

TRADITIONS IN TRANSITION:
BASQUES IN AMERICA

by

Alissa Peterson

A thesis

submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Applied Historical Research

Boise State University

May 2009

© 2009

Alissa Peterson

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

BOISE STATE UNIVERSITY GRADUATE COLLEGE

DEFENSE COMMITTEE AND FINAL READING APPROVALS

of the thesis submitted by

Alissa Kathryn Peterson

Thesis Title: Traditions in Transition: Basques in America

Date of Final Oral Examination: 18 March 2009

The following individuals read and discussed the thesis submitted by student Alissa Peterson, and they also evaluated her presentation and response to questions during the final oral examination. They found that the student passed the final oral examination, and that the thesis was satisfactory for a master's degree and ready for any final modifications that they explicitly required.

Sandra Schackel, Ph.D.

Chair, Supervisory Committee

John Bieter, Ph.D.

Member, Supervisory Committee

Todd Shallat, Ph.D.

Member, Supervisory Committee

The final reading approval of the thesis was granted by Sandra Schackel, Ph.D., Chair of the Supervisory Committee. The thesis was approved for the Graduate College by John R. Pelton, Ph.D., Dean of the Graduate College.

DEDICATION

For my father, who encouraged me to pursue my dreams despite tragedy. For Brittany and Maria, for Liam, and for Jody, who gave me their unwavering love and support.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank the Basque Museum & Cultural Center's board, staff, and volunteers. Among them are the Curatorial Committee; Loni Manning, former Curator; and Patty Miller, Executive Director. I also wish to thank Dr. Sandy Schackel, Dr. John Bieter, and Dr. Todd Shallat who served as my thesis committee at Boise State University. Other individuals without whom this project would not have been possible include Jody Ault, Bob Boyd of the High Desert Museum, Mike Edminster, Xabi Otero, Dr. Alberto Santana of the Boise State University Basque Studies Department, and Brittany Wheeler of Philipse Manor Hall.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF AUTHOR

Alissa Peterson received her Bachelor of Arts in History with a minor in English from Bemidji State University, Bemidji, Minnesota in May 2005. Following the completion of this degree, Alissa interned as an historic interpreter at Great Camp Sagamore, a non-profit national historic landmark within the Adirondack State Park in upstate New York.

The Brattleboro Museum & Art Center in Brattleboro, Vermont, employed Alissa as a museum intern in 2007 before she returned to Great Camp Sagamore as the tour supervisor for the 2007 summer season. In August of the same year, Alissa moved to Boise, Idaho, to pursue her graduate degree in public history at Boise State University and earned a Master of Applied Historical Research in May 2009, with an emphasis in modern American history, public history, and museum studies.

During 2007-2008, Alissa worked as a museum curatorial intern at the Basque Museum & Cultural Center (BMCC) in Boise to provide the museum curator with project support, redesign exhibit text panels, and recruit and train docents for BMCC's new tour program. In the summer of 2008, Alissa accepted a fellowship at the Museums of Old York in York, Maine, as an Elizabeth Bishop Perkins Fellow and gave historic tours, conducted research, and presented a collaborative research project on visitor services at an August symposium in York. Upon her return to Boise in August 2008, Alissa began work to research, design, produce and install a new exhibit for the BMCC as a thesis project to fulfill her Masters degree.

ABSTRACT

The Basque Museum & Cultural Center's newest corridor exhibit, *Traditions in Transition: Basques in America*, is an interpretive exhibit based primarily on material culture artifacts, photographs and literature. The exhibit provides a physical and thematic transition between the museum's entryway exhibits and the main gallery exhibit.

Traditions in Transition uses six corridor cases to exhibit six topics under an overarching theme of Basque migration and expression of their ethnicity through various cultural artifacts, practices, and traditions. This pattern is common largely among European immigrant groups' later generations. The exhibit addresses how the Basque immigrants adapted these cultural practices to their new environment as a response to their migration from their home country to diaspora communities in the American West.

The exhibit connects these topics to contemporary issues such as environmental conservation and trans-national migration in the modern world. The six topics include: cultural beliefs; the Basques and their impacts on the environment; performance arts; traditional cuisine; the sporting life; and the evolution of Basque gathering centers. The interpretive narrative of this exhibit focuses on the Basque immigrant community in the American West and their ongoing connection to the Basque Country through traditional Basque folk culture. Basque-Americans often use these cultural practices and artifacts to symbolically express their ethnicity. The exhibit emphasizes the fact that the Basque-American culture in the American West was the result of a regional migration because most emigrants came primarily from the rural area of the Basque Country. The current

exhibit displays traditional cultural objects. The majority of these displays, however, has remained unchanged since 1993 and do not involve enough interpretation to effectively educate museum visitors. *Traditions in Transition* provides interpretive themes to engage and educate the public in conjunction with BMCC's mission to promote Basque history and culture.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF AUTHOR	vi
ABSTRACT	vii
I. INTRODUCTION: TRADITIONS IN TRANSITION	1
Introduction to the Basques: A Brief History	4
Philosophy of Public History: The Need for Interpretation	9
Controversy in a Museum: “Beliefs”	13
Exhibit in Process	17
Historiography	19
Interpretive Plan	22
II. METHODOLOGY: PHILOSOPHY OF IMMIGRATION	26
III. CONCLUSION	30
NOTES	34
BIBLIOGRAPHY	39

I. INTRODUCTION: TRADITIONS IN TRANSITION

The Basques who emigrated from the Basque Country and formed a diaspora community in the American West in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries brought with them specific cultural traditions from rural areas in the Basque Country.¹ But the Basques blended these “old world” traditions with their American environment to produce a syncretic form of culture that links them to their heritage. Basque-American cultural traditions represent nostalgia for an ethnic identity removed from time and space. The Basque Museum & Cultural Center’s (BMCC) newest exhibit, *Traditions in Transition*, showcases Basque-American cultural traditions and interprets them according to an approach to immigration practices that use cultural objects and traditions as symbols to express ethnicity, i.e. symbolic ethnicity. The scope of this exhibit covers the rural culture that the Basques brought with them during the peak years of their migration to the American West between 1880 and 1930.

The exhibit also exemplifies the changing nature of museums between 1993 and 2009 because BMCC’s previous displays included little or, in some instances, no interpretation. Recently, history museums have placed more emphasis on educational interpretation and sensitivity to visitors’ needs. *Traditions in Transitions* meets both of these goals. It is not without its challenges, however. Public historians work in a variety of jobs and institutions as historic interpreters, educators with children’s programs, curators, collections managers, writers, architectural preservationists, marketing

developers, and directors. They work at museums, archives, national parks, historic sites, consulting firms, and in government sectors. Public historians serve as translators between academia and the public; therefore, museum professionals have a duty to primarily provoke dialogue among visitors. Controversial issues that have the potential to offend visitors must be researched and interpreted carefully.

The Basque Museum & Cultural Center, founded in 1983, has a mission “to perpetuate, to preserve, and to promote awareness of Basque history and culture through education, research, collections and social activities for present and future generations.”² My search for a thesis project and BMCC’s plans to produce and install an interpretive exhibit about Basque culture in the American West by May 2009 mesh well. As a result, my task has been to research, design, and install a series of six corridor case exhibits at the museum. The exhibit includes the themes of immigration history and ethnic identity, and explores how these themes are connected to regional folk culture. The exhibit fulfills the museum’s pre-existing plan and qualifies as a thesis project for the Master of Applied Historical Research degree at Boise State University.

It is clear that BMCC is not simply a “local” ethnic museum. It is a museum that puts a regional ethnic and cultural group in the context of the larger cultural and historical fabric of the American West and European history. The exhibit shows the Basque migration from the Basque Country to the United States between 1880 and 1930 is comparable to other European immigrant groups’ experiences because the culture did not remain static – it became dynamic and changing as Basque-Americans established themselves in the American West. These exhibit topics have benefited from new scholarship in the twentieth century and they ask the question, who are the Basques? This

is the essential theme of the entry exhibit which serves as an introduction for visitors, especially for those who are unfamiliar with Basque history.

Introduction to the Basques: A Brief History

The Basques have no current independent political state in Europe. Instead, the Basque Country regional borders are split between provinces in northern Spain (*Hegoalde*, which includes the provinces of Bizkaia, Gipuzkoa, Araba, and Nafarroa, all of which have some degree of autonomy) and southern France (*Iparralde*, which includes the provinces of Laupurdi, Nafarroa Beherea, and Xiberua/Zuberoa) stretching from the Pyrenees Mountains to the Bay of Biscay.³ Basques participated in world exploration and in many cases set up far-flung Basque communities commonly known as the Basque diaspora in places such as Latin America, Australia, the Philippines, and the United States to which other Basques continued to migrate. This world migration occupies a prominent place in Basque history and shows that Basque culture, community and ethnicity are not limited to the Basque Country's regional borders.

