PART I: INTRODUCTION

The first time I heard the title of this conference, I pictured barren parking lots and abandoned industrial complexes being redeveloped and transformed into productive sites. Later I thought in systemic terms, about a drought-ridden Texas oak, restored with life, and in turn, the potential to support a myriad of life around it.

These are ripe analogies for considering the sustainability of cultural institutions. The ultimate challenge for cultural institutions is to sustain their relevance in the world around them in order to play a critical role in their larger ecology. Yet, all too often, cultural institutions become gray, dust-covered and stagnant over time. This paper focuses on the greening of one particular heritage museum – the Pioneer Museum in Fredericksburg, Texas – and the quest to restore it with activity, purpose and contribution to community and quality of life.

While often thought about in physical terms (as a repository for a collection of artifacts) cultural institutions serve as guardians of both tangible and intangible culture and of our relationship to these resources.

The role of cultural institutions is even more critical in a post-industrial age, in which our objectives extend beyond the goal of turning raw product into consumable goods. Educator Ken Robinson talks about how our new tools are those things that inform and engage our imagination; then our imagination becomes our ultimate tool for problem-solving.¹ Cultural institutions are a ready set of such tools, but these have value only if we actively put them to use.

If, indeed, cultural institutions have so much potential, how is it that many find themselves leading a rather gray existence? Is there a connection between this situation and the graying of our environment and cultural landscapes? What are the human factors in these equations?

Our understanding of the natural world and our impact within this world is dynamic. For argument’s sake, let’s assume that we are increasing our knowledge of ecological systems, population impact and climate change. Why then, in the 21st century, do we appear to be on a path to abusing our natural resources and natural systems even more aggressively than did past generations?

It is, perhaps, because of the paradox that in developed societies, day-to-day actions are driven more by social and cultural wants than by basic needs for survival. We’re moving up Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs², yet our approaches remain heavily object-based – based in the tangible – rather than idea-based. Stated in more direct terms, we are promulgating a culture of consumption in our pursuit for fulfillment. As we heard in an earlier conference session, no one likes to be told he needs to do without. Assuming this is true, cultural institutions can help promote a shift toward re-discovering the value of the intangible aspects of culture, such as identity, story, ritual, and human relationships, and how these can provide an understanding of the world around us and a source of fulfillment along the way.

I will outline three observations as to why our relationship with the physical world is in a state of transition. Each suggests something about the importance of cultural institutions.

First, in the last few generations, there has been a rapid erosion of cultural knowledge among people living in the developed world. By cultural knowledge, I refer to the knowledge that a community or culture acquires by living and sustaining itself in a particular place over time. (Others refer to this as traditional knowledge, indigenous knowledge or local knowledge.³) Modernity blesses us with many conveniences, but this also means developed society is often disconnected from the natural resources that support it. The process of understanding natural systems and cycles becomes abstract, rather than rooted in first-hand experience. We often don’t know where resources come from -- water comes “from the tap” or “from the bottle.”

Second, we are increasingly mobile. The average person moves many more times in his lifetime than in generations past. He also moves resources around the planet with astonishing speed. We don’t have to be in relationship with a specific natural environment the way past generations did.

Third, we have modified our physical landscape and developed our virtual landscape such that it seems to be a 21st century condition that we are “lost” a fair amount of the time. We can fill our time, our space and our mental landscape with information – internet, cable, junk mail – to a point of tremendous distraction. In the quest for meaning, we often find ourselves in a quagmire of too much information, too many facts and not enough wisdom.

The Role Of Cultural Institutions In The 21st Century
These observations help explain a collective disconnect between general populations and cultural institutions. They suggest that we are still learning how to harness the potential of information technology in order to affirm relationships with the world around us. In this context, the physical space of a museum is important not only as a symbol or a repository, but also as a dynamic framework in which one can better understand the relationship between tangible and intangible resources, and can exist both as a part of a local community and a global one.

To illustrate these ideas, I will share with you the work that I’ve been doing, in conjunction with Overland Partners, for the Pioneer Museum in Gillespie County in the Texas Hill Country, approximately 75 miles west of Austin.

The Pioneer Museum is a heritage museum operated by the Gillespie County Historical Society, a non-profit organization formed in 1934. Largely volunteer-driven, the society operates with a full time staff of two, four part-time staff members, a team of paid docents and numerous volunteers. Over time, the activities of the Pioneer Museum have become a form of “social glue” in the town of Fredericksburg, and the museum site has become a repository for displaced historic buildings.

The challenge of the Pioneer Museum is one of sustaining a critical role within the community as the community changes and the economy shifts from agriculture to tourism (including heritage tourism, agritourism and recreational tourism). The Hill Country has become both a temporary and permanent retreat for more and more people, impacted by the growth of the nearby cities of Austin and San Antonio. Popular publications have named Fredericksburg a top destination for retirement. Yet even with this growth, museum visitation and membership stagnated during the 1990s and early 2000s. As more people were coming to Fredericksburg, a smaller percentage were visiting the museum or participating in its activities.

I will describe the physical nature of the site, its buildings and collections, as well the planning process undertaken, but first, let me offer a brief history of Gillespie County with some comments about how community sustainability can be seen through this lens.
PART II: GILLESPIE COUNTY HERITAGE

Texas in the Mid 19th Century

Figure 3: Map of Spanish Texas with orange rectangle indicating the approximate location of Gillespie County. Source: “Spanish Missions, Presidios, and Roads in the 17th and 18th Centuries”. Source: Adapted from Herbert E. Bolton, Texas in the Middle Eighteenth Century, University of California Press, 1915. Copyright 1976, Board of Regents. The University of Texas Systems. All Rights Reserved.

