Excursions into the Un-Remembered Past: What People Want from Visits to Historical Sites

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Introduction

Historic sites and museums do not rival Disney World or its copycats in terms of the number of visitors. Nonetheless, they have become increasingly popular destinations over the past few decades, prompting historian

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The authors would like to thank two undergraduate students, Patricia Marnien and Jennifer Hunt, for administering the survey and Cedar Crest College for a faculty development grant in support of this work. They also thank the late Jerry Bastoni (Delaware and Lehigh National Heritage Corridor), Beverly Sheppard (formerly of the Chester County Historical

The Public Historian, Vol. 22, No. 3, pp. 107–127 (Summer 2000). ISSN: 0272-3433

David Lowenthal's observation that history has become a booming industry with a heavy tourist trade.[1] James C. Makens estimates that the approximately 36,000 historic sites listed on the National Register of Historic Places receive over 100 million visitors annually.[2]

Ironically, visitors' interest in history is not equaled by their knowledge of history. William T. Alderson and Shirley Payne Low report that current visitors, as compared to those of the not-so-distant past, are woefully uneducated about historic sites: "Visitors at today's sites no longer come with as much—or, sometimes, with any—historical knowledge."[3] Michael Kammen refers to a body of research done on the public's aptitude for historical and geographical knowledge, noting the sorry results among Americans as compared to populations in other industrial nations.[4]

Although history and heritage tourism are "hot," less is known about people's desires and motivations to visit historic sites and museums. Audience surveys are routinely conducted by big museum corporations such as the Smithsonian and Colonial Williamsburg. With some exceptions,[5] the surveys tend to be demographic assessments that describe visitors in terms of their residence, age, sex, occupation, and income rather than psychographic profiles or reports on motivations and interests. Although a deeper probing of people's interest in historic sites would clearly be in the self-interest of many smaller organizations, it is not routinely done, in most cases because of the expense for already financially strapped institutions.

Society, Pennsylvania), and Linda Shopes (Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission) for discussions and guidance concerning how public historians understand the concept of numinous places and things. Special thanks go to Lance Metz (Hugh Moore Park and Canal Museum of Easton, Pennsylvania) for making available documents and historical materials on steel production at the Bethlehem Steel plant.

1. David Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985). Other general works dealing with the appeal of historic sites include John Jakle, *The Tourist: Travel in 20th Century North America* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985); Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991); Patricia Mooney-Melville, "Harnessing the Past: Preservation, Tourism, and History," *The Public Historian* 13, no. 2 (Spring 1991): 35–48; Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory* (London: Verso, 1994).

2. James C. Makens, "The Importance of U.S. Historic Sites as Visitor Attractions," *Journal of Travel Research* 25 (Winter 1987): 8–12.

3. William T. Alderson and Shirley Payne Low, *The Interpretation of Historic Sites*, 2nd ed. (Walnut Creek, Calif.: Alta Mira Press, 1996), quote p. 22.

4. Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory*, chap. 19.

5. Steven Lubar (personal communication) reports, for example, that the Smithsonian's own in-house Institutional Studies Office does studies that go beyond the demographic assessments of visitors. Recent examples of research he provided demonstrate an interest in knowing about people's reaction to the National Museum of American History and how exhibits could be made more effective, as well as what people want from proposed upcoming exhibits. See, for example, Randi Korn and Associates, "Discovering History in Artifacts: Results from Focus Groups" (Report prepared for the National Museum of American History, December 1997). Richard Handler and Eric Gable, in *The New History in an Old Museum* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1997) report that Colonial Williamsburg, Inc., has research, marketing, and advertising divisions.

Nonetheless, museum professionals have developed theories about visitors' interests and motivations. The literature suggests that anxiety about the future and a nostalgia for a presumed simpler time underlie the public's current backward-looking tendency.[6] Kammen dates the nostalgia craze to the decades following World War II, suggesting that it was fueled by fears about national security, freedom, rapid social change, and a profound sense of discontinuity among Americans.[7] In previous research, we, too, have found that nostalgia for an old-fashioned way of life helps explain why tourists visit Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, during the Christmas season.[8]

In this article, we report on some exploratory investigations of tourists' underlying motivations. Rather than focusing on the appeal of a seasonal tourist event, however, our primary interest is to identify what people want from their visits to historic sites and museums more generally.[9] We expected the usual sorts of reasons, such as fun and relaxation, aesthetic pleasure, and information and knowledge, but we also wanted to probe whether people sought a deeper affective or emotional experience.

Our hypothesis is that, in addition to gaining information, having fun, or creating family memories during a trip to a historic site, people often seek a deeper and more meaningful connection with a place or time period. We have borrowed the term *numen* from Latin to describe what many people want from their excursions. In its etymology, *numen* translates literally as a nod or beckoning from the gods, and metaphorically as a spiritual force or influence identified with a natural object, phenomenon, or place. Rudolf Otto, who introduced the word into religious philosophy in his book, *The Idea of the Holy*, describes numen as a religious emotion or experience that can be awakened in the presence of something holy. In his rendering, a numinous experience is akin to religious rapture or a deeply spiritual effect. Since Otto's introduction of the *numen* concept, several of the humanities now discuss numinous effects.[10]

6. Alderson and Low, *The Interpretation of Historic Sites*; Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory*; Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*.

7. Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory*, part 4.

8. Catherine M. Cameron and John B. Gatewood, "The Authentic Interior: Questing *Gemeinschaft* in Post-Industrial Society," *Human Organization* 53 (1994): 21–32.

9. Our survey did not ask people to separate their responses to historic sites and museums. We do realize that each type of venue can evoke different sentiments in visitors. Historic sites usually have an authenticity of place and a thematic focus, whereas history museums often lack a sense of place and usually incorporate a variety of artifacts that reflect different groups and time periods. Whereas a historic site such as Gettysburg National Military Park may provoke a greater emotional response than most museums, at least some museum exhibits also have considerable power to move visitors. See Richard Kurin, "From *Smithsonian's America* to *America's Smithsonian*," *Museum Anthropology* 21 (1997): 27–41.