There are two main phases of Basque migration to the Americas. Basque scholar William Douglass calls these patterns "old Basque migration" (pre-1880 to Latin America and from Latin America to California) and "new Basque migration" (post-1880 directly from the Basque Country to the American West or to Australia).⁴ From the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries, Basques participated in the Spanish conquest of Mexico and Latin America and emigrated from the Basque Country as merchants, explorers, conquerors, clergy, missionaries and settlers. Basque Jesuits also traveled the world spreading Roman Catholicism. In the twentieth century, Basques traveled to Australia as sugar cane workers.

Basques moved north to the American West as early as 1598 and became part of the first European settlement of New Mexico with Basque explorer Juan de Oñate. The

1849 Gold Rush also drew them north to California.⁵ It was only after 1880 that Basques migrated to the United States directly from the Basque Country during the peak years of European immigration to the United States. Because of the expanding sheep industry and the availability of herding jobs, Basque migration shifted east of California to areas in the Intermountain West.⁶

It is essential for visitors to understand the background of where these people came from in order to connect their European history to their experiences as a diaspora community seeking to promote and continue traditional cultural activities. The Basques' reasons for leaving their homeland were diverse; often it was because of changing economic conditions or family inheritance practices.⁷ In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Basques from rural areas on the Spanish side of the Basque Country faced harsh economic conditions during the Spanish Industrial Revolution and immigrated to the American West to take jobs as shepherders, for which they needed no prior experience or language ability. Rural areas in the early twentieth-century Basque Country "remained a traditional peasant economy," while the cities industrialized and Spanish workers moved north to Basque urban industrial centers to compete for jobs.⁸

Faced with this kind of competition from Spanish immigrants and the need to find other employment, single Basque men came to America for jobs. Single Basque women also came to the West to work in or operate boarding houses, which catered specifically to these shepherders. Shepherding and Basque boarding houses are impossible to separate in Basque history in the United States because they provide the basis for Basque immigration, economic, and social conditions in the West. Shepherding acted as the impetus to bring Basques from a specific region to the American West, and Basque

boarding houses provided the space and community in which these traditional regional cultural practices were insulated, promoted, and practiced in everyday life. Thus Basque immigration is comparable to other immigrant group experiences of the time, including how some twentieth-century Basque migrants also returned to the Basque Country.⁹ Many immigrants came to America with the intent of earning their “fortune” and returning to their home country. Some Basques did return to the Basque Country with their earnings, but like other immigrant groups who established themselves in America, many Basques stayed permanently in the American West.¹⁰

The Immigration Act of 1924 and the Taylor Grazing Act of 1934 were two key pieces of federal legislation that severely curtailed Basque immigration to the United States. The 1924 Immigration Act was a result of anti-immigrant sentiment that placed a limit on how many immigrants could enter the United States each year. Upon entering the United States, Basques were classified as either “Spanish” or “French” ethnicity; therefore, they fell under the Spanish and French quota numbers.¹¹ As a result, in 1929, the yearly immigration quota set by the United States allowed 3,086 immigrants of French national origin and only 252 immigrants of Spanish national origin to enter the United States. Both categories contained Basques.¹²

During the Great Depression, the federal government took an active role in regulating Western lands. This included passing the 1934 Taylor Grazing Act, which had significant consequences on Basque immigration and economy. Sheepherding was a major economic draw for Basques in the American West, but sheep grazing also contributed to ongoing ecological damage to the Western landscape.¹³ Prior to 1934, “itinerant” (independent) sheepherders were able to graze sheep on “millions of acres of

grazing lands” owned by the federal government. Basque shepherders and other stock growers had grazed on these lands free of charge for decades, which “resulted in serious deterioration of the rangelands.”¹⁴ Some Western stock growers and other proponents of the early twentieth century environmental conservation movement supported the federal government’s New Deal plan to protect grazing lands from further ecological damage. The result was the 1934 Taylor Grazing Act, which stipulated that stock growers needed to either own the land on which they grazed their herds or needed to obtain permits and pay a fee to graze on federal land.¹⁵ This act severely curtailed Basque immigration into the United States because it reduced the number of jobs in the sheep industry to immigrants. The change in the industry required ranchers and herders to commit to land ownership or leave the business.

Conservationists and New Deal policymakers viewed the Taylor Grazing Act as a positive act to promote ecological renewal; however, it had the effect of diverting Basque immigration to other regions, such as Latin America, Australia, the Philippines, and France. Until 1934, Basque culture shared more similarities with Basque culture in the Basque Country because of the large, direct inflow of immigrants. After 1934, many Basques could no longer secure employment as herders in the American West and non-English speaking Basques could not easily secure jobs in the United States in general. Thus Basque refugees from war-torn Spain lost opportunities for jobs in the West and instead migrated to other Basque diaspora communities.

In the twenty-first century, few Basques work as shepherders and most Basque boarding houses have shut down or been converted into other hotels and restaurants. But Basques still use shepherding and boarding house to celebrate and promote broader

Basque culture. This culture is seen as an integral part of their history, community and ethnic identity through exhibits at the Basque Museum & Cultural Center, festivals such as Jaialdi, gatherings such as the annual Shepherders' Ball, and dance groups, choral performances, and language classes. Many diaspora Basque communities continue to keep in close communication with Basques in the Basque Country.

Philosophy of Public History: The Need for Interpretation

Academic historians tend to write esoterically. The public historian's role is to translate those academic arguments into something educational and engaging so that the general public can more easily interpret these lessons in a non-academic setting, such as a museum. *Traditions in Transition* has been an experience in research, writing, interpretation, and exhibit design. In addition, the project also provided training in confronting the many challenges that accompany public history.

The public historian's task is to gather more information than the public can digest in a museum setting and therefore, decide how to interpret the information in the public's best interest. Public history must put the visitor's needs first, being careful not to overwhelm with too much information. Interpretation is essential because an overwhelmed visitor will not learn nearly as much as a visitor who encounters a concise and clear interpretive exhibit. Current museum pedagogy asks that curators consider visitors' needs and be aware of different learning styles. One effective way to accomplish this goal is through collaborative efforts by museum staff in producing an exhibit or interpretive plan. Above all, historical interpretation must be "*adjusted* to the learning styles of a mass audience, not diluted to a superficial presentation."¹⁶ To educate the public, museum exhibits should teach by repetition through variation. A museum exhibit should not include redundant information. It should concentrate on emphasizing a few key issues and repeat them using different visuals, wording, or phrases to cement them in a visitor's mind.

Public history emerged as a professional field in the 1970s and focused on academic training for public historians who worked in museums, archives, oral history,

and for local, state and the federal governments. Even though history museums have been part of the arts and cultural scene since the early twentieth century, by the 1970s, the writing of history was still largely limited to academia. Due to an employment crisis and a desire to expand the history field into the public venue, academic programs began turning training public historians. This would “ground students firmly in the knowledge and methodology of history” who would then work in public spaces to provide a bridge between academia and society’s perception of history.¹⁷ Trained historians then began to apply their training as curators, archivists, interpreters, and independent historians.

The public history field was dynamic, however, and it continued to undergo redefinitions throughout the late twentieth century. Even in the twenty-first century, museums are constantly undergoing change as they reconsider the relationship between museums, historians, and the public they serve. In a 2001 *Museum News* article, curator Nancy Villa Bryk considers the changing role of museum curators over the last few decades since public history emerged as an academic field in the 1970s. She asserts that until the early 1980s “historical perspective did not always embrace broader social interpretations,” and exhibits were “largely object-focused” with labels that included too much information that quickly overwhelmed visitors.¹⁸ According to Bryk, museum curators had been largely isolated from working with the educational or exhibit design departments; hence curators had no role in the conceptualization of exhibits.¹⁹

As historians in museums focused more on social history during this change, curators “learned to ask the ‘so what’ question...what did the objects say about larger issues that we, and our visitors, should care about?”²⁰ This is precisely the kind of change that BMCC’s corridor displays needed. G. Ellis Burcaw differentiates between a

“display” and an “exhibit” in this way: a display is “showing” objects, but an exhibit uses displays combined with interpretation in order to tell a story to educate an audience.²¹ An object on display – no matter how interesting or unique it is – will not educate an audience unless they feel a personal connection to it through history based on interpretation. Since 1993, BMCC’s corridor has housed *displays* rather than exhibits. *Traditions in Transition* uses many of those objects as well as interpretation to create an educational *exhibit*.

In a museum, public history uses educational and interpretive means to connect to visitors’ personal experiences. The tendency toward this mentality can be seen in “the trend toward greater emphasis on place-specific history and away from broad national topics which has brought city historical museums, neighborhood history societies, and other local history efforts to more prominence among public history venues.”²² Like the Basques, BMCC has multiple identities; it is a local history museum because its’ mission focuses on Basque history in the American West and seeks to promote community culture, but it is also an ethnic and an international museum as well as a local cultural center.

