolution," discusses how and why muskets with bayonets were the primary weapon of line infantry, and how that shaped infantry tactics. The label also discusses why rifles were ineffective and how officers carried, but rarely used, pistols. However, the objects on display include two fusils—

[74] Gregory J. W. Urwin, "The Second Amendment Con Job," accessed April 19, 2018, https://historynewsnetwork.org/article/160183.
[75] Ibid.

which are not discussed at all—two pairs of pistols, and only one musket.[76] Once again, guns an expert would enjoy, but not reinforcing the content of the label, which argues for the primacy of the musket.

One display actually is done well. Titled "Musket, Rifle, Fowler," it discusses the differences between the three rather well, as well as the differences between the ammunition each typically uses. On display is one musket, one rifle, and one fowler, all lined up so visitors can see the differences in length and durability then imagine how this would affect maneuverability and firing. It also includes examples of musket balls, rifle balls, and shot, giving visitors a visual representation of the types of ammo used.[77] The only improvement needed is a bayonet for the musket, to reinforce the fact that rifles and fowlers could not mount bayonets without extensive modifications.

However, the design problems in this exhibit are not limited to each case individually. The displays as a whole should ideally add up to something. They should all support some argument or message of the exhibit. If they do, it is so obtuse that visitors would never know. "Arms of the American Revolution" and "Musket, Rifle, Fowler" are clearly connected—but how do they connect to the seizure of arms or the second amendment? Obviously, with some thought, connections could be made, but there are no big exhibit labels to help visitors make any connections. The writing of the object labels and case labels is not bad, and often advances interesting ideas. In most cases they just are not connected in obvious enough ways for the average, non-gun-expert visitor. In the same way, the absence of a big exhibit label leaves the displays are not connected enough. The absence of an introductory label for the whole museum, with a clearly stated

[76] Ibid.
[77] Ibid.

"big idea," leaves the exhibits seeming like a random compilation of gun stuff.[78] Even a label stating a much better worded variation of "firearms played a huge role in forming current-day America" at the entrance of the museum would allow visitors to make connections between all of the exhibits.

For the most part, the rest of the museum has similar problems as discussed in the Petersen Gallery and Revolutionary War exhibit. However, it is still useful to examine some of the strengths and weaknesses of the other displays. After the Revolution exhibit, visitors can examine a recreation of a rifle shop. The focus here is on the creation and uniqueness of the Pennsylvania rifle. Because it is a diorama, it does a better job than the Mercer museum of actually conveying the ideas of craftsmanship and industry in American gunsmithing.[79] Visitors here will know right away that they are looking at a gunsmithing shop and gunsmithing tools, unlike visitors at the Mercer who simply see an odd collection of guns and swords and move on.

At this point, the museum opens up a bit, leaving visitors to choose which exhibits to see next. One option is the Civil War exhibit. This is creatively done in such a way that an exhibit label is not necessary. It intends to highlight the differences in firearms and firearms production in the North and South, and in doing so gets at the major differences in their economies. The astute visitor could even see in this the underlying causes of the war, and why the North could oppose slavery while the South hung on to it. The exhibit forms a hallway. On one side is a representation of a Northern factory, while on the other is a representation of a Southern plantation. Labels highlight the differences in arms-

[78] Ibid.
[79] *Romance of the Long Rifle*, exhibit, National Firearms Museum, Fairfax, VA, visited January 28, 2018.

making capacity that engendered, and through that the rationale for the Anaconda strategy of the North. Of course, firearms of both sides are displayed here as well.[80]

Figure 9. Too many guns in the West. Photo credit: Derek Engle

After this, visitors can see an exhibit on guns used in settling the west. This section goes back to the display style of the Petersen gallery, with vast amounts of guns all over the place (but thankfully less mirrors). From here, the museum becomes messy, as this part is in a state of transition between old exhibits, exhibits under renovation, and new exhibits. There are some displays like the Petersen gallery, including another hunting lodge styled room complete with a rhino head. Some are focused on wars, like the World War I and World War II exhibits which are set up as dioramas with soldiers and weapons. There is also an exhibit for the Vietnam War, which does not have a diorama, but just a display of the equipment and weapons of the Viet Cong and US troops. A common thread in these exhibits is that the wars are reduced to the guns, and missing both traditional military history analysis of tactics and strategy and the newer military/social history

[80] *A Nation Asunder*, exhibit, National Firearms Museum, Fairfax, VA, visited January 28, 2018.

analysis of the common soldier's experience.[81] However, the museum's mission is to talk about firearms, not necessarily military history.

Then there are three rather different exhibits remaining. First is a display called "America's Rifle," which highlights the popularity of the AR-15. It includes several different ARs, some in flashy colors, some with attachments like scopes, and some basic black ones. However, it does not engage the gun control debate directly, even though the AR-15 is often at the center of it. The display simply claims there are legitimate civilian reasons to own an AR, implying that at least they should not be banned, without actually saying that.[82] It could easily raise questions for discussion with just a bit more effort, such as, are the illegitimate uses of ARs enough to outweigh the legitimate uses? It should also cover how the AR is used in shootings. In fact, the museum should talk about gun crime in general, from the black market to armed robbery to murder and gang violence.