10. The original numen reference is found in Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958). Additional references to numen and the numinous are found in literature and philosophy, usually in connection with spiritual or mystical effects. This same sense of the terms is found in a Webster's definition, (WWWebster Dictionary, http://www.n-w.com/cgi-bin/netdict, 25 Mar. 1998).

Anthropologist Alondra Oubré discusses numen in connection with the evolution of human consciousness. She sees the numinous mind as allowing transcendental thought, which she

Rachel Maines and James Glynn suggest that *numen* can apply equally to both places and objects, endowing them with a "special sociocultural magic" and inspiring reactions of reverence and awe.[11] Similarly, Prentice, Witt, and Hamer imply that something akin to numinous experiences occurs at heritage sites. Following Csikszentmihalyi and Csikszentmihalyi's lead, they use the term "flow" to describe visitors' cognitive states in which there is intense engagement, a loss of the sense of time passing, and a transcendence of self.[12] One of the most fascinating accounts of the power of objects to awaken a deeply affective response is found in Richard Kurin's account of a two-year, twelve-city touring exhibit called *America's Smithsonian* developed by the museum to bring three hundred of the nation's treasures to the public. He describes a series of very emotional responses to these treasures—the woman who was struck by the Rembrandt Peale painting of George Washington, calling it "holy," the man describing his reaction to the Lincoln artifacts as indescribable, the many times that the museum staff found people crying in front of exhibit cases.[13]

We use "numen" to describe a transcendental experience that people can have in contact with a historic site or objects in an exhibit. Sites and displays that conjure in visitors a visceral or emotional response to an earlier event or time (one that could allow them to achieve a connection with the "spirit" of times or persons past) are especially valued. Further, a portion of the public are active numen-seekers—they explicitly desire to experience history in highly personal ways. Such a numen impulse is not necessarily exclusive of other motives, such as information seeking and entertainment, but it is distinguishable. Although something akin to numen-seeking has been recorded in the literature, to our knowledge there has been no systematic empirical demonstration of it as a motive for visitors or its possible frequency in a sample of people.

The next section presents the results of the survey administered in the historic downtown of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, on the topics of visitors' interest in and experience at historic sites and museums. Special attention is given to the numen impulse. Following a discussion of the empirical findings, we explore the implications of our results for public historians in

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defines as "direct experiential apprehension of perception and consciousness normally outside the realm of normal human experience that is said to bring serenity, peace, understanding, and deep knowledge. Alondra Y. Oubré, *Instinct and Revelation: Reflections on the Origins of Numinous Perception* (Amsterdam: Gordon and Breach, 1997), 215.

11. Rachel Maines and James Glynn, "Numinous Objects," *The Public Historian* 15, no. 1 (Winter 1993): 9–25. We realize that we are not using the idea of numen exactly as Maines and Glynn describe it. In their rendering, some numinous objects may be more like personal mementos or relics collected from the past whose association can be entirely esoteric to the collector.

12. Richard Prentice, Steven Witt, and Claire Hamer, "Tourism as Experience: The Case of Heritage Parks," *Annals of Tourism Research* 25 (1998): 1–25. M. Csikszentmihalyi and I. S. Csikszentmihalyi, *Optimal Experiences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

13. Kurin, "From *Smithsonian's America* to *America's Smithsonian*."

relation to two issues. The first is the most effective designs for industrial history sites, the subject of this special issue. Our interest is in connecting the numen quest with heavy industrial sites, asking what sorts of things might facilitate a personal connection to such places, especially given that the size and scale of heavy industry sites can be an obstacle to people's ability to conjure the personal side of an industry. The second issue is whether the numen impulse might be used by public historians to augment the educational experience for a public that has been described as more ignorant of history than visitors of earlier times.

Research Site and Survey Findings

Bethlehem is a city of 70,000 people located about eighty miles west of New York City and fifty miles north of Philadelphia. It is the oldest of the three cities in a region known as the Lehigh Valley. The valley was settled under the leadership of William Penn, who lured Scotch-Irish and German settlers with the promise of land. In the eighteenth century, the economy was based solely on agriculture, but with the discovery of minerals in the Pocono Mountains in the nineteenth century, the region entered an era of heavy industry. Bethlehem became the home of the Bethlehem Iron Company (later, Bethlehem Steel Corporation) in the 1860s. The company dominated the city's economy until the domestic steel crisis of recent years. Today, the home plant is still, although the company has profitable operations elsewhere.

Bethlehem projects a gritty image to outsiders because of the long presence of the Bethlehem Steel Corporation. That image is correct insofar as the region is a prototype of industrial development with its early history of mining, canals, and railroads and its later episode of heavy manufacture. However, Bethlehem has another side, and a history which precedes iron and steel making.

The city was founded in 1741 by a Protestant sect called the Moravians, who came to America from Moravia by way of Germany. They were a closed corporate community for the first hundred years of settlement, providing needed goods and services to their more rural neighbors. The Moravians were notable for their communalistic orientation, hospitality to strangers, love of music, and emphasis on education, including that for girls.

Bethlehem has marketed its history as an old Moravian settlement very successfully, mirroring similar efforts in Winston-Salem, North Carolina (a community founded by Moravians in 1766). The Moravians have continuously maintained many of their buildings over the years, a fact that tour guides proudly stress. These historic structures are outstanding examples of eighteenth-century Germanic architecture and include the Old Chapel, the Sisters' House, the Brethren's House, the Widows' House, the Bell House,

and the 1741 *Gemeinhaus* (meeting house). Not far from this area is a restoration of the original eighteenth-century industrial quarter that features a grist mill, tannery, soap house, and water wheel. Newer Moravian buildings include Central Church (begun in 1803), church-related structures, a lower school academy, and a large bookstore. The Moravian district receives heavy visitation throughout the year, but especially during the Christmas season. The Chamber of Commerce estimates that over 45,000 visitors come from out of town for the Christmas celebration.

