
THE OPEN AIR MUSEUM

Upper Canada Village & Shelburne Museum

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Nestled along the banks of the St. Lawrence River in Morrisburg, Ontario, Upper Canada Village transports visitors back in time to 1860s Post-Confederation rural life through total sensory immersion. Gravel crunches beneath the visitor's feet as he makes his way toward the village through the parking lot. The scent of freshly baked bread wafts in the air, and horses' hooves click rhythmically in the distance. These factors engage the visitor's senses and immediately immerse him in a lost era. Similarly, the Shelburne Museum in Shelburne, Vermont, also recreates the sights, sounds, tastes, smells, and textures of American social history from the colonial period to the turn of the twentieth century. Both spaces belong to the genre of open-air museums, and both attempt to plunge visitors into the sensualized environments of eras passed.

The visitor's first stop in Upper Canada Village is Beach's Sawmill. [See Figure 1] Perched above a babbling brook, the mill noisily and systematically cuts lumber at an unprecedented speed by means of a water-powered engine. Sawdust floats through the air before finally settling on the floor, while water condenses in the humid Indian summer air. Next to Beach's Sawmill is the Asseline Woolen Factory, which operates at full speed for maximum textile production. The pungent scent of wood and moldy wool form a unique aroma whose sensual properties are further heightened by the presence of a weaver who is busily working away. The first floor of the factory, one of Canada's earliest water-powered textile mills, cards wool by using the river beneath

it as its energy source. Giant spools of wool cascade from the upper floor, where sheep's wool is washed, dyed, and spun. [See Figure 2] Visitors are encouraged to touch the textiles, thus giving them insight into the textual subtleties of objects that are otherwise inaccessible through sight alone. Nearby, Bellamy's Grist Mill innovatively uses steam and waterpower to grind wheat into flour. Its finished product is delivered to the local Bakery where it is used to bake fluffy loaves of bread in the brick stone oven. The flour is further refined through the use of a two hundred year-old, thirty-ton quartz millstone from Ferté-sous-Louarre on the river Marne in France. The millers use the millstone to distribute white flour and midlings, otherwise known as wheat germ, in order to make the laboursome milling process accessible to the visitor. [See figure 3]



Figure 1: Beach's Sawmill cuts lumber by means of a water-powered engine



Figure 2: A weaver cards wool in the Asseline Woolen Factory



Figure 3: Refining flour on a millstone in Bellamy's Grist Mill

Unlike Upper Canada Village, the Shelburne Museum does not house a mill, sawmill, or a woolen factory. The landscape on which this museum of Americana has been built is quite urbanized. Its focal point is the museum's grand mansion that belonged to Electra Havemeyer Webb, heiress and wife of James Watson Webb, Sr., a Vanderbilt heir; Electra Havemeyer Webb founded the museum in 1947. The museum's *pièce de résistance* is an impressive collection of Impressionist paintings that are displayed in the mansion itself, the Electra Havemeyer Webb Memorial Building. Despite the Shelburne Museum's rich history, the museum's most popular and frequently visited exhibits are those that exhibit locomotion. Upon purchasing an admission ticket, the visitor strolls down a winding path through meticulously manicured English gardens. He eventually reaches the Circus Building, a horseshoe-shaped wooden barn which houses one of the world's most renowned miniature circus procession models. Here, the visitor can walk the length of the wooded Circus Building to marvel at the models, arranged in a parade formation, which represent the grand circuses that traveled from town to town during the nineteenth century.

As he leaves the Circus Building, the visitor passes by a carousel, which children giddily wait to ride. [See figures 4 and 5] Following a winding path, the visitor finally reaches the Railroad Station where Locomotive 220 is located. Locomotive 220, a coal-burning steam engine, carried numerous American presidents and heads of state including Calvin Coolidge, Herbert Hoover, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Dwight D. Eisenhower. The train also transported Prime Minister Churchill during his visit to Canada

and the United States in 1941; it is appropriately nicknamed the “President’s carriage”. Visitors are ushered inside the train, where a pristine mahogany interior adorns the lavish drawing quarters, several sleeping compartments, a sitting room, and a well-equipped kitchen. The aroma of old wood fills the visitor’s nose and captivates his senses. As he exits the locomotive, he crosses a set of train tracks and enters Railroad Station. There, he finds a post office, seemingly in media res, ready to send telegraphs and receive mail. [see figure 6]



Figure 4: Locomotive 220, the “President’s carriage”



Figure 5: The lavish interior of Locomotive 220

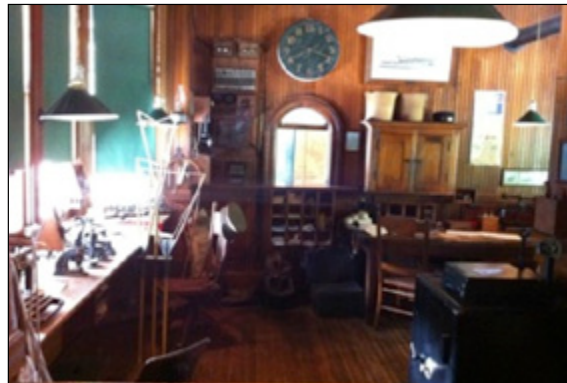


Figure 6: A post office is conveniently located in Railroad Station

After leaving the flourmill at Upper Canada Village, the visitor crosses over to the Bakery where the aroma of freshly baked bread wafts in the air and tantalizes his taste

buds. After the dough has risen sufficiently in a large aluminum tray, it is cut, placed into molds, and cooked in a brick stone whence the oven's bricks transfer heat to the lump of dough. The freshly baked bread follows a local trajectory; the flour is milled on site, baked nearby, and then served in the village inn and sold in the museum gift shop. The visitor's senses are perhaps most thoroughly engaged by following this local process. [see figure 7]