One of the most unique displays in the museum has to do with children. It shows various toy and BB guns, and discusses how they allowed kids to familiarize themselves with guns before they eventually used real guns in adult life, and how as the need for guns as adults went down, that evolved to just playing with toys.[83] This, with the AR-15 exhibit, could provide an interesting commentary on the gun culture in America.

Throughout the museum, several of the exhibits have an interactive digital display. This allows visitors to view a museum map, see intro videos for each exhibit, explore each display, and bring up detailed information on each weapon in it. This

[81] *The American West*, exhibit, National Firearms Museum, Fairfax, VA, visited January 28, 2018; *America Ascending*, exhibit, National Firearms Museum, Fairfax, VA, visited January 28, 2018; *Ever Vigilant*, exhibit, National Firearms Museum, Fairfax, VA, visited January 28, 2018.
[82] *America's Rifle*, exhibit, National Firearms Museum, Fairfax, VA, visited January 28, 2018.
[83] *For the Fun of It!*, exhibit, National Firearms Museum, Fairfax, VA, visited January 28, 2018.

provides a very good solution for label creep—all the extra details about a weapon that are not relevant to supporting a specific display can be put on there for visitors who truly want it. This can help keep caption and object labels under 50 words, and even help keep display labels short and concise. The museum could make better use of AV equipment in their exhibits if new exhibit intros were developed. Videos of weapons firing would also improve several of the displays.

Overall, the NRA museum has some bright spots but several big problems. It is generally celebratory in nature, and barely engages difficult stories. It also misses some important and relevant narratives to today's world and some good opportunities to facilitate discussion, while avoiding taking on controversy. However, its association with the NRA and location in NRA headquarters cripple it immensely from the very start.

Weapons displays of every type hold important lessons for museums that wish to display guns. Each has good and bad points for museums to learn from. However, very few of the gun displays examined do a good job of making guns relevant and accessible to a broad audience. Only one touches on the gun debate, and it does so very briefly. It is time for a new gun exhibit that addresses this more directly.

CHAPTER 4

A FUTURE GUN DISPLAY

In chapter two, I examined multiple gun displays and their strengths and weaknesses. How can we apply lessons from the history of gun displays and the current state of displays towards creating a new display? The examined displays have an assortment of strengths and weaknesses that reveal many methods which can be applied to improve all gun displays, regardless of exhibit type and content. Those methods could also be applied to create a new exhibit which promotes a more responsible gun debate.

Before getting into that, it is important to outline some of the general principles to keep in mind when displaying guns, as drawn from my examinations. Some of these principles can apply to all museum displays, while others are specific and common weaknesses in most gun displays or apply especially to gun displays.[84]

The first is that displaying firearms with objects associated with their use really helps visitors understand what the gun was used for. A wall of hunting weapons with labels is overwhelming and confusing, but a few hunting weapons with recognizable hunting equipment and the hunted animals allows a visitor to immediately deduce what the weapons were for, without even reading the label.

[84] Principles of display and design for museums as a whole are outlined in multiple places by experts in the field. Beverly Serrell covers label-writing and more in her ubiquitous guide, *Exhibit Labels: An Interpretive Approach* (New York: AltaMira, 2015). Polly McKenna-Cress and Janet Kamien discuss the entire process for creating exhibits in *Creating Exhibitions: Collaboration in the Planning, Development and Design of Innovative Experiences* (New York: Wiley, 2013). Barbara Carson concisely demonstrates how to use objects to make connections between people and their actions, rather than simply describe them in her short article, "Interpreting History through Objects," *The Journal of Museum Education* 10, no. 3 (July 1, 1985): 2–5. Finally, Julia Rose writes on a particularly relevant topic—how to interpret history that involves trauma in her work, *Interpreting Difficult History at Museums and Historic Sites*, Interpreting History Series (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016).

This ties in to the second principle, that guns need to be displayed in context. Once again, a wall of guns tells visitors nothing. Put them next to colonial objects, or Civil War objects, and it is clear what time period the guns are from and gives the visitors clues regarding their purpose. The context they are displayed in matters too. Muskets displayed in a war context are much less relatable than muskets displayed in a domestic context. Many visitors will not have owned or experienced guns, and do not think of them as personal objects. Place a musket next to recognizable household items that visitors do think of as personal objects, and visitors can better relate to the musket and the person who used it.

Another way to engage the visitor better is to use personal stories of the gun's users. NMAJH does this with the video of the woman who discusses firing the M1 Garand for the first time when she joined the army. Unfortunately, there are no 18th century video interviews, but there are accounts of colonists who used guns for hunting, for militia duty, for all kinds of uses. These could be read by a costumed interpreter, filmed, and played in a museum.

As with most displays, interactive exhibits are also helpful for gun displays. The musket visitors can lift at Valley Forge is an example of this, but this could be taken much further than that. Being able to actually touch and feel replica objects helps visitors get a better sensory understanding of the originals. Additionally, digital interactives allow visitors to explore much more content than can be put into labels. Well-designed digital interactives can further stimulate the visitors' minds by inviting them to keep exploring and interacting with the content in depth.