The Moravian district is flanked by an upscale residential area dominated by Victorian mansions that once housed the industrial barons of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Also adjacent is the commercial district that was gentrified in the 1970s—buildings were restored, the sidewalks were laid with brick, and Victorian lampposts were installed. Main Street features a number of quaint shops, as well as a restored eighteenth-century inn that received many notable figures during its time as a hostel. It is a popular shopping area for tourists and locals, alike.

Until the 1980s, the programmatic side of tourism was confined to the events, displays, and tours associated with the Christmas season, to the many small museums that dot the area, and to the annual performances of the Bach Choir in May. The next two important developments were the creation of a nine-day music festival called Musikfest in 1984 and a three-day British culture festival called Celticfest in 1987. Both these events are set in or near the historic district described above.

The heritage tourism program has been largely confined to the north side of the Lehigh River, which bisects the city into two zones known as the north side and the south side. Although the south side has recently been incorporated into the Christmas program with tours of ethnic churches, it had not received much attention until the announcement that Bethlehem Steel was interested in using its idle land for recreational purposes.

Following several years of speculation and rumors, in February 1997 the company announced officially that it would build a museum to showcase industrial history, generally, and steel-making, specifically. The museum, called the National Museum of Industrial History, will sit within a larger redevelopment project called the Bethlehem Works, which will provide a variety of recreational activities for visitors. What nobody guessed at the time of the announcement was that the Smithsonian, through its Affiliates Program, would help develop the museum by offering the expertise of one of their industrial curators (Steven Lubar, co-editor of this issue) and long-lease technology exhibits. The company is now putting together a public and private funding package for the museum, which is expected to open within three to five years. Over two million visitors a year are expected.[14]

14. Catherine M. Cameron, "Emergent Industrial History: The Politics of Selection," *Museum Anthropology* 23, no. 3 (2000): 58–73.

As unlikely as it might seem at first glance, Bethlehem has become a significant draw for people interested in cultural and heritage tourism. The tourism program which began modestly with Christmas now includes events throughout the year and brings hundreds of thousands of visitors to the historic district of the north side. The area springs to life during the two festivals described before, but at other times of the year, the downtown is more peaceful, emitting an ambience of gentility and history. Tourists and locals alike amble along the streets, visit the many museums, and shop in the quaint stores. This ambience seems to stimulate a historic awareness and appreciation among visitors, a state of mind open to the questions we wanted answered in our research. Thus, we felt that downtown Bethlehem would be an ideal place to conduct our survey, which was designed to probe what people want from their visits to historic sites and museums.

The survey form was administered to 255 people over a period of several weeks during June 1995. People were intercepted on the street or as they left several museums in the area. Because respondents were rather randomly selected from among people walking the streets, we are confident that the sample is representative of the pedestrian population of downtown Bethlehem during June of 1995. But because the sample was not randomly drawn from a finite list of potential respondents in a pre-defined population (e.g., it was not a representative national sample), there is no way of knowing precisely how far our findings can be generalized beyond the summer pedestrian population of downtown Bethlehem. Such questions of generalizability are a common weakness of all exploratory research and of site-based visitor studies in particular, whether the data being collected are qualitative or quantitative.

The most we can say at this time is that Bethlehem's out-of-town visitors are virtually the same as respondents who live in Bethlehem year round. That is, comparisons of local and nonlocal residents with respect to their demographic and attitudinal characteristics show no significant differences (except level of education). Thus, the remarkable similarities between locals and nonlocals in the sample suggest that our "Bethlehem" findings extend well beyond Bethlehem. How far is an empirical question.[15]

The survey form included a combination of closed-ended and open-ended questions that assessed people's interest in historic sites—both the

15. The Bethlehem sample's generalizability can be ascertained in two ways. The first approach (most straightforward, but also expensive) is to administer the questionnaire to a large, nationally representative sample. Findings from such a national survey would reveal whether local samples are typical or aberrant. The other approach is to build up comparison groups little by little. Findings from a multitude of smaller-scale surveys conducted in a variety of sites could be compared with one another. This approach will produce a fine-grained understanding of "visitor interests in historic sites," but without first estimating base frequencies in the population as a whole. Following this second approach, we are in the process of analyzing data collected during the summer of 1999 about visitors to Gettysburg National Military Park.

time period and type of site as well as the importance of certain features such as signs, guided tours, costumed actors, and the like. One open-ended question asked people to describe what might enhance their experience at a historic site; another one asked what they sought to get out of their visit. These two questions helped us understand what was important to visitors and determine whether there was any support for our numen hypothesis. We have included many of the verbatim comments made by our respondents because they provide a fascinating demonstration of the transcendent power of place.

The basic demographic characteristics are as follows. We interviewed 163 (64%) local residents and 92 (36%) nonlocal visitors. Interviewees were well educated, 63% having a baccalaureate or graduate degree. Over half (55%) reported household incomes of more than $50,000 per year. Forty-six percent of the group were in their thirties or forties, 35% were fifty years or older, and 19% were in their twenties or younger. The group included 146 women (58%) and 107 men (42%).

Interest in Historic Sites

The respondents indicated a high level of interest in historic sites, generally (see Table 1). Almost two-thirds of the sample (157 people) said they were "very interested" in visiting such sites, and 171 said that on a trip away from home they would be "very likely" to make a visit.

Almost half the sample (122 people) said they had preferences for one or more particular time periods. Although responses to this open-ended question varied, the clear favorite was the colonial and Revolutionary War period (54 people), followed by the nineteenth century or Victorian era (22 people), and the Civil War period (18 people). The rest of the sample said they did not have a period preference.