Interpreting public history in a museum presents its own set of challenges, particularly if an exhibit only presents a certain perspective. In Barbara Franco’s opinion, “audiences are often critical and distrustful of presentations that seem to offer only one viewpoint and prefer to make their own judgments from a range of possible interpretations.”²³ Curator Lonnie Bunch asks, “how should museums respond to cultural and political pressures” in the middle of debate, controversy, and competing ideas?²⁴ He argues that “the greatest danger [museums face] is not from threats to funding sources or

pressures from government officials, but from the profession's willingness to self-censor exhibitions...in order not to offend in this politically charged atmosphere."²⁵ Museum educators must also remember that an exhibit

"must be in good taste. Taste must be defined for each museum and each kind of visitor, but the designer must endeavor not to offend. He[/she*] must respect public mores, accepted standards of decency, the sensitivity of minorities and ethnic groups, religious beliefs, and similar areas of concern to museum visitors."²⁶*

Traditions in Transition must be sensitive to several factors, including BMCC's mission and its interpretive plan, visitors' expectations and cultural sensitivities, available historical objects, budget, space, and time limitations. The project consists of six exhibit cases that address a different topic though all are linked by a common theme of ethnic cultural identity. Although Basques have been aware of these cultural traditions for decades, this exhibit is a chance for the museum to present new interpretation to meet audiences' changing expectations. The current display cases have been housed in the BMCC gallery since 1993. The "Music," "Dance," and "Church" cases have been unchanged, containing the same objects and text with little interpretation. The "Strong Men" and "Ball Games" were two separate displays, but have since been combined into one case. The "Escola" and "Life on the Coast" cases were more recent additions, but they also lack interpretation. "Life on the Coast" was designed to accompany the main gallery's exhibit, "Basque Whaling: Danger and Daring on a Distant Shore," which opened in July 2007. By changing topics and using new interpretation, the new exhibits bring a fresh, new perspective to the museum and its visitors. This approach accommodates and anticipates the changing nature of the museum environment in the twenty-first century.

Controversy in a Museum: “Beliefs”

Some challenges in the exhibit process are unanticipated. One exhibit topic that was unexpectedly difficult to interpret was the content associated with “Beliefs.” This topic addresses pre-Christianity and Roman Catholicism in the Basque Country and Catholicism in the American West. During the preliminary research, BMCC’s curatorial committee cautioned that this was a subject that had to be researched, interpreted, and worded very carefully because of the personal and emotional ties the Basque community still holds to Catholicism. The issues are not whether or not Basques in the Basque Country practiced a pagan religion in the pre-Christian era, but 1) how long pagan rituals continued after the Romans introduced Roman Catholic Christianity to the region; 2) in what century the Basques converted to Christianity; and 3) whether or not paganism persisted in Basque traditions and daily life after the conversion.

Scholars are divided over competing interpretations on this subject. Some writers, such as Mark Kurlansky, believe that paganism coexisted as a religion with Catholicism in the Basque Country. Other scholars, such as Alberto Santana, ardently believe that the Basques rejected paganism when they embraced Catholicism. Finally, some scholars such as Rodney Gallop and William Douglass believe that elements of pagan culture survived in certain traditions, but that Basques no longer worshipped pre-Christian deities after the majority of the Basques converted to Catholicism.

In *A Book of the Basques*, Rodney Gallop claimed in 1930 that the Basques’ conversion to Roman Catholicism took place “in the neighborhood of the sixth century.”²⁷ Gallop also cited Nogaret who dated the Basque conversion to Christianity to the second century A.D., and Louis Colas, who claimed that the Basques converted fully

to Catholicism by the tenth century.²⁸ But Gallop reminds his audience that every European culture was pre-Christian at one point, and warns not to judge the Basques as pagan worshippers because of some of their folk practices.

In *A Basque History of the World*, Mark Kurlansky claimed that the Basques did not accept Roman Catholicism as a religion until the seventh century. Kurlansky also states that some scholars place Basque Catholic conversion in the tenth or eleventh centuries.²⁹ He writes that after this struggle, “Christianity slowly penetrate[d] Basque culture, and even then, Basque religious beliefs coexisted with Christianity for centuries. Some still survive.” As evidence for his theories of pagan and Catholic coexistence, Kurlansky claimed, “while everyone was Christian, the Basques worshipped the sun and the moon and a pantheon of nature spirits.”³⁰

The study of Basque legends also adds to the controversy. Jose Maria Barandiarán collected many Basque legends and folktales published between 1921 and 1946.³¹ As late as 1981, he wrote that, “although Christianity later came to occupy center stage for the Basques, many elements of the old world wisdom existed alongside or in the shadow of Christianity.”³² Elena Williams, however, asserts “the study of legends [in the early twentieth century] suffered from their identification with myth, which in turn suffered from their identification with religion and prehistory.”³³ Williams suggests that Barandiarán may have been too hasty to assign pre-history origins to these legends and “perhaps dwelt too much on the antiquity and origins surrounding these supernatural creatures, disregarding the fact that the stories also contain many modern elements contemporary to the time of their telling.” In essence, Williams reminds us that there is no concrete way to connect these legends to pre-history and therefore, they should be

interpreted according to their “social importance to the community.”³⁴ She further claims that Barandiarán “saw mythology as the key to reconstruct an ancient system of Basque religion, a goal that he later admitted was ultimately impossible to attain due to the fragmentary nature of the data.”³⁵

There may be another motive for perpetuating the idea that pre-Christian practices persisted in the Basque Country into the nineteenth century. When cities industrialized, “nineteenth-century nationalism condemned the cities and industries as the corruptor of authentic Basque values and idealized the rural life of farmers.”³⁶ Nineteenth and early twentieth century ethnographers who documented legends through oral history interviews wrote during an intensely pastoral romantic and nationalistic era and used rural Basque culture to legitimize Basque nationalism political claims in the early twentieth century.³⁷

Two pieces of primary source evidence support both theories. In *Amerikanuak*, Douglass and Bilbao cite an account of two Catholic pilgrims traveling to Santiago de Compostela whom the Basques harassed in the mountains.³⁸ “There is reason to believe that pagan beliefs continued to hold sway in the mountainous heartland of the Basque Country. As late as the twelfth century, two travelers [Catholic pilgrims] seeking to cross the Basque area reported harassment.”³⁹ The authors go on to write that it was common for travelers to fear Basques, who were “given to evil-doing.” Douglass and Bilbao also discuss historians’ disagreement on the paganism and Catholicism.

“Some authorities believe that even after Christianity penetrated the mountainous regions there continued to be pockets of pagan believers. In his 1957 *Vasconia medieval. Historia y filología*, Jose Maria Lacarra suggests that pagan and Christian communities coexisted for several centuries. Precisely when paganism was finally abolished among the Basques is unclear.”⁴⁰

Douglass and Bilbao still suggest that the Basques did not fully convert to Catholicism until the fifteenth century. Aimeric Picaud, a twelfth-century Norman pilgrim, witnessed a group of Basque peasants attend Catholic services in the village church, and then later encountered a group of the same men who proceeded to rob him. This experience “disillusioned” him into describing the Basques as “perfidious, faithless, corrupt, violent, [and] savage.”⁴¹

The controversial aspect of this subject implies the need for careful research and close examination of the evidence, since there are clearly two schools of thought regarding the persistence, or lack thereof, of pagan beliefs in contemporary Basque culture. From all the evidence and arguments regarding pre-Christian beliefs in the Basque Country, it seems logical to interpret that even though the Basques believe folk tales and mythical figures are true and make appearance in contemporary life, it does not necessarily mean that Basques worshipped them after their conversion to Catholicism. Still, there is not enough evidence to presume that pagan beliefs coexisted with Catholicism, even though Basques still allude and refer to mythic creatures in traditional folktales. On this topic, it is important to provide careful interpretation that does not ignore these contradicting theories. The museum must provide all perspectives preceded by the phrase “evidence suggests” in order to allow visitors to choose from multiple interpretations. Based on the current literature available, a conclusive interpretation is not possible based on the lack of available evidence.

Exhibit Process

The process for this exhibit involved all elements of installing a museum exhibit: researching, writing, designing and producing. In September 2008, BMCC granted permission to BSU, specifically the MAHR degree program, to redesign the current exhibit. The BMCC curatorial committee agreed to sponsor the project and approved the topics and the interpretive approach. In December 2008, the Pete Cenarrusa Foundation awarded BMCC a \$2,000 grant for the production and installation of *Traditions in Transitions*. This funding helped augment the cost of text panel production and photograph enlargements. BMCC's limited budget and lack of production department meant that the exhibit design and installation needed to be done in-house.

The next step was the necessary historical research to support the interpretive outline. This included researching immigration history, environmental history, religious history and cultural history. This research would need to be woven into an interpretive narrative in the exhibit text panels (labels). Because of the diverse audience who visit BMCC, including school groups and international visitors, the text labels reflect an eighth to tenth grade reading level to accommodate different learning styles. Museum educators at the South Dakota State Historical Society agree that writing text for the public at an academic level will discourage museum visitors from reading the complete text. Other museums, such as the Adirondack Museum, the Minute Man National Historic Park, and Old Sturbridge Village, follow this model of appealing to a high school reading level.