One of the major problems with current gun exhibits is that they are overwhelming. Displays of many guns lined up in a row should be avoided, as the average visitor simply turns away and looks for something less intimidating and more manageable to investigate. These displays are rarely labelled and interpreted, making it even harder for visitors to engage. This gallery approach to displaying museum objects has largely been surpassed by new display methods in many museums. Good label writing and exhibition practices are very important for gun displays because guns are often less accessible objects for many audiences. It is essential that these exhibits stick to current museum practice.

This also means that guns on display need to support whatever argument or message the exhibit is trying to communicate. Each firearm should be selected for its relevance to the exhibit. It should be clear to visitors why each one was chosen for display, whether that comes through in caption labels, section labels, or even visual cues. Speaking of visual cues, firearm displays should also reference specific details on the displayed firearms. Labels that prompt visitors to look closely at the object promote better engagement with the object. Guns often include interesting details that are very relevant to their usage, and can help visitors better understand them. This should be taken advantage of.

Messaging and perception is also important in gun displays, especially for content relating to the gun debate. Special care needs to be taken to stay balanced and fair. Otherwise, the display will very quickly alienate significant parts of the audience.

Another common problem with gun displays is the weapons chosen. Often, ornate, elite firearms are prioritized over the firearms of the everyday man. One

exception to this is military displays, where common soldier weapons are often included, even if there is sometimes a preponderance of elite pistols and swords carried by generals. However, civilian firearms that are displayed are usually very high class, like those at the art museum. Crude weapons, like the mountain rifle held by Valley Forge, are rarely displayed. This is partly because many firearm collectors and early museums focused on collecting "quality" weapons, resulting in not as many of the crude weapons surviving. However, browsing online collections catalogs generally shows that the crude weapons which have survived are generally not on display.

Firearms tend to draw a lot of visitor attention when they are actually fired. As a result, firearms demonstrations usually attract large crowds. Even when sites only offer them at set times, such as once an hour, visitors will prioritize them, and are usually a few minutes early so as not to miss them. Using these demonstrations not only helps visitors better understand firearms, but it also provides an opportunity for an interpreter to talk to visitors, and for visitors to ask questions.

The final lesson is that clever design can make arguments without labels. The Civil War exhibit at the NRA museum is one example of this—with just the juxtaposition of factory and plantation, a visitor can recognize how Northern and Southern arms production would have differed, and the massive advantage that gave the North. Visitors need not read a label to understand the argument.

Keeping these principles in mind, how could an exhibit use 18th century weapons to improve the state of the gun debate? The first step is to familiarize visitors with various 18th century firearms and their uses. This should help them understand the relationship between colonists and their guns. It will also show how types of guns were categorized

then, and the crossover between categories. Finally, it will show the various gun regulations in place then. Visitors will see how important firearms were at the time, which can act as a baseline for their thoughts on how important firearms are or are not today. It is also necessary for visitors to be familiar with 18th century firearms and 18th century gun regulations in order to examine the colonists' thoughts and debates about them then. This can serve as an entry point for the debate today. Once these topics are covered, the firearms and stories surrounding them can be used to promote respect and mutual understanding between both sides of the gun debate—but more on that later.

Upon entering the exhibit, visitors will be greeted with an introductory label containing a brief description of the displays ahead. It will also include a brief introduction to firearms, with a small panel timeline of the evolution of firearms. To counter the idea that technological progress equals human progress, statistics showing firearms deaths will be included with the evolution of firearms. Another small panel can introduce visitors to the effects of caliber and length on power and accuracy and the difference between smoothbore and rifled barrels. This can be explained with cut out sections of barrels from each type of firearm put next to each other, along with a short description. A GIF type animation can be included to demonstrate how the flintlock mechanism works.

The meat of the exhibit will begin with an exploration of the types and usage of firearms in the 1700s. This section will be in one area, with visitors free to move to the displays in any order they desire. Potential label text can be found in appendix B.

Military firearms, specifically muskets, will constitute one display. The display will center around a table with a digital screen on it. This will help explain line tactics

and why muskets were used with an overhead view of tactics, as well as footage of line infantry marching, drilling, and firing. Eight muskets and bayonets will be selected for display in angled cases on each side of the table, two to a case. The pairings will include an English long-land pattern musket, French Charleville musket, Mughal Empire musket, Ottoman Empire musket, Safavid Empire musket, Spanish musket, German Potzdam musket, and an American contract musket. This allows visitors to compare muskets from different nationalities and different cultures, and see the similarities despite the broad range of styles. Cartridges and cartridge boxes will also be displayed, to highlight the efficient loading systems used for military weapons.

The next display will consist of various hunting firearms. Long fowlers from several places will discuss the use of shot and stationary hunting. A New England club-butt fowler and a later fowler made in the Mid-Atlantic will serve to show how they got shorter over time. A shorter English fowler will be displayed to discuss sport hunting, and contrast it with hunting for survival. Additionally, the case will include hunting accoutrements such as shot, decoys, and powder horns. It will also include representations of several types of waterfowl. This could be just in paintings or pictures, or it could be stuffed birds; however, using actual stuffed birds may send too much of a hunting lodge vibe if not done carefully.