In questions that polled people on their interests in particular kinds of sites (as opposed to time periods), colonial history (which was considered both a time period and a type) was again the clear favorite (see Table 2), followed in rank order by "Native American," "homes of

Table 1
General Interest in Historic Sites

	Very [3]	Somewhat [2]	Not Very [1]	MEAN
General interest in visiting historic sites	157	79	19	2.541
Likely to visit historic sites while traveling	171	56	28	2.561

Table 2
Interest in Specific Types of Historic Sites

	Very Interested [3]	Somewhat Interested [2]	Not Very Interested [1]	MEAN
Colonial sites	163	73	19	2.565
Native American sites	126	97	32	2.369
Homes of famous people	130	88	37	2.365
Early industrial sites	97	96	62	2.137
Military/political sites	85	112	58	2.106
Heavy industrial sites	56	83	116	1.765

famous people," "early industrial," "military/political," and "heavy industrial."

When asked about what was essential at historic sites, respondents considered "explanatory signs" the most important (see Table 3), followed in rank order by "hands-on displays," "costumed actors," "guided tours," "life-size displays," "large, colorful displays," and finally "audio recordings."

Open-Ended Responses

In an open-ended question, we asked people to identify what things make a historic site particularly enjoyable for them. We then did a content analysis of their responses, grouping responses into categories and arranging them into a taxonomy (see Figure 1).

At the most general level, the responses broke down into three categories: one pertained to the content at the site (204 mentions), a second had to do with some aspect of the physical layout or amenities (110 mentions), and

Table 3
Essential Features of Historic Sites

	Very Important [3]	Somewhat Important [2]	Not Very Important [1]	MEAN
Explanatory signs	204	41	10	2.761
Hands-on/working displays	119	97	39	2.314
Costumed actors	119	87	49	2.275
Guided tours	119	86	50	2.271
Life-size displays (diorama)	108	105	42	2.259
Large, colorful displays	105	96	54	2.200
Audio recordings	59	108	88	1.886

"Is there anything that makes a historical site particularly enjoyable for you?"

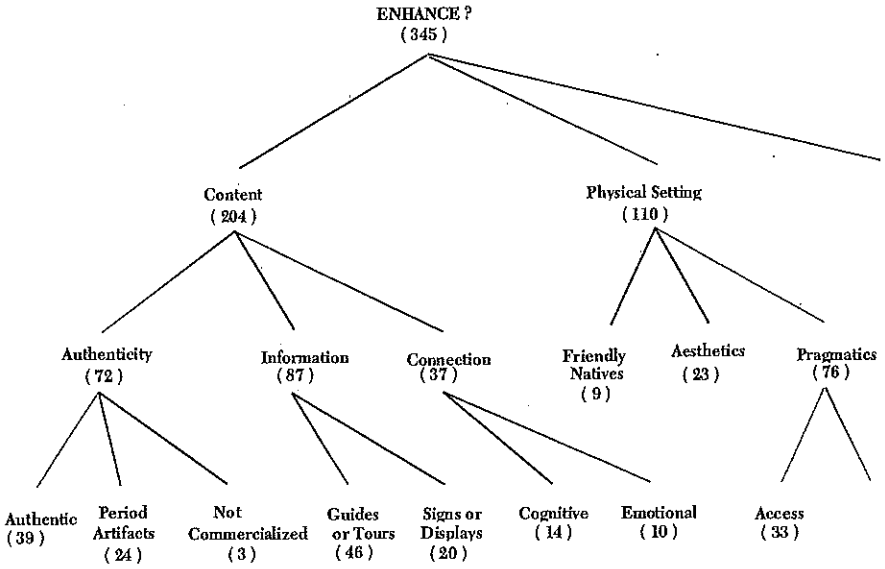

Figure 1. "Enhance" taxonomy. (Numbers in parentheses indicate "coded responses," i.e., 255 respondents produced 345 responses.)

a third residual "other" category (31 mentions) included both "no/nothing" responses, as well as other unusual ones. Often, people would refer to two or three different things—e.g., "The freedom to walk around. Accessibility of location and hours. Knowledgeable tour guides." As a result, we have 345 coded responses from 255 individuals.

The content replies further broke down into those that stressed the importance of authenticity or accuracy (72 mentions), an informative presentation or interpretation (87 mentions), and an individual's ability to make some kind of personal connection, either emotional or cognitive (37 mentions). Specific aspects of informativeness were knowledgeable guides/good tours and good signs/displays. Under authenticity, people said they wanted "authentic presentation." They also said they liked sites that were *not* commercialized and that contained period furnishings and costumed actors. The connection idea was sometimes expressed personally ("If I had some kind of connection, like a family member") and sometimes in terms of prior knowledge ("If I know ahead of time what it's about").

Among those references to the physical aspects of the site (110 mentions), the majority of people indicated the importance of access, both physical and temporal, and amenities such as shops, restaurants, bathrooms, and general cleanliness. The other references were to aesthetic features (beautiful grounds and art objects) and friendly people, meaning guides and/or natives.

"What do you want to get out of your visits to historic sites or museums?"

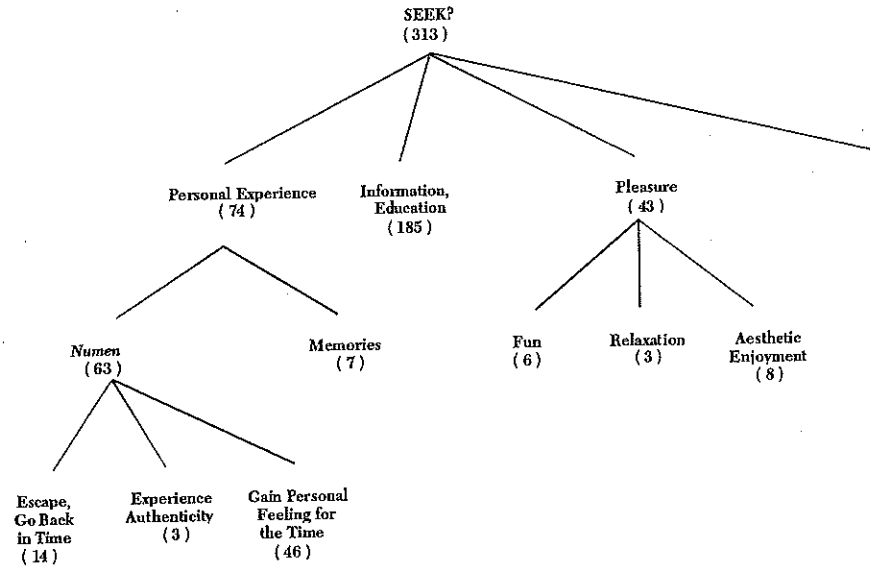

Figure 2. "Seek" taxonomy. (Numbers in parentheses indicate "coded responses," i.e., 255 respondents produced 313 responses.)