Exhibit labels needed to be concise, interpretive, provocative yet non-offensive, and appropriate and engaging for both children and adults. To accomplish this, the text consists of one or two pages per topic. The goal of this exhibit is to provoke audiences to

contemplate new ideas and understand concepts that will aid their knowledge of history, of culture, of the world around them, and of themselves because, as Burcaw asserts, “the end is not the collections, the museum, the exhibits, or even the viewing of exhibits. These are all means. The end is the change brought about in the minds of people.”⁴²

Historiography

There were several challenges in researching material for this exhibit. One challenge was checking the credibility of sources of Basque history. Much of the scholarship written before 1970 did not incorporate new information that was available to scholars after the death of dictator Francisco Franco in 1976. Because BMCC did not have immediate access to the Basque Country for primary sources, the research centered mainly on sources at the museum and scholarship available in the United States. The main sources were published in English, though some sources in Spanish proved useful.

BMCC's library resources housed most of the secondary source research material essential to the background of the exhibit, and I found primary source documents in their collections. Basque scholars, I discovered, often disagree, particularly on the date of the Basques' conversion to Roman Catholicism and the possible persistence of pagan practices in the Basque Country. Much of the secondary source literature dates no earlier than 1970, although folktales collected by early twentieth-century anthropologist and folklorist Jose Miguel de Barandiarán and eventually published as *A View from the Witch's Cave: Folktales of the Pyrenees*, and Rodney Gallop's 1930 *A Book of the Basques*, are valuable as primary source cultural observations.⁴³

Scholars writing Basque history write according to their academic discipline; they include historians, anthropologists, archaeologists, and folklorists. They also vary in their focus. A select few scholars write broad, sweeping histories, such as William Douglass and Jon Bilbao's 1975 *Amerikanuak: Basques in the New World*, a thorough overview of the Basques in world history. In 2007, Douglass and Joseba Zulaika produced *Basque Culture: Anthropological Perspectives*, another broad overview of Basque history from

an anthropological perspective. Two other important works that cover a broad Basque history are Basque scholar Gloria Toticagüena's 2004 *Identity, Culture, and Politics in the Basque Diaspora* and her 2005 *Basque Diaspora: Migration and Transnational Identity*. Writer Mark Kurlansky also adds to the general Basque histories with his 1999 *The Basque History of the World*.⁴⁴

Many scholars focus on regional and thematic Basque histories. These usually include studies that focus on a particular region, such as the Basque Country or diaspora communities in the United States. Rodney Gallop's *A Book of the Basques* is a primary source look at Basque rural culture in 1930. Paddy Woodworth's 2008 *The Basque Country* is similar in its scope; Woodworth includes history and current cultural practices from rural and urban Basque communities to provide an updated cultural study.⁴⁵

Diaspora community studies were also essential for cultural studies. John and Mark Bieter's *An Enduring Legacy: The Story of Basques in Idaho* provides an overview of Basque immigration and adjustment history in the American West, and is enhanced by Jeronima Echeverria's *Home Away from Home: A History of Basque Boardinghouses*.⁴⁶

Other sources fell under the category of case study specializations. In some cases, the research is often the domain of one or two experts in the field. For instance, Gorko Aulestia is the expert on *bertsolaritza* (Basque improvised oral poetry), Joxe Mallea is the expert on aspen tree carvings (*arborglyphs*), and Carmelo Urza is the expert on Basque sports.⁴⁷ Much of the primary source research for these topics does not exist in written form but instead consist of oral histories, videos of dances, tapes of choral performances and sporting events. Many studies of cultural practices are limited to journal articles. Articles found in *Basque Cultural Studies* and *Essays in Basque Social*

Anthropology and History are useful because they cover a broad array of cultural and historical topics.⁴⁸

Interpretive Plan

The interpretive plan for the exhibit involved researching a variety of subjects in order to understand cultural traditions in both the Basque Country and in the American West. It is clear that the Basques brought a specific rural culture with them to the United States and perpetuated this lifestyle as a way to maintain ties to their homeland and their identity. Over time, some traditions changed, creating a syncretic blending of Basque and American culture. The following case topics exemplify these important yet changing traditions.

The “Beliefs” case addresses physical elements (such as caves and stone markers) of early pre-Christian religion in the Basque Country as well as the Basques’ overwhelming conversion to Roman Catholicism in the medieval era. This topic provoked the most controversy among the curatorial committee because of numerous scholars’ lack of consensus on the date of the Catholic conversion and the disagreement about how seriously pagan beliefs fused with Catholicism in the Basque Country and for how long. After extensive research, it is clear that currently, there is no consensus on the date of Basque conversion to Catholicism, and due to lack of primary sources, scholars may never agree. Therefore, the subject is interpreted in a way that presents multiple perspectives in order to allow visitors to come to their own conclusions based on the evidence provided.

The “Basques and their impact on the Environment” case addresses the physical markers such as dolmens (stone slab sculptures) in the Basque Country and stone boys (large rock piles) in the American West that provide physical evidence of the Basques’ presence on the environment. Arborglyphs also show Basque herders’ desire to leave a

fingerprint on the landscape. This section also addresses the importance of Basque sheepherding in the American West and the issue of environmental preservation. Both “Beliefs” and “Environment” address the physical aspect of transitional cultural changes. The remaining cases address cultural ethnicity.

“Performance Art” is the first case visitors encounter that shows nostalgia for ethnic cultural traditions. It combines Basque dance, music, and *bertsolaritza*. This topic emphasizes the importance Basques place on festivals and celebrations that fostered community gatherings and includes traditional instruments, songs, and dance. Basques still make these performances an active part of Western life and conduct dance and choral practices and performances throughout the year. To accompany this case, BMCC plans to include a free-standing interactive kiosk to provide additional textual and audio-visual information of general history of Basque music, dance, and oral poetry.

“Traditional Cuisine” emphasizes ethnic groups’ importance on traditional food and drink. This is clearly evident in the Basque boarding houses where *hotelerak* (hotel matrons) worked to prepare familiar Basque food for sheepherders and their families in order to recreate a sense of place and home in their dining rooms. This case also addresses the importance of familiar food to new immigrants from the Basque Country just arrived at the Basque boardinghouses.

“The Sporting Life” also follows this theme of the importance of place in which Basques practice community activities. *Fronton* courts for Basque ball sports in the Basque Country were frequently built next to the local Catholic Church. This emphasized the important role of the church as a community gathering place. In the West, Basques built fronton courts next to Basque boarding houses which indicates the boarding house’s

important role as a Basque community center. The church used to be the place of community gatherings, but in the American West, the gathering places switched to boarding houses.

The last case, “Basque Community Centers,” depicts the importance of the Basque boarding house as the place in which Basques promoted traditional Basque culture, including food, card-playing, language, and dances. This was important to Basque shepherders who were laid off from their employment in the winter and stayed in the boarding houses during that time. As jobs in shepherding declined and fewer Basques immigrated to the United States in the second half of the twentieth century, most of these boarding houses closed. Basque centers that opened as clubs in the second half of the twentieth century then inherited the boarding houses’ role as networking venues and community centers that promoted cultural traditions and gatherings.

Traditions in Transition’s overarching theme shows changing cultural traditions and the search for identity through symbols of their ethnic identity.⁴⁹ The exhibit examines which cultural traditions and practices transferred to the American West with Basque immigrants and how subsequent generations attempted to preserve and promote these portions of their culture. By removing themselves from the Basque Country yet striving to keep cultural traditions and practices alive, Basques largely preserved a pre-1950s culture which subsequent Basque-American generations have embraced.

The Basques were not immune to assimilation, however. They did not fully embrace Americanization nor did they reject it; their current culture reflects a syncretic ethnicity with links to their heritage and a proud assertion of their Basque ethnicity. The Basques’ case study demonstrates that their experience was similar to other European

immigrant groups in their transfer of culture from the old world to their new environment. The exhibit also addresses contemporary issues such as the current Basque migration experience and the constant search for ethnic identity (symbolic ethnicity) through culture.

II. METHODOLOGY: PHILOSOPHY OF IMMIGRATION

Historian Oscar Handlin's 1951 *The Uprooted* was a significant work which provided a theoretical framework for immigration scholars. His premise suggested that European immigrants were forcibly "uprooted" from their ethnic and cultural homes and brought to the United States between 1880 and 1930 through forces beyond their control.⁵⁰ In 1985, John Bodnar added to Handlin's work by accepting some of Handlin's premises in his broad study, *The Transplanted*. Bodnar, however, alters immigration theory to suggest that instead of being "uprooted," immigrants and their culture were "transplanted" in the United States. Bodnar's thesis suggests that the motives for immigration to the United States largely affected how well they adjusted to life in a new environment. Bodnar rejects Handlin's idea that European immigrants had no choice in choosing jobs, places to live, or their immigration experience in general.⁵¹

Even though Bodnar did not include Basques in his study, historians can apply certain parts of his model to the Basque experience. Although he focused on urban rather than rural spaces, Bodnar's idea that "folk culture was simultaneously transformed and revitalized in urban America" still applies to Basques in the American West.⁵² If Bodnar considers places such as Boise, Idaho, an urban space, this part of his model epitomizes the Basque case because of the traditional regional folk culture that the Basques brought with them to the United States and revitalized based on their memory of cultural identity.