Also in this display will be a selection of rifles, to discuss hunting larger game such as deer. These will include a Pennsylvania rifle, a crude mountain rifle like the one at Valley Forge, and a German Jaeger rifle. The rifles can be compared and discussed to show why the longrifle was ideally suited to the American forests, despite the European preference for shorter rifles.

Finally, the display will include two fuzees and discuss their versatility as multi-purpose weapons. They can be displayed with different types of shot and ball. Visitors will be able to see the differences in length and maneuverability between these types of hunting weapons fairly easily since they are all displayed together.

After the hunting display, visitors will see displays on several other uses of weapons. A display on personal protection will include a fuzee, rifle, and musket, as these were all used as personal defense weapons, but will also include pistols. The pistols will include three sets of Queen Anne pistols with barrel lengths of 2-10", as well as a pair of muff pistols and a pair of holster pistols. The holster pistols will be shown with saddle holsters, so visitors understand they were typically carried on horseback, while the Queen Anne pistols will be shown carried in pockets. One of the muff pistols will be displayed being drawn by a female mannequin.

The final typology display will discuss several uses, from sport, to status, to everyday uses like killing vermin, scaring animals, and signaling for help. Two rifles with depictions of a shooting match will be displayed, along with a very ornate fowler and pistol pair to discuss weapons that show status and wealth. It will also include older, cruder firearms which have evidence of heavy wear and repairs, such as the Valley Forge doglock, to discuss everyday use and upkeep.

To help visitors better understand the differences between these firearms and how they are suited to each use, they will next encounter an interactive display. This display will consist of non-firing replicas of each type of firearm securely attached to cables. Visitors will be able to pick these up to feel the weight, and aim them down a small simulated firing range. This enables them to discover for themselves why certain firearms

were suited for different roles, and will allow them to tell the differences between these firearms better. Firearms to be picked up can include a fowler, muskets with and without a rubber bayonet, fusil, and Pennsylvania rifle. Signage will clearly indicate that these replicas are not toys, and should be treated like live firearms. They should only be aimed downrange and never pointed at other visitors. They will be stored high enough that children cannot access them but adults can. This does not mean children will not be allowed to use them, but that they can only use them with adult supervision. Also posted in the vicinity will be pictures from one of the manuals of arms depicting several ways soldiers were instructed to hold them, allowing visitors to try those techniques, as well as illustrations of hunting positions for visitors to try as well. This display could easily become crowded with too many people during periods of high visitation. Perhaps an interpreter could provide adequate supervision and additional replicas to visitors during these times.

Following the exploration of firearms types, visitors will encounter an exploration of early gun control laws. This will begin by a display looking at race and slavery. The display will include touchscreens on either side. On the left will be various colonial laws prohibiting slaves and free blacks from owning firearms, and on the right will be various colonial laws mandating white males over 18 to own muskets and accoutrements for militia service. Some of these can be original documents, in proper low-light cases with lift covers, and the rest will be on the touchscreens for visitors to explore in depth. They will be able to look at the laws for each colony, both in transcript form and digitized copies of the originals. Four guns will stand upright in a case in the center, two muskets for militia use, and two firearms used in slave rebellions, if any can be found. One of the

muskets will be a standard, long-land pattern musket in good condition, but the other will be older with signs of damage and repair to represent colonists who could barely afford to own a musket. If firearms from a slave rebellion cannot be found or obtained on loan, the display will include regular muskets as stand-ins. In front of the four guns will be a Jim Crow era sign reading "Whites Only." This is intentionally provocative and confrontational to make the point without needing a lot of text. It is also meant to be visually stunning, to draw visitors to the display. However, I am concerned it might be too provocative, and more importantly that it might cause undue distress to visitors who have experienced discrimination. The display would need careful consideration, planning, and thinking before being implemented, and maybe should be redone in a different form. In either case, I doubt most museums would be willing to take the risk of putting on this display.

The second display on colonial gun control will discuss European attempts to keep Native Americans from obtaining firearms. It will include text of laws prohibiting trading guns to natives, as well as a diorama showing a trader and Indian exchanging guns for furs. It will then discuss how European governments then changed those laws to allow the trade and focus on regulating it instead of banning it. The display will include several fuzees of the types designed specifically for trading to Native Americans, and discuss how trading companies produced them specifically for trade once the trade was legalized.[85]

[85] Often these were marketed with snake or serpent designs on the lockplate, which were popular with Native Americans. This fact will not be included in the display because it is exactly the type of fact that only the traditional firearms audience cares about.

A small panel will also be included here discussing the Elizabethan prohibition on Queen Anne pistols.[86] It will discuss her fear of assassination that led to the ban, as well as the lack of any other laws prohibiting personal firearms ownership. It will also reference the role this traditional lack of firearms regulation formed a part of colonial ideas about firearms and the eventual conflict in Boston. The panel will include a small case holding two small Queen Anne pistols.