The second open-ended question asked people what they want to get out of their visits to historic sites. Once again, we arranged them into a taxonomy (see Figure 2). Excluding the eleven "other" outliers, the three categories of responses pertained to the desire for information (185 mentions), pleasure (43 mentions), and a personal experience of some kind (74 mentions). Often, the information-seekers would simply say "increased knowledge," "learn about the history," or "education." The pleasure-seeking comments mentioned the desire for fun, relaxation, or aesthetic appreciation, for example, "I just want to enjoy the day," or "Just the pleasure of looking at things."

The seventy-four personal experience responses varied a bit. We distinguished among those who see historic site visits as a way to create memories (7 mentions) —e.g., "To leave with lasting memories" or "Something I can soak up and remember"—and those who seek to make a personal connection with the place (63 mentions). For the latter, there were three ways of expressing this desire. One group said they sought to go back in time or escape, e.g., "I like to feel that for a short time you return to an era that's no longer there" or "[I want to take] a mental sabbatical into the past." A second group made reference to authenticity once again, e.g., "I want to see the real thing, no reconstructions." A third group stressed the importance of gaining *information* but in a deeper way, often using the words "appreciation of" or

"feel for," as in "get a feel for that time." Some of the best examples of this turn of mind are as follows:

- "To be able to develop a feel of the experience of the people of that time, what they were thinking, what their reality was . . ."
- ". . . a feeling of the place, a way to connect with what was . . ."
- "I like to reflect and remember it, to be part of it."

and, perhaps the best quote illustrating numen-questing:

- "I want to feel the aura of the period, gain a sense of connectedness with the way people lived. I want to have used my mind to experience it, not just the externals."

Based on our content coding of responses to this open-ended question, the base frequency of such "personal experience"/numen-seekers in our survey is about 27%, i.e., 70 respondents out of a total of 255 clearly indicated that they desire some sort of personal experience from their visits to historic sites and museums.

Statistical Analysis

Given the surprisingly high frequency with which numenesque comments appeared in our open-ended questions, we conducted several analyses to try to identify the demographic or attitudinal characteristics that might correlate with numen-seeking.

The first step was a factor analysis of our fifteen specific "historical interest" questions (the fifteen items reported in Tables 1–3). Factor analysis is a data reduction technique that uses the intercorrelations among numerous specific items to determine how many underlying dimensions, or factors, are necessary to account for the obtained correlations. For instance, if each item were completely unrelated to all the others, then each question would be measuring a different underlying variable, and there would be as many factors as items. At the other extreme, if all fifteen items were perfectly correlated, then they would be regarded as redundant measures of a single underlying variable.

Principal components factor analysis with varimax rotation of our fifteen items produced three orthogonal factors. That is, the correlations among our survey's fifteen specific questions can be explained reasonably well in terms of three mutually independent, underlying dimensions. The relationships between these underlying dimensions, or factors, and the original items are indicated by each item's factor loadings (see Table 4). Factor loadings can be interpreted rather like simple correlation coefficients: the larger the absolute value of an item's factor loading, the better that item measures that factor. For example, the "interest in visiting sites/museums"

Table 4
Factors Loadings of Historical Interest Items

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
"General Interest in History" Items			
Interest in Visiting Sites/Museums	.83	.04	.24
Likely to Visit Sites/Museums	.81	−.12	.15
Interest in Colonial Sites	.60	.19	.13
Interest in Native American Sites	.55	.10	−.01
Importance of Explanatory Signs	.32	.16	.29
"Interactional Potential of Sites" Items			
Importance of Costumed Actors	.17	.70	−.12
Importance of Large, Colorful Displays	.02	.67	.16
Importance of Guided Tours	.01	.63	.01
Importance of Life-Size Displays	.08	.59	.19
Importance of Hands-On Displays	.11	.55	−.02
Importance of Audio Recordings	−.05	.46	.29
Interest in Homes of Famous People	.40	.46	−.16
"Appeal of the Military-Industrial Complex" Items			
Interest in Heavy Industrial Sites	−.03	.00	.85
Interest in Early Industrial Sites	.19	.06	.75
Interest in Military/Political Sites	.25	.06	.48
Eigenvalues:	3.371	1.981	1.463
Variance Explained:	22.5%	13.2%	9.8%

item is a better measure of factor 1 (.83) than of factor 2 (.04) or factor 3 (.24). Similarly, the "likely to visit sites/museums" item also loads strongest on factor 1. By contrast, "importance of costumed actors" loads strongest on factor 2, and "interest in heavy industrial sites" loads strongest on factor 3.

Once the items have been arranged according to their factor loading patterns, we can interpret the different factors by noting which items load strongest on each. Thus, based on the five items that load highest on factor 1, we interpret the first factor as something like "general interest in history." The second factor's items seem to involve the "interactional potential of sites," and the third factor might be called "appeal of the military-industrial complex."

Next, we used one-way analysis of variance to determine whether demographic groupings are nonrandomly associated with any of the three historical interest factors. As a preliminary step, each respondent's answers to the fifteen specific questions were recalculated as three "factor scores" (in which the coefficients of these data reduction formulas depend on the results of the foregoing factor analysis of items). Then, the mean factor scores of groups—groupings defined by one demographic variable at a time—were compared.