According to Bodnar, European immigrant groups who came to the United States between 1880 and 1930 (the peak period of immigration to the American West) depended

on family connections to adjust to life in their new environment. But he claimed that while fraternal ethnic organizations were important, they were not overly successful at maintaining group dynamics.⁵³ The Basque case fits the former theoretical framework, because familial relations were the driving force influencing so many Basques to move to the American West. Ethnic organizations, such as Basque boarding houses prior to 1970, were very influential in maintaining a Basque community. Basques developed fraternal organizations across the American West, such as Euskaldunak Inc. (the Basque Center in Boise, Idaho), an organization that has promoted Basque dance, gatherings, and events since its establishment in 1949.⁵⁴ In the late twentieth century, these centers are analogous to, if not the direct descendent of, Basque boarding houses in their efforts to maintain and promote Basque cultural traditions. In many cases, other immigrant groups were not as dependent on boarding houses as were the Basques. According to Jeronima Echeverria, Basque boarding houses were “unique among ethnic boarding houses” because they catered almost exclusively to Basques, functioned as job centers, translation centers, and provided other kinds of immigrant transition assistance.⁵⁵ Here, marriages were made and new Basque-American families were created.

Bodnar’s theoretical framework for European immigration is only partially successful as a model for the Basque experience. Basques remained strongly Catholic, although Bodnar claims that in America, the Church was a place for disagreement and conflict, and clerical power could not withstand the driving forces of capitalism and ethnic nationalism.⁵⁶ In the Basques’ case, the Catholic Church was not a place of strife. Instead, Catholicism was and remains a major part of their identity. Basque ethnicity, which includes Catholicism, is symbolic and dependent on cultural emblems that Basques

use to identify themselves as ethnically Basque outside of the Basque Country. Symbolic ethnicity often applies to immigrants who came in a regional or chain-migration pattern. The subsequent generations who felt or feel even more removed from their original country of origin than their parents' and grandparents' generation often rely on cultural symbols in order to "formulate and bolster their ethnic identity."⁵⁷ According to Herbert Gans, these are "easy and intermittent ways of expressing their identity, ways that do not conflict with other ways of life."⁵⁸ Thus, subsequent generations of hyphenated Americans, such as third-, fourth-, or even fifth-generation Basques, retain elements of their ethnic culture, such as cuisine, dance, music and language, as well as embrace the benefits of American modernity.⁵⁹ Gans asserts that this immigrant culture is largely adaptive, and stresses that most of the third immigrant generation came of age during the 1970s "ethnic revival" and searched for the ethnic identity of their grandparents which they could (symbolically) embrace.⁶⁰

Historian Werner Sollars puts this "memory" into context when he warns scholars to beware of holding too tightly to the idea that traditional European culture, or "folk culture," was by any means ancient and unchanged. He called traditional culture such as folktales, costumes, and superstitions "neo-traditions," which are tied to modern nationalism of the late nineteenth century. Sollars subscribes to Benedict Anderson's idea of "imagined communities" emerging as a cultural construct and asks scholars to accept the fact that traditions are now a part of history; therefore, they must not be discounted.⁶¹ Virginia Yans-McLaughlin also contributes to the immigration discussion by asserting that popular theories such as the "melting pot" imagery, cultural pluralism, and assimilation are too simplistic and too broad to fit *all* immigrant groups and experiences

in the United States. Instead, she promotes the idea that immigrant groups who came to the United States networked among themselves to create their own opportunities.⁶²

No one theory in its entirety fits the Basque model even though it is similar to other immigration patterns. As an immigrant experience, the Basque case must be further deconstructed to understand that theirs, like other European immigrant groups in this period, was a *regional migration*. Most Basques in the American West came from rural areas of the Basque Country, and they brought that specific culture with them. It is also important to consider the idea that these cultural practices promised some sort of security (as familiar reminders of home) in an insecure situation, and that most of the immigrants were primarily rural peasants or farmers. In the later half of the twentieth century, after Basque immigration ceased on a large scale, Basques were trying to reconcile these pre-modern peasant traditions to a post-modern identity in both the United States and in the Basque Country. If ethnic identity is indeed a cultural construction and communities are “imagined,” the Basque diaspora example demonstrates this in their desire to connect to historical memory.⁶³

III. CONCLUSION

Museums have undergone important changes in recent decades. No longer do museums seek to limit themselves to a simple display of various artifacts. Instead, museums now consider different learning styles and work to accommodate them in their thematic exhibits. Interpretation is essential to turn an object-based display into an educational and engaging exhibit. This new public history approach set the tone for the necessary research in Basque scholarship. The exhibit *Traditions in Transition* allows audiences to connect with the Basques' ethnic experiences, some of which may be similar to their own. It shows the persistence of a group that continues to use symbols to proclaim its ethnicity through music, dance, oral poetry, cuisine, sports, and community centers. The Basques are only one example of an immigrant group who transplanted their traditions to a new environment in the transition from a distinctly Old World view to a new, blended culture.

At the Basque Museum & Cultural Center, the museum corridor provides the physical transition for visitors and leads them through the thematic and chronological journey the Basques took as they migrated to the United States. This entry exhibit already provides visitors with important background information about the Basques, such as their physical place of origin, their language, and some of the economic forces behind Basque emigration. The corridor exhibit interprets Basque cultural traditions for the visitor and prompts them to question their assumptions of immigrant cultural identity and assimilation practices. It demonstrates that the Basques' symbolic ethnicity allowed them

to maintain their ethnic identity by promoting and practicing the exhibited cultural traditions. The transition that the Basques underwent when they immigrated to the American West was similar to Bodnar's analogy of a "transplanted" group. The symbolic traditions lay dormant for a large number of first and perhaps second generation Basque immigrants as they established themselves in the United States. But for later generations of Basque-Americans who sought to embrace ethnic identity, these traditions gained strength as symbols of a Basque ethnic heritage.

Challenges for public historians emerged from this project and exhibit process. These challenges provided a learning experience in how to address issues such as limitations in scholarship, sensitive cultural issues, and visitor needs. Above all, the exhibit attempts to fulfill the public historian's mission to educate the public in a non-academic setting. It also fulfills BMCC's mission to promote Basque history and culture in a new era. Visitors to the museum will benefit from new interpretation and the emphasis on a thematic exhibit rather than a display case full of historical objects.

The exhibit is a set of new and refreshed topics linked by the theme of Basque culture in a diaspora community. It uses specific examples (dance, cuisine, sports, economy and religion) to explore themes of immigration, culture, symbolic ethnicity, and assimilation to the ethnic group's host environment. Even though the Basques occupy their own place in World and American history, Basque scholarship is still relatively specialized. Further research is needed on subjects that have received little attention from scholars, such as sports; and on subjects that numerous scholars have addressed, such as Catholicism and mythology in the Basque Country. There is no clear evidence to form conclusive interpretation about the date of Basque conversion to Catholicism; therefore, a

multi-discipline approach in archaeology, anthropology, and history is necessary to address the debate. In many instances, symbolic ethnicity is an acceptable framework with which to study the European immigrant experience in America.

Scholars can continue to use symbolic ethnicity to frame their arguments on Basque immigration, culture, and assimilation because the Basques' transition to the American West was not without American cultural infusion. Basque culture was also influenced by elements of collective memory, nostalgia, cultural materials, and the local environment. Job availability, federal legislation, and local community networks also shaped their opportunities. Like many other immigrant experiences in America, Basque culture blended Old World traditions with their local environment to create a hybrid culture. But as elements of their old culture began to slip away due to time and physical separation from Europe, Basques in the American West used local materials and memory to continue to practice their cultural traditions in order to maintain their ethnicity, albeit symbolic. But these traditions move beyond the museum; BMCC is also a cultural center that perpetuates Basque dance and language classes, and the Basque centers in the American West continue to perpetuate many cultural practices.

It is important to show that there are several Basque immigration stories. Basques emigrated to diaspora communities worldwide after the Spanish conquest of the Americas in the fifteenth century, and their migration continues into the twenty-first century. Family connections, heritage curiosity, cultural exchange programs and institutional-sponsored academic programs contribute to a new kind of trans-national migration in the Basque communities. The majority of the Basque diaspora community in the American West was settled by Basques who migrated directly from the Basque

Country. It is thus easier for them to imagine a community link with their country of origin and proclaim themselves “Basque” because of their shared heritage. For Basque-Americans, their immigration demonstrates a transition from original culture to syncretic and largely symbolic traditions. This experience is at the heart and purpose of the Basque Museum & Cultural Center’s newest exhibit, *Traditions in Transition*.