The final display discussing colonial gun control will look at the struggle to control powder and cannon at the start of the American Revolution. This will primarily consist of two dioramas. The first will be at the magazine at Cambridge, and will show British troops taking barrels of powder from the magazine. The labels will discuss Gage's motives—to deprive colonists of the means of resistance—and right as Governor of Massachusetts to relocate government powder and artillery.[87] They will also mention the scarcity of powder in the colonies and explain why it was so valuable to the colonists.[88] This will help visitors understand why many colonists were alarmed at General Gage moving it from Cambridge to Boston, where it was under Gage's control. The second will show colonists burying artillery at Concord. Under the dirt there will be cutouts featuring replicas of the brass two- and three-pounder cannon the British were seeking at Concord, which will have caption labels. The display's main labels will explain how the Whigs

[86] These pistols are now often called Queen Anne pistols because of their popularity during her reign, but they did exist before her reign. Other names for them include cannon-barrel pistols, screw-barrel pistols, turn-off pistols, and pocket pistols.
[87] Fischer, 42-3.
[88] It could even reference Governor Dunmore's attempt to empty the magazine in Williamsburg to show a different kind of disarmament and the colonial reaction to it.

saw the cannon as belonging to them rather than the British army, in accordance with J.L. Bell's research.[89]

The dioramas are dramatic for several reasons. First, it shows the very real colonial fear of disarmament—although in this case disarmament primarily of communal cannon and powder, rather than individual weapons—that led to further gun violence in the form of a shooting war.[90] It will also help visitors better understand one of the reasons some colonists were willing to face the British army at Lexington and Concord on their mission to secure the brass cannons. Once again, the visual display showing action should limit need for excessive text. Visitors will be able to make the connections between the two displays to get a better understanding of the whole picture. Additionally, the label will mention how the war began during the mission to Concord. This should help reinforce how important this issue was to the colonists, making their debate relevant to today.

The next display will discuss the Second Amendment. It will show various American opinions on the amendment and its wording, but with a much wider diversity of opinion than shown in the NRA museum. More importantly, it will provide historical context around the creation of the Second Amendment, discussing how it arose out of politics necessary to ensure adoption of the Constitution. The discussion will begin with an explanation of the conflict between the United States' need for a peacetime standing army and the great mistrust Americans had of standing armies. Then it will move to an

[89] Ibid, 56-7, 207. Bell, ch. 3-4, 8-10. A museum could create an entire exhibit from Bell's book and its fascinating discussion of the race to seize and control artillery. It goes into great detail around the personalities surrounding the four brass cannon in Concord, which could connect quite well with many audiences.

[90] According to Fischer, the British Army did enter private homes during the Concord mission. A spy for Gage provided him with a list of homes known to be harboring caches of weapons and supplies. However, Gage was very concerned to respect the rule of law and private property, and his primary goal remained to find the four missing brass cannon. Fischer, 206-7; Bell, ch. 9-10.

explanation of the inadequacy of the militia for national defense and internal order, and the anti-Federalists' concerns about keeping the militias at state level. It will explain how the amendment was created to placate the Anti-Federalists by serving as a mechanism for ensuring the survival of state militias which could safeguard the states against overreaches of federal power. This ultimately led to the expansion of federal power because it led to the ratification of the Constitution, and eventually to the state militias becoming a tool of the federal government.[91] Armed with this information, the display will ask visitors to question the true intent of the amendment—was it created for the reasons the founders state? Or were their words disingenuous, manipulating public opinion for the greater good of ratifying the Constitution?

Of course, much of this is words and debates about words and so little of it is objects. It would not make an engaging diorama or display, but has a lot of content, so it would work best as a digital interactive. This way, visitors interested in the wording can dive deep—while the majority of visitors will be able to move on without trouble.

This concludes the visitor's introduction to 18th century firearms and gun regulations. From here, visitors are ready to begin the second part of the exhibit, which seeks to promote understanding by exposing them to the experiences of those with opposing viewpoints.

Exposing both sides of the gun debate to the other side's experiences is critical to advancing the debate. This builds understanding and common ground between the two sides, humanizes the opponent, increases empathy, and allows debaters to better understand their opponent's viewpoints. So far, the trend has been to vilify the other side,

[91] Gregory J. W. Urwin, "The Army of the Constitution: The Historical Context," in *Papers from the Conference on Homeland Protection,* ed. Max G. Manwaring (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2000), 27-62; Urwin, "The Second Amendment Con Job."

in some cases going so far as to call them evil. Modern firearms, like the AR-15, often immediately evoke very strong emotions—including strong affinity and strong repulsion—which makes common ground, empathy, and understanding even harder to achieve. Putting these guns on display would likely cause more problems than solutions. However, muskets rarely evoke these reactions, so using them and other 18th century firearms would be a good way to help both sides of the debate experience guns in a different way that can build a connection between them. This exhibit can do this after exploring the historical context—the audience has been warmed up and prepared with knowledge about 18th century firearms. Now, the exhibit can dive into people's experiences with those weapons, both good and bad, while creating new experiences for the audience. Of course, it will still require a lot of willingness and open-mindedness from all participants to achieve any kind of mutual understanding. Let us hope the audience is up to it.