The results (see Table 5) show that neither home residence, educational level, household income, nor age is significantly associated with any of the three dimensions of historical interest. Sex, however, is related to respondents' scores on all three factors: weakly with "general interest in history," but fairly strongly with "interactional potential of sites" and "appeal of the military-industrial complex." In particular, women, as a group, score higher than men on the "interactional potential of sites" factor. Conversely, men score higher than women on the "appeal of the military-industrial complex" factor.

Lastly, we compared the 70 individuals who made numen-seeking comments on the open-ended question with all 185 other respondents (see Table 6). Although the numen-seekers are slightly more educated than the rest, analysis of variance shows no significant group-group differences on any of the five demographic variables. Shifting to the historical interest factors, the numen-seeking group scores significantly higher on the "general interest in history" factor, but does not contrast significantly with the rest of the sample on the second and third factors.

In short, numen-seeking is positively related to general interest in history, but it is *not* associated with one's desire for presentational bells and whistles, with the specific nature of the site, or with any obvious demographic characteristic. Thus, numen-seeking appears to be a peculiar turn of mind—an aspect of one's personality—independent of sex, age, education, income, or residence. Clearly, the personality

Table 5
Historical Interest Factor-Scores by Demographic Variables
(One-Way Analyses of Variance)

	Residence	Education	Income	Age	Sex
Factor Score 1: "General Interest in History"					
F-ratio probability	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	.0213
[a]Estimated ω^2	—	—	—	—	1.7%
Factor Score 2: "Interactional Potential of Sites"					
F-ratio probability	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	.0000
[a]Estimated ω^2	—	—	—	—	12.5%
Factor Score 3: "Appeal of Military-Industrial Complex"					
F-ratio probability	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	.0000
[a]Estimated ω^2	—	—	—	—	13.1%

[a]Estimated omega-squared is the appropriate 'strength of association' statistic for analysis of variance, and usually one does not calculate it unless an association is statistically significant. It can be interpreted in the same way as r^2, i.e., it approximately means percent of variance in the dependent (interval-scale) variable accounted for by the independent (nominal-scale) variable. See any elementary statistics text for its formula and discussion, e.g., Richard P. Runyon, Audrey Haber, David J. Pittenger, and Kay A. Coleman, *Fundamentals of Behavioral Statistics*, 8th ed., (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1996).

Table 6
Distinguishing Characteristics of Numen-Seekers
(One-Way Analyses of Variance)

	Mean of Numen-Seekers (n = 70)	Mean of All Others (n = 185)	*F*-prob.	Est. ω^2
Demographics				
Residence (coded 1–2)	1.37	1.36	n.s.	—
Education (coded 1–4)	3.01	2.72	.0581	1.0%
Income (coded 1–7)	4.48	4.58	n.s.	—
Age (coded 2–6)	3.94	3.91	n.s.	—
Sex (coded 1–2)	1.57	1.58	n.s.	—
Historical Interests (Factor Scores)				
General Interest in History	.2653	−.1004	.0091	2.3%
Interactional Potential of Sites	−.0476	.0180	n.s.	—
Appeal of Military-Industrial	−.0274	.0104	n.s.	—

characteristics that go with numen-seeking should be explored further in subsequent research.[16]

Summary

The survey confirms what the research mentioned earlier has found: that, in general, people are quite interested in history and heritage and that, while traveling, they are quite likely to visit a museum or historic site. As for what was essential at a site, the clear favorites were good signage and effective tour guides. However, people also rated interactivity highly: they said they wanted hands-on displays and role-playing actors. A study recently commissioned by the National Museum of American History (NMAH) found that

16. There are several areas in which subsequent research might profitably expand upon the exploratory work reported here. First, surveying a nationally representative sample would enable us to estimate the base frequencies of different visitor motives in the general population. At the same time, it would be desirable to compare findings from a multitude of site-specific visitor surveys. For example, some sites may attract relatively more numen-seekers than others, whatever the base frequency in the general population is. Second, we identified people as a numen-seekers depending on how they answered one open-ended question. If they were terse, in a hurry, or ill-at-ease with the interviewer, they may not have verbalized their true feelings sufficiently well for us to code them as numen-seekers. Longer, more typically ethnographic interviews might well identify more individuals as numen-seekers than did our single question. At least, such interviewing would have greater face validity and would most likely show a higher base frequency of numen-seekers than we found from our survey question. Lastly, subsequent research should pursue the question of what correlates with numen-seeking by including personality and life-history items as well as demographic variables. This advice is based on findings from our exploratory research.

interactive exhibits were in great demand, and that, conversely, text-heavy exhibits were generally regarded as too ponderous.[17]

Many of our respondents mentioned pragmatic considerations at historic sites with comments about physical and temporal access, restaurants, clean bathrooms, air conditioning, and parking. As is common knowledge among museologists, an effective exhibit can be undermined by mundane matters.[18] In addition, complex sites can be daunting. Visitors to large-scale museums or historic sites are often overwhelmed or confused by the layout and in need of orientation. The NMAH study mentioned above points out that people need and want an initial orientation regarding the content of the site so that they can make decisions about how to structure their visit.[19] In his review of the Motor City exhibit in Detroit, Olwell notes that parts of the layout are confusing to visitors; he observed, for example, that many people tried to leave the way they entered, not realizing there was a planned exit.[20]

The clear preference in our sample was colonial history, a finding that may be linked to the fact that, to date, Bethlehem has specialized in eighteenth-century Moravian history. However, it is also true that colonial sites such as Colonial Williamsburg, Historic Deerfield, Plimoth Plantation, Monticello, Mount Vernon, and others tend to have heavy visitation as compared to sites from other periods. If nostalgia is the driving force of our times, the appeal of colonial sites is easy to understand, for they represent the furthest going back in American history (although not the history of the continent) and, thus, a remote time. That period is also characterized by human-scale communities, artisanal work, and an organic connection with both people and nature, features that are viewed as missing in modern life.