NOTES

¹ Basques from different regions migrated to different parts of the American West, often because of family connections or a shared Basque language dialect. For instance, Basques currently in Idaho emigrated primarily directly from the Bizkaia region of the Basque country. Basques currently in California emigrated from the French Basque provinces.

² Official mission statement of the Basque Museum & Cultural Center, Boise, Idaho.

³ For the duration of this study, I will use the Basque spelling of names where possible, such as “Bizkaia” instead of its Spanish equivalent, “Vizcaya.”

⁴ William Douglass, “Factors in the Formation of the New-World Basque Emigrant Diaspora,” *Essays in Basque Social Anthropology*, William Douglass, ed. (Reno: University of Nevada Basque Studies Program, 1989), 255.

⁵ Jeronima Echeverria, “*Euskaldun Adreak: Basque Women as Hard Workers, Hotelaras, and Matriarchs,*” *Writing the Range: Race, Class, and Culture in the Women’s West*, Elizabeth Jameson and Susan Armitage, eds. (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 299.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 300.

⁷ In the rural Bizkaian province in the Basque country, the family passed the farm (*baserri*) to the child of their choosing instead of automatically passing to the eldest male child. The other family members who did not inherit the farm needed to find alternate means of earning a living, and sheepherding in the American West in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries provided a source of income either to return to the Basque Country, send money home to help the *baserri* in hard economic times, or carve out a new life for themselves in America.

⁸ Jacqueline Urla, “Reinventing Basque Society: Cultural Difference and the Quest for Modernity, 1918-1936,” *Essays in Basque Social Anthropology*, William Douglass ed. (Reno: University of Nevada Basque Studies Program, 1989), 151.

⁹ Douglass, “Factors in the Formation of the New-World Basque Emigrant Diaspora,” 261.

¹⁰ John Bieter and Mark Bieter, *An Enduring Legacy: The Story of Basques in Idaho* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2000), 41, 42.

¹¹ Mae M. Ngai, “The Architecture of Race in American Immigration Law: A Reexamination of the Immigration Act of 1924,” *Journal of American History* V. 86, no. 1 (June 1999), 74.

¹² *Ibid.*, 69-70, 74.

¹³ In Europe, the Basques altered the physical landscape around them for different purposes. In the Basque country, one can still find *cromlechs* (rock circles that date from the Bronze Age, 1,500 – 800 B.C.) and *dolmens* (stone sculptures that date from the Neolithic Age, 5,000 – 2,000 B.C.) on open areas of the landscape; William Douglass and Joseba Zulaika. *Basque Culture: Anthropological Perspectives* (Reno: University of Nevada Center for Basque Studies, 2007), 52, 53. The people who built these sculptures and who drew on cave walls had a very close relationship to the natural world, just as Basque sheepherders did

in the American West. In a similar fashion, Basque sheepherders built *harri mutiliak* (stone boys, similar to stone cairns) in Oregon and Nevada. These stone piles usually measured no higher than six feet and often marked boundaries and acted as landscape guides for sheepherders. There is, however, no way to tell who built the stone boys without oral history, through which Basque sheepherders identify the stone boys they built. Because herders built many of these stone boys on mountaintops or in places that did not need a physical marker, some scholars speculate that herders built them for similar purposes as aspen tree carvings: in order to leave a physical reminder of their presence in the wilderness; Alberto Santana, Director, Boise State Basque Studies Program, interview by author, 10 October 2008, Boise.

Scholars are able to compare and contrast stone boys in the American West and cromlechs and dolmens in the Basque country, but little has been done to study arborglyphs in the Basque country. Joxe Mallea maintains that there has been documented work on carvings on beech trees in the Basque country, but it only warrants a footnote in his research. More research needs to be done to address this aspect of European environmental impacts: where and on what the carvings are found, and for what reason people carved them. For instance, beech trees (on which Basques in the Basque country carved images) do not grow in the American West, but they look similar to aspen trees; Joxe Mallea-Olaetxe, *Speaking Through the Aspens: Basque Tree Carvings in California and Nevada* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2000), 16, 189n.

The exhibit highlights arborglyphs because many visitors have never seen or even heard of them. Preserving arborglyphs also preserves an historical legacy of Basque sheepherders. These arborglyphs are evidence that Basques were a part of the wilderness rather than simply mutilators of it while sheepherding. This story shows the complexity of a “populated wilderness,” because even though herders maintained a close relationship with nature, they caused ecological damage to the landscape.

The wilderness in which Basques spent their summers tending sheep was a place of isolation; however, it also represented a major part of their livelihood as sheepherders. Joxe Mallea-Olaetxe, researcher and leading authority on arborglyphs, has documented over twenty thousand arborglyphs in the American West; Joxe Mallea-Olaetxe, *Speaking Through the Aspens: Basque Tree Carvings in California and Nevada* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2000). The presence of sheep bands (quite often as many as 1,500) also impacted the natural landscape by overgrazing and trampling the natural environment. To ignore these carvings, and the ecological effects of sheep grazing, is to pretend that this particular history did not occur, which does an injustice not only to the environmental history of the West, but also to the memory of these sheepherders. The landscape that these sheepherders occupied and the aspen groves in which they carved their names, the date, their place of birth, or images provides contemporaries with anything but a “barren” landscape that is suggested by popular notions of American wilderness.

Basque sheepherders’ interaction with nature demonstrates that wilderness that includes human interaction can still be “wilderness.” Part of the goal of the exhibit is to dispel what environmental historian William Cronon calls the notion that “the dream of an unworked natural landscape is very much the fantasy of people who have never themselves had to work the land to make a living” because “the romantic ideology of wilderness leaves precisely nowhere for human beings actually to make their living from the land;” William Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness, or Getting Back to the Wrong Nature,” *Environmental History*, V. 1, no. 1 (Jan 1996), 17. It may seem that Basque sheepherders had little impact on American history because they were isolated from civilization; in fact, their efforts and contributions impacted the West. Therefore, they occupy a place in American, environmental, local, and Basque history. With this in mind, it is necessary to include visuals for museum visitors to help them understand that “wilderness...is limited to the remote corners of the planet, or that it somehow depends on pristine landscapes we ourselves do not inhabit;” William Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness,” 24.

Studying these arborglyphs and stone boys is a way for scholars and visitors to recognize the Basques’ presence in American history. Hikers, tourists, hunters, locals, historians, and environmental preservationists who view these carvings also interpret them differently. Some viewers think arborglyphs are a type of graffiti or vandalism, while others believe arborglyphs are valuable historical records, cultural documents, and examples of folk art in the American West. These carvings contain highly emotional words, phrases, and images that expressed the sheepherders’ moods, feelings, frustrations, or philosophical thoughts; Joxe Mallea-Olaetxe, *Speaking Through the Aspens*, 4, 10. It is relatively easy to connect the idea that isolated and lonely sheepherders looked upon these aspen trees as potential canvasses as a way to record their presence in the region, because, as Mallea indicated, “inscribing [their] name on trees was the herders’ response to [their] environment;” Joxe Mallea-Olaetxe, *Speaking Through the Aspens*, 23.

The issue is not whether or not people should continue to carve arborglyphs. The point of the exhibit is simply that these carvings, whatever they may be, represent a form a history (a type of literal “living history”) that is in danger and in need of preservation. In the exhibit, a text label includes the question, “Would you carve your name on a tree?” to try to get visitors to identify on a personal level with these sheepherders’ experiences and understand why they might have carved trees as a method of self-expression. This exhibit is meant to provoke these kinds of questions and engage visitors in a dialog about expanding or exploring the reasons behind their own viewpoints, as well as to consider (but not necessarily require them to agree with) multiple perspectives.

¹⁴ Gerald Nash, *The Federal Landscape: An Economic History of the Twentieth-Century West* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1999), 32; Bieters, 82-83.

¹⁵ Nash, *The Federal Landscape*, 32.

¹⁶ Mark Howell, “Interpreters and Museum Educators: Beyond the Blue Hairs,” *Public History: Essays from the Field*, James B. Gardner and Peter S. LaPaglia, eds. 1999, Revised edition (Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing Co., 2004), 143.

¹⁷ Constance B. Schultz, “Becoming a Public Historian,” *Public History: Essays from the Field*. James B. Gardner and Peter S. LaPaglia, eds. (Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing Co., 2004), 33; fields of historical studies, such as minorities’, environmental and women’s history, expanded in the 1970s as social upheaval dominated the era. New approaches to the field included the need to employ historians beyond the university and a need to reconnect the public with an academic understanding of history. Patricia Mooney-Melvin, “Professional Historians and the Challenge of Redefinition,” *Public History: Essays from the Field*. James B. Gardner and Peter S. LaPaglia, eds. (Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing Co., 2004), 13, 14.