The exhibit can provide the experience of firing guns to visitors through several methods. The first method would be firing demonstrations of the type many battlefield museums hold. This means an interpreter demonstrating how to fire replica firearms at a safe distance from visitors. The interpreter will fire a musket, fowler, pistol, and rifle to demonstrate the differences. The interpreter can then talk about and answer questions on the experience of firing these guns. Actually firing replica historical firearms is the one of the closest engagements with objects that a museum can offer. Additionally, actually learning how to fire a gun from the interpreter is a great opportunity for gun critics to better understand gun enthusiasts. Of course, 18th century guns are different than modern guns in many important ways, but they can serve as a substitute meant to allow for

greater access because they are less intimidating to fire, can easily fire blanks, and are not perceived the same way AR-15s are.

In addition to the firing demonstration, visitors will see a display on how colonists enjoyed guns. This display would include a diorama of colonial riflemen competing with each other to see who is the better shot.

It is also essential to provide an experience of receiving gun violence to the other side of the debate. It can provide tragic stories from victims of gun violence, and invite visitors to empathize with them. This can take several forms.

One display can discuss gun violence in crime, displaying firearms used in crime and against criminals. It can discuss victims of gun crime and share the stories of victim's relatives and survivors. However, that might simply lead to the argument that more guns are necessary to defend against crime. Perhaps a better way is the second and third displays.

The second display will discuss the massacre of the Conestoga Indians by the Paxton Boys and the Enoch Brown school massacre. Guns were used in both, although tomahawks, knives and clubs were also used. In any case, the display needs to be somewhat horrifying—as the actual events were—in order to upset visitors and help them experience guns in a negative and tragic way. The display will include two dioramas, one showing each massacre. Firearms will be shown prominently in each, alongside the other weapons; since the attacks began with shooting, however, the dioramas will focus on the early stages and the moments right after the guns were discharged. Accounts of the events by horrified colonists will be included to show their reactions and experience. The aftermath will be shown with illustrations, including graphic illustrations that will be

covered with a content warning which can be lifted by individual visitors. The illustrations and diorama could be supplemented by video as well.[92]

The third display will show the results of gun violence where both sides are armed, such as the results of a Revolutionary War battle. It could feature a diorama of a surgeon and his tools, and discuss the effects of musket balls on the human body. Quotes from wounded combatants and well-trained interpreters could discuss this. Including displays on one-sided massacres as well as an armed conflict, makes the experience of gun violence more balanced.

After visitors make it through both experiences, they will be able to post their own experiences on a wall. This could be their experiences with guns outside the museum, of handling or firing guns for first time at the museum, reactions to any of the displays, or whatever experience they have. However, it will require some ground rules to keep it from becoming a useless, unproductive digital yelling match like those common on social media. The experiences must be the visitors' own—no stories from others. They should use I statements. There should be no personal accusations and attacks. Instead, visitors should respond with how the experience made them feel and what it made them think. Visitor responses will be posted on the wall through a projector, which will be controlled by a tablet visitors can use to explore and display different responses. Visitors will be able to use their phones and a mobile website to submit their responses, or the tablet on site. Responses can be filtered by algorithms for offensive language or other

[92] Richard Middleton, *Pontiac's War: Its Causes, Course, and Consequences* (Routledge, 2007), 171; David Dixon, *Never Come to Peace Again: Pontiac's Uprising and the Fate of the British Empire in North America* (University of Oklahoma Press, 2005) 223-4. Both these books can provide a starting point for descriptions of the Enoch Brown massacre and primary sources discussing it. Kevin Kenny, *Peaceable Kingdom Lost: The Paxton Boys and the Destruction of William Penn's Holy Experiment* (Oxford University Press, 2009), ch. 13. Kenny's work not only describes the massacre and places it in context, it also contains many eyewitness accounts which could be used in creating the display.

inappropriate content. The responses can be analyzed with digital tools, such as a word cloud, and posted on the museum website. This way even those who do not come to the museum can still engage with different experiences of firearms.

There are some potential problems that come with this proposed exhibit. Museum fatigue could play a role, as this exhibit contains a lot to digest. Getting people through the first part without boring and tiring them out before they reach the second part could prove difficult. This could be addressed with visitor research, surveys, focus groups, prototypes, etc. during exhibit development.

Also, the nature of guns, and especially the discussion of gun violence could cause psychological stress to some individuals. Hopefully, use of 18th century weapons minimizes this. However, the later section is designed to elicit strong emotional reactions to ultimately increase understanding of and empathy with proponents of gun control. This section uses graphic material for that effect, which could easily cause stress. Looking at how the Holocaust Museum deals with its graphic content could help improve this section, as well as visitor research with focus groups. While it would be problematic to ask a survivor of gun violence for feedback, there are survivors who regularly speak out. One of them might be willing to assist with exhibit development and help exhibitors avoid causing undue trauma to victims of gun violence. Engaging a psychologist experienced with victims of gun violence would also be necessary while developing the exhibit. A good reference for anyone who takes on this exhibit would be Julia Rose's *Interpreting Diffcult History at Museums and Historic Sites*.[93]

The gun debate is highly controversial, and the museum could easily be accused of favoring one side over the other. The exhibit is designed in part to avoid this, but it

[93] Rose.

should also be addressed with focus groups, audience research, etc. The controversial nature means the exhibit will need to be extra careful in its choice of funders. If either side is alienated before ever showing up, the whole project is ruined. An alienated group will likely scream louder than ever, and the display will have the reverse effect of intensifying the gun debate to even less responsible levels.