Of the eight kinds of sites we asked about, heavy industrial sites were the least preferred, although probably not disliked. It is not clear whether this is peculiar to our sample or a more general trend among the museum-going public. We tend toward the latter view. This is not to say that an industrial museum cannot have appeal, and certainly there are some very successful ones such as the Detroit Motor City exhibit. However, such sites suffer from a recency effect: the operational industry is well within people's memory. It may be difficult to be sentimental or nostalgic for the work or occupational culture barely gone or even, in some cases, still in operation. Indeed, the locals may feel bitterness and anger about the demise of the industry. For others not involved in such work, the automobile plant, the

17. Randi Korn and Associates, "Discovering History in Artifacts."

18. Edward J. Bronikowski, "What Can Museums Learn from Attractions?" paper presented at Industrial History Museums Today conference, Lehigh University, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, March 27–28, 1998.

19. Randi Korn and Associates, "Discovering History in Artifacts."

20. Russell Olwell, "'Detroit—Motor City,' At the Detroit Historical Museum," *Technology and Culture* 37 (1996): 813–16.

steel mill, or the coal mine may not be appealing as places to visit for their size and scale, grit, and ostensible absence of the human element.[21]

Whereas people in our survey expected information at sites, they also valued authenticity highly. This was especially apparent in the first open-ended question about what kinds of things enhance a person's visit to a site; Figure 1 shows that the desire for authenticity is almost as often expressed as that for information. This desire was expressed sometimes simply as "authenticity" or "not commercialized" and other times with reference to specific artifacts or clothing style. The theme of authenticity appears often in the social science literature on tourism, as well as the research on the heritage movement.[22]

The most interesting finding of the survey was the proportion of respondents (27%) who spontaneously verbalized what we call the numen-seeking motive. Figure 2 shows that the numen impulse seems to break down into three kinds of affect: those who want to indulge in some harmless escapism (the "mental sabbatical" idea), those who want an experience with the real thing (authenticity), and those who want to make a highly personal connection with events or people of the past. It should be stressed that this numen-seeking motive is not necessarily exclusive of other motives.

In the final section, below, we situate the numen-seeking impulse in the context of present efforts to museumify the recent industrial past.

Discussion

There are several issues that make historic sites interpreting heavy industry problematic, and we would like to use the proposed National Museum of Industrial History being planned for Bethlehem to illustrate these issues.

21. In an article on industrial heritage in the U.K., Edwards and Llurdés i Coit note that size, degradation, and peripheral location detract from the public's image of industrial sites. J. Arwel Edwards and Joan Carles Llurdés i Coit, "Mines and Quarries: Industrial Heritage Tourism," *Annals of Tourism Research* 23 (1996): 341–63.

22. Cameron and Gatewood, "The Authentic Interior: Questing *Gemeinschaft* in Post-Industrial Society"; Richard Handler, "Heritage and Hegemony: Recent Works on Historic Preservation and Interpretation," *Anthropological Quarterly* 60 (1987): 137–41; Handler and Gable, *The New History in an Old Museum*; Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country*; Neil Asher Silberman, "Structuring the Past: Israelis, Palestinians, and the Symbolic Authority of Archeological Monument," in *The Archeology of Israel: Constructing the Past, Interpreting the Present*, ed. Neil Silberman and David B. Small (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 62–81.

Whether visitors to museums and historic sites really do want reality and authenticity is a moot point. Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory*, p. 626, suggests that Americans want a depoliticized and sanitized history and share "an impulse to remember what is attractive or flattering and [want] to ignore all the rest." Handler and Gable, *The New History in an Old Museum*, chap. 9, suggest that the problem lies more with curators who believe that the public wants a cleaned-up version of the past, what they call a "good vibes" approach to history.

One of these concerns which elements of the industrial past should be selected for interpretation. In the case of steel-making heritage, there are several possibilities. The first of these is the industry itself. Steel-making as it has transpired through this century is a dramatic and dangerous form of work. Indeed, many workers have been maimed or injured in the line of duty. Also, the scale of any integrated steel plant is enormous. For example, the Bethlehem plant runs for several miles along the Lehigh River. Further, making steel is a complex process, requiring specialized labor and technology. Elements of the process were worked out in the past by the brilliant engineers and inventors celebrated in published steel chronicles.

Beyond the industry itself, the story of steel making is also a story of people. In the steel chronicles just mentioned, the focus has usually been on the luminaries of the industry: the presidents, engineers, and managers. But others are part of the script, too. There are the workers who often came as immigrants from other lands, bringing their customs, language, and religion with them to cohabit with different incoming groups. The industry is also a saga of the organization of labor to address the problems of wages and working conditions.

Another element of steel making is the social and community-relations side. At its peak in 1945, Bethlehem Steel employed almost 24,000 workers in the plant and additional professional and clerical people in the administrative headquarters. Whether on the shop floor or in corporate offices, there was a complex of hierarchical and lateral relationships between workers and bosses and among workers themselves. As Leary points out, there were important management changes involving the consolidation of authority over production workers in industrial settings. He suggests that museologists should interpret labor processes "rendering the envelope of social relations surrounding production as transparent as the hardware of manufacturing technology."[23] In addition, throughout the history of the Bethlehem plant, a complex web of relationships has connected the company, the city, and Lehigh University—yet another story that bears telling.

For steel-making and industrial history more generally, there is the opportunity to capture either multiple or minimal narratives at a site. Decisions conditional on many factors—financing, public interest, and historical significance—influence the choices that are made, and, very likely, the success of the museum. Robert Weible, who discusses the history of choices made at Lowell National Historic Park, describes the many points of view and interest groups who came together over the years to make the Lowell story multivocal.[24] Contrasting with this, Donna DeBlasio's history

23. T. E. Leary, "The Vulture and the Owl—Museums and Industrial History," in *The Popular Perception of Industrial History*, ed. Robert Weible and Francis R. Walsh (Lanham, Md.: AASLH Library and Museum of American Textile History, 1989), 53–59, quote p. 56.