¹⁸ Bryk, Nancy Villa. “Reports of Our Death Have Been Greatly Exaggerated: Reconsidering the Curator,” *Museum News*, 2001. Acquired 10 June 2008, http://www.aam-us.org/pubs/mn/MN_MA01_ReconsiderCurator.cfm.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

²¹ G. Ellis Burcaw, *Introduction to Museum Work*, 3rd ed (New York: Altamira Press, 1997), 129.

²² Barbara Franco, “Public History and Memory: A Museum Perspective,” *The Public Historian*, V. 19 no. 2 (Spring 1997), 66.

²³ Barbara Franco, 67.

²⁴ Lonnie Bunch, “Embracing Controversy: Museum Exhibitions and the Politics of Change,” *The Public Historian*, V. 14 no. 3 (Summer 1992), 63.

²⁵ Lonnie Bunch, “Embracing Controversy,” 64.

²⁶ G. Ellis Burcaw, 131.

²⁷ Rodney Gallop, *A Book of the Basques*, 44.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 45n.

²⁹ Mark Kurlansky, *The Basque History of the World*, 36, 38.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 36.

³¹ Elena Arana Williams, "Basque Legends in Their Social Context," 107.

³² Luis de Barandiarán Irizar, ed. *A View from the Witch's Cave: Folktales of the Pyrenees*, xii.

³³ Elena Arana Williams, "Basque Legends in Their Social Context," *Essays in Basque Social Anthropology and History*, ed. William A. Douglass. Basque Studies Program Occasional Papers Series, No. 4 (Reno: Basque Studies Program, University of Nevada, 1989), 108.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 108.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 108.

³⁶ Jacqueline Urla, "Reinventing Basque Society: Cultural Difference and the Quest for Modernity, 1918-1936," 153.

³⁷ Elena Arana Williams, "Basque Legends in Their Social Context," 124 n.1; Jacqueline Urla, "Reinventing Basque Society," 158.

³⁸ European Catholic pilgrims frequently traveled to the tomb of St. James (Santiago de Compostela) from the ninth century to the Protestant Reformation. Pilgrims could sail directly to northwest Spain, but another route was through the Pyrenees and risk passing through Basque territory. Basques had a medieval "reputation for rapacity at worst and unfriendliness at best," according to Aimery Picaud's *The Pilgrim's Guide to Santiago de Compostela*. Rachel Bard, "Aimery Picaud and the Basques: Selections from The Pilgrim's Guide to Santiago de Compostela," *Essays in Basque Social Anthropology and History Anthropology*, ed. William Douglass (Reno: University of Nevada Basque Studies Program, 1989), 189, 192.

³⁹ William Douglass and Jon Bilbao, *Amerikanuak*, 44.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁴¹ Gallop, *A Book of the Basques*, 45, 46. Aimeric picaud's "Codex Compostellanus." Because of this account, Gallop places the Basques' conversion to Catholicism around the sixth century.

⁴² G. Ellis Burcaw, 133.

⁴³ Gallop, Rodney, *A Book of the Basques*, 1930, Reprint (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1970); *A View from the Witch's Cave: Folktales of the Pyrenees*, ed. Luis de Barandiarán Irizar, collected, with a prologue by Jose Miguel de Barandiarán. Foreword by Josefa Zulaika, trans. Linda White (Reno: University of Nevada, 1991).

⁴⁴ William Douglass and Jon Bilbao, *Amerikanuak: Basques in the New World* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1975); William Douglass and Joseba Zulaika, *Basque Culture: Anthropological Perspectives* (Reno: University of Nevada Center for Basque Studies, 2007); Gloria Toticagüena, *Basque Diaspora: Migration and Transnational Identity* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2005); Gloria Toticagüena, *Identity, Culture, and Politics in the Basque Diaspora* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2004); Mark Kurlansky, *The Basque History of the World* (New York: Penguin Putnam, Inc., 1999).

⁴⁵ Rodney Gallop, *A Book of the Basques*; Paddy Woodworth, *The Basque Country: A Cultural History*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁴⁶ Bieters, *An Enduring Legacy*; Jeronima Echeverria, *Home Away from Home: A History of Basque Boardinghouses* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1999).

⁴⁷ Gorko Aulestia, *Improvisational Poetry from the Basque Country*, trans. Lisa Corcostagui and Linda White (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1990); Joxe Mallea-Olaetxe, *Speaking Through the*

Aspens; Carmelo Urza, "Basque Sports: the Traditional and the New," *Basque Cultural Studies*, eds. William A. Douglass, Carmelo Urza, Linda White, and Joseba Zulaika, Basque Studies Program Occasional Papers Series, No. 5 (Reno: Basque Studies Program, University of Nevada, Reno, 1999).

⁴⁸ *Basque Cultural Studies*, William A. Douglass, Carmelo Urza, Linda White, and Joseba Zulaika, eds. Basque Studies Program Occasional Papers Series, No. 5 (Reno: Basque Studies Program, University of Nevada, Reno, 1999); *Essays in Basque Social Anthropology and History*, eds. William A. Douglass. Basque Studies Program Occasional Papers Series, No. 4 (Reno: Basque Studies Program, University of Nevada, 1989).

⁴⁹ According to Herbert Gans, symbolic ethnicity is often "free from affiliation with ethnic groups and ethnic cultures, and instead dominated by the consumption of symbols, for example at ethnic restaurants, festivals, in stores that sell ethnic foods and ancestral collectibles, and through various trips to the Old Country," Herbert Gans, "Comment: Ethnic Invention and Acculturation, a Bumpy-Line Approach," *Journal of American Ethnic History*, v. 12 no. 1 (Fall 1992), 44.

⁵⁰ Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted: The Epic Story of the Great Migrations that Made the American People* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1951).

⁵¹ John Bodnar, *The Transplanted*; Oscar Handlin, *Boston's Immigrants, 1790-1880: A Study in Acculturation* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1959), 37.

⁵² John Bodnar, *The Transplanted*, 185.

⁵³ John Bodnar, *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 71, 130.

⁵⁴ William Douglass and Joseba Zulaika, *Basque Culture: Anthropological Perspectives* (Reno: University of Nevada Center for Basque Studies, 2007), 173.

⁵⁵ Jeronima Echeverria, "Euskaldun Adreak," 301.

⁵⁶ John Bodnar, *The Transplanted*, 166.

⁵⁷ Herbert Gans, "Symbolic Ethnicity: The Future of Ethnic Groups in America," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* V. 2 no. 1 (1979), cited in Lisa Corcostegui, "Moving Emblems: Basque Dance and Symbolic Ethnicity," *Basque Diaspora / La Diaspora Vasca*, William A. Douglass, Carmelo Urza, Linda White and Joseba Zulaika, eds (Reno, University of Nevada Press, 1999), 250.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Bieters, *An Enduring Legacy*, 120.

⁶⁰ Gans, 45.

⁶¹ Werner Sollars, *The Invention of Ethnicity* (New York: University of Oxford Press, 1989), x, xv.

⁶² Virginia Yans-McLaughlin, *Immigration Reconsidered: History, Sociology, and Politics* (New York: University of Oxford Press, 1990) 5, 6, 12.

⁶³ Ethnicity as a cultural construction in the modern sense means that there is a consciousness and awareness of ethnicity expressed through ethnic symbols (either concrete objects or so-called "traditional" practices) and choice of embracing ethnicity.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Aulestia, Gorko. "The Basque *Bertsolari* in the New Millenium," *Basque Cultural Studies*. William A. Douglass, Carmelo Urza, Linda White, and Joseba Zulaika, eds. Basque Studies Program Occasional Papers Series, No. 5. Reno: Basque Studies Program, University of Nevada, Reno, 1999.
- , *Improvisational Poetry from the Basque Country*. Lisa Corcostagui and Linda White, trans. Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1990.
- Bard, Rachel. "Aimery Picaud and the Basques: Selections from *The Pilgrim's Guide to Santiago de Compostela*." *Essays in Basque Social Anthropology and History Anthropology*. William Douglass, ed. Reno: University of Nevada Basque Studies Program, 1989.
- Baroja, Julio Caro. *The World of Witches*. Weidenfeld and Nicolson 1964, trans. Reprinted London: Orion Publishing Group Ltd. 2001.
- Basque Cultural Studies*. William A. Douglass, Carmelo Urza, Linda White, and Joseba Zulaika, eds. Basque Studies Program Occasional Papers Series, No. 5. Reno: Basque Studies Program, University of Nevada, Reno, 1999.
- Basque Diaspora / La Diaspora Vasca*. William A. Douglass, Carmelo Urza, Linda White and Joseba Zulaika, eds. Reno, University of Nevada Press, 1999.
- Bieter, John and Mark Bieter. *An Enduring Legacy: The Story of Basques in Idaho*. Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2000.
- Bodnar, John. *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985.
- Boyd, Robert G., William A Douglass, Richard W. Etulain, Jeronima Echeverria, Robert Echeverria, Thomas McClanahan, David Romtvedt, and Linda White. *Amerikanuak! Basques in the High Desert*. Bend, Oregon: The High Desert Museum, n.d.
- Brochu, Lisa and Tim Merriman. *Personal Interpretation: Connecting Your Audience to Heritage Resources*. National Association for Interpretation: InterPress, 2002.