Finally, the exhibit, at some points, uses 18th century firearms almost as a stand in for modern firearms. While these weapons are divided among similar roles—military, hunting, recreation, etc.—the exhibit still needs make clear that there are important differences between these and modern guns.

Overall, the exhibit idea is not yet all the way there. It needs refinement generally, as well as for some of the displays. Finding content for some parts of the displays might be difficult as well, and the label writing would have to be carefully done to both caption and reference each object while also tying them into the larger display. Additionally, while researching the objects, museum staff might find interesting stories they hold that are not currently considered by the exhibit. To tell them could require revisiting the layout of the exhibit. As it stands, the idea needs criticism from an exhibit team, including designers, interpreters, curators, and administrators before it is ready for future steps. It would also be necessary to consult the audience in some way, including both pro- and anti-gun groups, without succumbing to the fate of the Enola Gay exhibit.[94] However, these ideas can hopefully serve as the start of an exhibit which promotes responsible debate about guns.

[94] The planners of that exhibit released the script without proper context, and it was torn apart by veteran's groups.

Conclusion

Finding a museum that would be capable and willing to take on the exhibit exactly as I proposed, range and all, could prove very difficult. Even museums with large firearms collections would probably still need to get some firearms on loan to fill out some of the specific requirements of the proposed displays. Also, the displays require a lot of additional design work, and would not be cheap to build. The range comes with liability issues, which most ranges deal with by waivers and other forms; are museums willing to do the same? Additionally, building a range is very expensive and complex. Perhaps an alternate option would be for the museum to acquire some replica firearms and work with a local range to hold events during which museum visitors can use their voucher for an hour of range time.

The NRA museum has the collections, space, and funding to pull the proposed exhibit off—but they might not be willing to and more importantly, their association with the NRA would influence the audience so much that it would defeat the purpose of the exhibit. The NPS might be able to pull it off as well. They have enough collections if several parks worked together, even just Morristown and Valley Forge. However, getting funding could be an issue, and both parks are currently using all their exhibition space. Additionally, the NPS is already skittish about its black powder program, so the idea of visitors firing guns would never be considered. Finally, the NPS is a government agency—which could be an advantage or a disadvantage based on individual visitors' views about the government.

This does not mean the exhibit has no hope of ever existing. Sometimes the odd museum takes on a project nobody expected and does it excellently. On the other hand, various displays in the exhibit could stand alone or fit into different exhibits with different narratives. Plus, the general principles used to design the exhibit still apply. Even if no part of the exhibit is ever created, it can still serve as a model for new, more innovative gun displays that are both relevant and engaging to broader audiences.

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Exhibits

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America Ascending. Exhibit, National Firearms Museum, Fairfax, VA. Visited January 28, 2018.

America's Rifle. Exhibit, National Firearms Museum, Fairfax, VA. Visited January 28, 2018.

City Stories: An Introduction to Philadelphia. Exhibit, Philadelphia History Museum, Philadelphia. Visited March 28, 2017.

Cliveden, Germantown, PA. Visited February 7, 2017.

Determined to Persevere. Exhibit, Valley Forge National Historical Park, King of Prussia, PA. Visited July 30, 2017.

Ever Vigilant. Exhibit, National Firearms Museum, Fairfax, VA. Visited January 28, 2018.

Firearms. Exhibit, Mercer Museum, Doylestown, PA. Visited January 14, 2018.

For the Fun of It!. Exhibit, National Firearms Museum, Fairfax, VA. Visited January 28, 2018.

Guarding Gold. Exhibit, Wells Fargo History Museum, Philadelphia, PA. Visited January 16, 2018.

Gunsmithing & Weapons. Exhibit, Mercer Museum, Doylestown, PA. Visited January 14, 2018.

Kretzschmar von Kienbusch Galleries. Exhibit, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia. Visited February 5, 2017.

National Museum of Jewish History. Philadelphia, PA. Visited January 25, 2018.

Old Guns in a New World. Exhibit, National Firearms Museum, Fairfax, VA. Visited January 28, 2018.

The American West. Exhibit, National Firearms Museum, Fairfax, VA. Visited January 28, 2018.

The Ordinary, the Extraordinary, and the Unknown: The Power of Objects. Exhibit, Philadelphia History Museum, Philadelphia. Visited March 28, 2017.

The Road to American Liberty. Exhibit, National Firearms Museum, Fairfax, VA. Visited January 28, 2018.

The Robert E. Petersen Gallery. Exhibit, National Firearms Museum, Fairfax, VA. Visited January 28, 2018.

Tools of Crime...and Punishment. Exhibit, Mercer Museum, Doylestown, PA. Visited January 14, 2018.