24. Robert Weible, "Developing Lowell National Historical Park," paper presented at the Industrial History Museums Today conference, Lehigh University, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, March 27–28, 1998.

of the Youngstown Steel Museum discusses a series of decisions that led to a pared-down narrative focusing on worker history and occupational culture rather than the many other possible stories.[25]

Heritage, of course, springs from something that is spent. Museums usually present things that were once, but are no more. In some cases, the present dies a "natural" death, gradually moving from one phase to the next. In other cases, what seemed timeless or time-honored is suddenly executed by extra-local forces. Much industrial heritage derives from recent production in the cities of the Northeast and Midwest now in the grip of deindustrialization. To what extent should social historians and curators include critical discussion in their exhibits of the forces that have created a swath of rust? Brian O'Donnell, in his evaluation of museums of four mill towns of the Northeast, thinks curators should include such discussion; he notes that many museums, however, give only cursory treatment of the end of local industries.[26]

Related to issue of narratives is the problem of ownership of industrial heritage. Does anyone or any one group own the intellectual, social, and technological capital of steel making? Might we want to focus on those provided the capital to build the plant, on the engineers and managers who made important decisions or inventions, or on the white- and blue-collar workers who toiled for wages? Academics (historians, anthropologists, folklorists, and anybody who specializes in the study of social history or "the folk") might want to imagine that industrial heritage is largely about the workers. But certainly steel-making cannot be construed as mainly vernacular or working class history in, say, the same way as coal mining. There were, of course, the venture capitalists and managers who financed and ran the coal mines, but the principal workers were the colliers themselves who did a few simple jobs (although dangerous and debilitating): digging in the mines below or sorting the chunks of coal above. In marked contrast with this, there is a highly specialized work force in the integrated steel plant—the legion of skilled plant and clerical workers, managers, engineers, and executives. Should any group be privileged in the construction of steel heritage or should everyone get their due? This is clearly an important decision point in the planning of a site.

Industrial museums that opt for the "big story," that focus on technology, the drama of the work, industrial products, and the brilliant men of the company, may have trouble engaging the public in an affective way. Our survey has found that many people want to achieve a transcendental experience at a historic site. We were not able to determine the correlates of numen-seeking in terms of any special characteristics except possibly a

25. Donna DeBlasio, "Politics and Practical Problems," paper presented at the Industrial History Museums Today conference, Lehigh University, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, March 27–28, 1998.

26. Brian O'Donnell, "Memory and Hope: Four Local Museums in the Mill Towns of the Industrial Northeast," *Technology and Culture* 37 (1996): 817–27.

general interest in history. But, as a study by Oubré suggests,[27] the numinous mind is distinctively human, separating human consciousness from that of other higher order animals. Further, citing Rudolf Otto, Oubré suggests that the capacity for transcendental thought lies latent in all humans, only waiting to be awakened by certain experiences or settings.

If numen-seeking is an integral aspect of consciousness, curators must ensure that a site has a strong component of the personal, the human side of the time period being represented, so that visitors can have the desired experience.[28] This goal is probably easy to achieve in, for example, colonial sites that feature costumed actors doing skilled work such as carpentry or butter churning, where visitors can easily imagine the pace and rhythms of life as it was in the past. Providing the personal will be more problematic at industrial history sites that feature cavernous buildings and mighty machines. In such settings, the temptation will be strong to concentrate on the awesome scale and power of the artifacts, but site designers need to consider balancing these elements with the human side—the workers, their occupational culture, and community life. In a tour that we took through a portion of the nearly empty Bethlehem Steel home plant, we noticed that our companions took special note (and photographs) of the remnants of worker life—a leftover set of Christmas lights, humorous graffiti, and an arresting locker room area (called the "welfare room") with hard hats and memorabilia left behind by those who had worked there.[29] The curious material remains of what had once been a vibrant plant made the workers and their activities palpable to the visitors on that tour.

Our survey found that at least 27% of the sample could be described as seeking a numinous experience in their visits to historic sites and museums. The best quotes used terms such as "developing a feeling for x," "connecting with the past," "using the mind to experience" revealing that what people want is to engage their minds and emotions with what they are viewing. The active numen-seekers certainly are willing to do their part to engage with their environment and, if Oubré is correct, potentially almost every visitor is equally willing to do so. This suggests to us that effective site design that builds in both cognitive and emotional interactive potential will have the greatest success in communicating to visitors. The same point is made by Rosenzweig and Thelen, whose respondents said they want history to be learned as an active and collaborative venture with a strong dose of the personal.[30]

27. Oubré, *Instinct and Revelation: Reflections on the Origins of Numinous Perception*.

28. Rosenzweig and Thelen, who surveyed over 1,400 individuals on their interest in and use of the past, repeatedly make the point that people value history that is personally familiar or relevant to them. Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

29. The tour was part of the Industrial History Museums Today conference, Lehigh University, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, March 27–28, 1998.

30. Rosenzweig and Thelen, *The Presence of the Past* (see chapter entitled "Afterthoughts" for this discussion).

Whereas museum organizations can use visitors' numen-quest to enhance people's experiences and possibly attract larger crowds, it is debatable whether encounters with numinous objects or places will produce, by themselves, a better understanding of history. Here is the real challenge for site designers and curators. Whereas numinous relics augment the psychological impact of displays, they do so in a piecemeal fashion. A vivid presentation does not guarantee full comprehension. Among a public that has been characterized as largely unfamiliar with the past, a site, however well presented, cannot fully educate the visitor. As Falk and Dierking point out, museums, in contrast to schools, are considered informal educational settings. Although their research suggests that it is difficult to know what will "stick" from a museum visit, they argue that previous experience and subsequent reinforcement enhances learning.[31] We would add that numinous sites can increase visitor excitement and enthusiasm. If visitors are sufficiently engaged and stimulated by their excursions into the unremembered past, perhaps they will be motivated to learn more subsequently. Thus, we believe the most effective approach to site design will be one that arouses affect while providing a cognitive framework for continued learning.

31. John Falk and Lynn Dierking, *The Museum Experience* (Washington, D.C.: Whalesback Books, 1992).