- Bryk, Nancy Villa. "Reports of Our Death Have Been Greatly Exaggerated: Reconsidering the Curator," *Museum News*. 2001. http://www.aam-us.org/pubs/mn/MN_MA01_ReconsiderCurator.cfm. Acquired 10 June 2008.
- Bunch, Lonnie. "Embracing Controversy: Museum Exhibitions and the Politics of Change." *The Public Historian* V. 14 no. 3 (Summer 1992): 63-65.
- Burcaw, G. Ellis. *Introduction to Museum Work*. 3rd ed. New York: Altamira Press, 1997.
- Cronon, William. "The Riddle of the Apostle Islands: How Do You Manage a Wilderness Full of Human Stories?" *Orion*, V. 22 no. 3 (May-June 2003): 36-42.
- , "The Trouble with Wilderness, or Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," *Environmental History*, V. 1 no. 1 (January 1996): 7-28.
- Crosby, Alfred W. *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492*. 30th Anniversary Edition. Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003.
- Douglass William. "Factors in the Formation of the New-World Basque Emigrant Diaspora," *Essays in Basque Social Anthropology and History*. William A. Douglass, ed. Basque Studies Program Occasional Papers Series, No. 4. Reno: Basque Studies Program, University of Nevada, 1989.
- Douglass, William A. and Jon Bilbao. *Amerikanuak: Basques in the New World*. Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1975.
- , *Basque Shepherders of the American West: A Photographic Documentary*. Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1985.
- Douglass, William and Joseba Zulaika. *Basque Culture: Anthropological Perspectives*. Reno: University of Nevada Center for Basque Studies, 2007.
- Echeverria, Jeronima. *Home Away from Home: A History of Basque Boardinghouses*. Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1999.
- , "Euskaldun Andreak: Basque Women as Hard Workers, *Hoteleras*, and Matriarchs," in *Writing the Range: Race, Class, and Culture in the Women's West*. Elizabeth Jameson and Susan Armitage, eds. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997.
- Essays in Basque Social Anthropology and History*. William A. Douglass, ed. Basque Studies Program Occasional Papers Series, No. 4. Reno: Basque Studies Program, University of Nevada, 1989.

- Euskaldunak: la Etnia Vasca*. San Sebastian: Etor, 1985.
- Fillmore, Colleen Asumendi. *Basques of Boise: Adult Dietary Culture and Tradition*. Saarbrücken, Germany: VDM Verlag Dr. Müller, 2008.
- Franco, Barbara. "Public History and Memory: A Museum Perspective." *The Public Historian*, V. 19 no. 2 (Spring 1997): 65-67.
- Gallop, Rodney. *A Book of the Basques*. 1930. Reprint. Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1970.
- Gans, Herbert. "Comment: Ethnic Invention and Acculturation, a Bumpy-Line Approach." *Journal of American Ethnic History*, v. 12 no. 1 (Fall 1992): 42-52.
- Handlin, Oscar. *Boston's Immigrants, 1790-1880: A Study in Acculturation*. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1959.
- Handlin, Oscar. *The Uprooted: The Epic Story of the Great Migrations that Made the American People*. Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1951.
- Howell, Mark. "Interpreters and Museum Educators: Beyond the Blue Hairs." *Public History: Essays from the Field*. James B. Gardner and Peter S. LaPaglia, eds. 1999. Rev. ed. Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing Co., 2004.
- Hoyt, Audra. "History in the Trees: the Basque Arborglyphs of Idaho and 'the Grove on Grove Street.'" Masters Thesis, Boise State University, 2007.
- Irigaray, Louis. *A Sheepherder Watches, A Sheepherder Sings: Growing up a Basque Shepherd in California's San Joaquin Valley*. New York: Doubleday, 1977.
- Kurlansky, Mark. *The Basque History of the World*. New York: Penguin Putnam, Inc., 1999.
- Lertxun Marrak: Basque Tree Carvings*. Center for Basque Studies, University of Nevada, Reno. <http://basque.unr.edu/trees/thumbnails1.htm>. Acquired 18 January 2009.
- Limerick, Patricia Nelson. *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1987.
- Mallea-Olaetxe, Joxe. "Carving Out History: The Basque Aspens." *Forest History Today*, (Spring/Fall 2001): 44-50.
- . *Shooting from the Lip: Improvised Basque-Verse Singing*. Reno: North American Basque Organization, 2003.

- . *Speaking Through the Aspens: Basque Tree Carvings in California and Nevada*. Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2000.
- Miller, Patty, Executive Director, Basque Museum & Cultural Center. Interview by author, 9 December 2008. Boise.
- Mooney-Melvin, Patricia. "Professional Historians and the Challenge of Redefinition." *Public History: Essays from the Field*. James B. Gardner and Peter S. LaPaglia, eds. Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing Co., 2004.
- Ngai, Mai M. "The Architecture of Race in American Immigration Law: A Reexamination of the Immigration Act of 1924," *Journal of American History*. V. 86 no. 1 (June 1999): 67-92.
- Nash, Gerald D. *The Federal Landscape: An Economic History of the Twentieth-Century West*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1999.
- Olin, John C. "The Idea of Pilgrimage in the Experience of Ignatius Loyola." *Church History*, V. 48 no. 4 (December 1979): 387-397.
- Otero, Xabi. *Euskal Herria, Esentziak*. Nafarroa: Txoria Errekan.
- Portraits of Basques in the New World*. Richard W. Eultain and Jeronima Echeverria, eds. Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1999.
- Public History: Essays from the Field*. Edited by James B. Gardner and Peter S. LaPaglia. 1999. Revised edition. Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing Co., 2004.
- Santana, Alberto. "Chapels." *Euskal Herria, Esentziak*. Edited by Xabi Otero. Nafarroa: Txoria Errekan.
- . Director, Boise State Basque Studies Program. Interviews by author, 10 October 2008 and 6 February 2009. Boise.
- . "Furniture." *Euskal Herria, Esentziak*. Edited by Xabi Otero. Nafarroa: Txoria Errekan.
- Constance B. Schultz. "Becoming a Public Historian." *Public History: Essays from the Field*. James B. Gardner and Peter S. LaPaglia, eds. Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing Co., 2004.
- Sollars, Werner. *The Invention of Ethnicity*. New York: University of Oxford Press, 1991.

- Tilden, Freeman. *Interpreting our Heritage*, 3rd ed. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1977.
- Toticagüena, Gloria. *Basque Diaspora: Migration and Transnational Identity*. Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2005.
- . *The Basques of New York: A Cosmopolitan Experience*. Center for Basque Studies, Basque Diaspora and Migration Studies Series. Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2004.
- . *Boise Basques: Dreamers and Doers*. Reno: Center for Basque Studies, University of Nevada, Reno, 2004.
- . *Identity, Culture, and Politics in the Basque Diaspora*. Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2004.
- Urbeltz, Juan Antonio. "Folklore." *Euskal Herria, Esentziak*. Xabi Otero, ed. Nafarroa: Txoria Errekan.
- Urla, Jacqueline. "Reinventing Basque Society: Cultural Difference and the Quest for Modernity, 1918-1936." *Essays in Basque Social Anthropology and History*. William A. Douglass, ed. Basque Studies Program Occasional Papers Series, No. 4. Reno: Basque Studies Program, University of Nevada, 1989.
- Urza, Carmelo. "Basque Sports: the Traditional and the New." *Basque Cultural Studies*. William A. Douglass, Carmelo Urza, Linda White, and Joseba Zulaika, eds. Basque Studies Program Occasional Papers Series, No. 5. Reno: Basque Studies Program, University of Nevada, Reno, 1999.
- U.S. Congress. House. "Wilderness Act of 1964." Public Law 88-577, 88th Cong., 4th sess., 3 September 1964.
- A View from the Witch's Cave: Folktales of the Pyrenees*. Luis de Barandiarán Irizar, ed. Linda White, trans. Reno: University of Nevada, 1991.
- Weidel, Nancy. *Sheepwagon: Home on the Range*. Glendo, WY: High Plains Press, 2001.
- Williams, Elena Arana. "Basque Legends in Their Social Context." *Essays in Basque Social Anthropology and History*. William A. Douglass, ed. Basque Studies Program Occasional Papers Series, No. 4. Reno: Basque Studies Program, University of Nevada, 1989.
- Woodworth, Paddy. *The Basque Country: A Cultural History*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Xamar. *Orhipean: The Country of Basque*. Pamplona-Irunea, Nafarroa: Pamiela Argitaletxea, 1992.

Yans-McLaughlin, Virginia. *Immigration Reconsidered: History, Sociology, and Politics*. New York: University of Oxford Press, 1990.