What Is This Place? Understanding the Mercer Museum. Exhibit, Mercer Museum, Doylestown, PA. Visited January 14, 2018.

Women at Work in Revolutionary America. Exhibit, Betsy Ross House, Philadelphia. Visited April 5 2017.

APPENDIX A

SAMPLE LABELS

What did it mean to bear arms in the 1700s?

Given the choice between acquiring their first firearm or their first piece of furniture, many American colonists would have purchased a firearm (often a flintlock fowler, fusil, or rifle). Firearms had many everyday uses, and were very common household tools. When it came to feeding a family and surviving in the colonies, a firearm was as important a tool as any other.

Firearms as Tools

Just as forks, knives, and spoons have their specific purpose, so too did 1700s firearms. Colonists hunted waterfowl with fowling pieces. They hunted deer with rifles or fusils. Many firearms were used for unintended purposes as well, such as shooting competitions or scaring away pests.

In several colonies, colonists were required by law to bring firearms to church. Most colonies also required households to own one firearm for each adult male to use in the militia. The militia would be called out periodically for drill. Colonists often brought unsuitable hunting firearms to drill, while some failed to comply with the law at all.

Fowlers

Colonists used fowlers to hit as many waterfowl as possible with one shot. They were loaded with 200-250 pellets. A fowler was often very heavy, cumbersome, and long

(some over 6 feet). Some colonists took them to militia drills, although they were useless as military firearms.

Look at the initials on the stock of this fowler. The owner likely engraved them to personalize and differentiate his firearm.

Notice how the stock extends all the way up the barrel? This makes it impossible to fit a bayonet.

You can see a simple sight on this fowler. Fowlers would be aimed in the general direction of ducks—and the 200 lead pellets would make up for the firearm's inaccuracy.

This makeshift repair shows how colonists adapted and reused their firearms.

Fusils

Colonists used trade fusils as multipurpose guns. Developed for trade with American Indians, they were short, light, and mobile. The colonists used them to hunt flying birds or small to medium game. They were also economical, using less powder and lead, because of their small caliber.

Many fusils were military firearms. Note that this one can mount a bayonet.

Take a look at how little wood is used on this fusil! That makes it lighter, but also more fragile.

Longrifles

This rifle is a fairly crude example, made cheaply in the backwoods. It may lack refinement, but it served its owner well.

Colonists adapted the technology of the German Jager rifle to create the Pennsylvania longrifle. It served well as a special frontier hunting gun. Powerful and highly accurate in the hands of a skilled shooter, it was perfect for hunting medium to large game.

Like fowlers, rifles were not made to mount bayonets.

The grooves shown here are called rifling. They twist all the way down the barrel and impart spin on the ball, which helps make rifles so accurate.

Notice the sights on this rifle. They were essential to aiming accurately. Longrifles were more accurate than Jager rifles partly because the extra length helped shooters sight better.

Look at the patchbox on the stock. This contains pieces of cloth needed to help the ball grip the rifling. As a result, loading a rifle was a lengthy process.

The small caliber and precision of the longrifle allowed shooters to use ammunition very effectively.

Muskets

Muskets were the battlefield weapon of choice in the 1700s. They were specifically created as military firearms which prioritized loading speed, durability, and simplicity as well as standard dimensions (caliber, barrel length, etc). Colonists owned muskets primarily to bring to militia duty or for home defense.

Look at the damage to this older doglock musket. It clearly had a hard life. It is an excellent example of the type of former military weapon a civilian might own.

Unlike the rifle, the inside of a musket barrel is smooth. This means easy reloading and cleaning, but at the cost of accuracy.

Here (on top of the barrel) you can see a bayonet lug. This is where the bayonet would attach.

Bayonets were essential to 1700s warfare. See how this bayonet could fit on a musket?

This musket was stamped on the barrel by the colony of New Hampshire. At the beginning of the American Revolution, the colony confiscated civilian muskets for use in the war.

Pistols

Some colonists carried pistols for self-defense, just like some Americans do today. They carried pistols openly in saddle holsters or on the belt, or carried them concealed in coat pockets. However, many pistols were fairly expensive and often out of the reach of poorer colonists.

Some colonists carried “pocket pistols.” These were short enough to fit in coat pockets, and be carried hidden for personal defense (especially when in cities or travelling).

Many colonists and soldiers carried holster pistols such as this one. They were quick and easy to reload but not powerful or accurate.

Pistols could be very elaborate and finely decorated, although not all were. More decoration often meant the pistol cost more, and could be used to show off wealth.

See the bulge near the bottom of the barrel? This allowed users to unscrew the barrel, then load it from the breech instead of the muzzle.

These turn-off pistols had rifled barrels. The close grip of the rifling made these pistols accurate and powerful.

Notice how the lock is in the center of this pistol rather than off to the side. This is called a box lock, and helped keep the pistol from snagging on clothes when drawn.

Choices

Finding a quality product is never easy. Many colonists could only afford one firearm: which should they have chosen? Just like today, they had to consider their specific needs and priorities, and match those with what they could afford. They made choices and compromises when shopping, just like we all must do today when choosing anything that will protect ourselves or help put food on the table.