Figure 7: Bakers prepare to bake dough in a brickstone oven

Upon exiting the Baker's, the visitor stumbles upon the Cheese Factory, in which the pungent scent of unpasteurized milk saturates the air. Through a complex process involving rennet, cheese curds are pressed together; the products of this process, soft bricks of cheese, are then aged in a warm room for respective periods of time. [see figure 8] The cheese maker considers the gustatory properties of the cheese by informing the visitor that the two-month-old cheddar cheese that is processed in the village tastes like two-year-old aged cheddar cheese by present-day standards. After eagerly watching the process unfurl, hungry visitors are given samples of cheddar.

As the visitor continues to navigate his way through Upper Canada Village, his sense of smell inevitably leads him to Louck's Farm. [see figure 9] Located on the river bend, the Louck Family house epitomizes Victorian grandeur; its parlor, dining room, and numerous sleeping quarters suggest wealth and prominence. A stable, a cattle yard and a pigpen house many cows, goats, sheep, horses and pigs; visitors scurry

about to feed the cattle and livestock apples and hay. Soon thereafter, visitors reach the Physician's House, where ailing patients once paid the village doctor for house calls. The doctor's instruments are displayed in the sitting room next to his office, a testimony to the seemingly blood-curdling and barbaric medical practices of a by-gone era. [see figure 10]



Figure 8: The makings of cheddar cheese



Figure 9: A farmer speaks with curious visitors at Louck's Farm



Figure 10: Inside the Apothecary Shop

Like the Physician's House, the Shelburne Museum's Apothecary Shop has a similar disenchanting effect on visitors, where countless bottles fill cabinets, each with the promise of relieving a wide range of ailments. Pungent smelling salts sit atop a counter, waiting for curious visitors to test out their potency. An oversized mortar and pestle is nestled between a cash register and a display of soap, where the apothecary grinds various herbs and concocts remedies for ailments such as hair loss, liver weakness, and consumption. Nearby, the General Store houses countless household staples whose labels are fading away with age. [see figure 11] The musty scents of textiles, weather-beaten leather, and wood come together to form a most pungent aroma. In the middle of the room is a cast iron fireplace that serves as a central heating system; its giant pipe circulates heat throughout the building during the cold winter months. The town mailbox is located at the back of the General Store, where villagers would collect their letters and parcels. Spools of silk, men's socks, women's pantyhose, and black licorice and rock candy sit in large glass jars near the cash register.



Figure 11: Countless household staples can be purchased at the General Store

As the visitor ventures toward the southwestern side of the Shelburne Museum, he encounters the museum's *pièce de résistance* and most treasured exhibit. [see figure 12] In the middle of a grassy plain lies the steamboat Ticonderoga, one of the several passenger and freight ferries and excursion showboats that formed an integral part of New Englander high society in the 1920s. After ascending a long wooden ramp, the passenger boards the first story of the steamboat. Freight, including a red Durant touring car and a buggy filled with hay and produce, is stored here during the voyage across Lake Champlain. [see figures 13 and 14] The passenger is free to tour the steamboat's first floor in order to become acquainted with its rich history. He ventures around the workers' quarters and watches a short film that traces the arc of the steamboat from its creation to its recent restoration. After climbing a flight of stairs, the passenger enters the grand corridor, where plush, velour chairs line the mahogany walls. Natural sunlight streams through a series of skylights and casts shadows on the rich green carpet. On one side of the corridor are the steamboat's few staterooms, in which only the wealthiest passengers would board during their excursion. A luxurious, china-clad dining room is situated at the end of the hallway, where passengers once attended fancy feasts and afternoon teas while enjoying the spectacular view of Lake Champlain through panoramic windows. [see figure 15] The steamboat's kitchens and pantry are conveniently located beneath the dining room. Countless loaves of bread, eggs, bags of sugar and flour, evaporated milk and salted meat line the wooden countertops, ready to be mixed, prepared, and cooked into a mouthwatering feast at a moment's notice. Fruit and vegetables sit in crates on the periphery of the pantry, and kitchen staples such as lard and coffee beans stock shelves. A wood oven, a tin coffee canister, and a small icebox also occupy the space. The visitor imagines the plethora of sensoria of the kitchen as it prepared countless meals while the steam engine hummed gently in the background.



Figure 12: All aboard the Ticonderoga

The visitor leaves Upper Canada Village and the Shelburne Museum with renewed perspective about the socio-economic conditions that coloured the villagescapes during a time when processed cheddar cheese and mass-produced textiles were unbeknownst. Through the seamless flow of one exhibit into the next, the visitor himself becomes a villager. By reliving the sensations of these bygone Canadian and American societies, the past sensualizes the present.



Figure 13: Freight is transported across Lake Champlain on the steamboat's first floor



Figure 14: the grand hallway



Figure 15: The steamboat's pantry and kitchen are fully stocked and ready for the next meal service.



Figure 16: The view from the Asseline Woolen Factory, Upper Canada Village



Figure 17: The view from the upper deck of the Ticonderoga, Shelburne Museum