The land of Gillespie County was recognized in the 18th and early 19th centuries as part of “Comanchería,” the domain of the Comanche Indians. It was not widely opened to settlement under land grants during the Spanish or Mexican rule over Texas.

Like the governments of Spain and Mexico that preceded it, the Republic of Texas, established in 1836, saw that encouraging settlement of Texas by immigrants from the United States and Europe was a way to establish a protective buffer between settlements in the eastern part of the state and the Comanche to the west. The newly formed Republic sent agents to Europe, who acted on behalf of the State, and in some cases for their own benefit, promoting the promise of Texas.

By the 1830s Germans, especially those who made their lives farming, were beginning to experience the negative effects of the Industrial Revolution: small farms could no longer compete with increasingly mechanized productions, nor could cottage industries that had been used to provide supplemental income. Political tensions, overpopulation, high taxes, the desire to own property, to avoid military service and to gain religious freedom also supported decisions to leave the homeland. Embarking on a journey in which there were many unknowns (especially given the slow and limited means of communication at the time) required a capacity for adventure; thus it was difficult for many German emigrants whose families had been rooted in the same town or village for innumerable generations. Perhaps, it is from this idea that a pattern emerged: many sought to recreate stable communities and were intent upon establishing the cultural traditions and opportunities known to them in the cities, towns and villages they left behind.

In 1842, a group of Germans formed the Mainzer Adelsverein, the Society of German Noblemen, first organizing themselves around the purchase of a land grant west of San Antonio. They intended to create a German colony in Texas that would alleviate overpopulation and
poverty (primarily among farming classes in Germany) and to harvest natural resources for export back to Europe.

Prince Carl von Solms was appointed commissioner-general and soon began to advertise throughout Germany. Only after his arrival in Texas (July, 1844) did he realize that the grant was expired; further, the Texas Republic would not renew it. Back in Germany, the Adelsverein quickly negotiated the purchase of a second grant, known as the Fisher-Miller grant, from Henry Fisher, a German native and the Official Consult of the Republic of Texas. Assured by Fisher that the land (which included more than three million acres between the Colorado and Llano Rivers) could be developed for 80,000 Texas dollars, the Adelsverein continued with their plans.

When the grant was purchased, neither Fisher nor any member of the Adelsverein had ever seen the land, nor did they compute that it was in the heart of Comanche territory. In 1844 German newspapers advertised that the Adelsverein, for a fee, would provide Texas-bound emigrants with transport, acres of land and material aid.

Journey and Arrival
In December 1844, three ships (the Johan Detthart, the Herschel, and the Ferdinand) carrying 700 colonists arrived through Galveston to the port of Carlshafen (later Indianola). In haste to secure settlement rights, however, the Adelsverein failed to address that the land had not been surveyed, a condition of settlement (established by the Republic of Texas) that would come at no small cost. Newly arrived immigrants wanted to complete the long journey inland to the land they would settle, but they were forced to camp in temporary shelters in the vicinity of the port.

As a stopgap measure, Prince von Solms purchased 800 acres along the Comal River, north of San Antonio for use as a way station and temporary settlement. By March 1845, the first group settled New Braunfels and received the land at no cost, since they were still unable to settle the land in the Fisher-Miller grant. Having completed part of the goal of settlement, Prince von Solms resigned his position, and Baron von Meusebach (who would take the name John O. Meusebach) became the second commissioner-general.
When Meusebach took his appointment, the Adelsverein were in a dire financial position. In November 1845, he received word that some 4,303 colonists were departing from Germany. Galveston and Carlshafen were both suffering from overcrowded conditions and outbreaks of cholera and yellow fever. Realizing that a second stopgap colony was needed, Meusebach and a survey party traveled inland to select a site between New Braunfels and the Fisher-Miller land grant. After selecting the site that would become Fredericksburg, Meusebach resolved to move colonists there as soon as possible, perceiving it to be far healthier than the disease-ridden coast.

Although idealistic and poorly organized, the Adelsverein brought 7,380 immigrants to Texas from the period 1844 to 1846. From the arrival of the first settlers in Fredericksburg in May of 1846 to the start of the Civil War, Gillespie County would absorb thousands of German immigrants arriving from the ports of Galveston and Carlshafen, as well as from other ports in the United States.

**Settlement**
Meusebach’s descriptions of the lands that became Fredericksburg indicate that the quality of water, stone and timber were important to its selection as a place of settlement. In the spring of 1846, 120 men, women and children made the 16-day ox cart trip from New Braunfels to settle the town of Fredericksburg.

The town began to reveal transposed German characteristics: laid out like a village on the Rhine River, it had one long street roughly paralleling Town Creek. Initially, buildings were constructed as simple frame structures with walls of upright cedar posts. Settlers soon began to build permanent structures of *fachwerk* (which combined timber, rock and plaster) and eventually, buildings of heavy limestone block.

The first permanent building constructed by the town was the Vereins Kirche, an eight-sided *fachwerk* structure that served as a school, social hall, fortress and house of worship for the various faith congregations represented. The fact that congregations shared a common house of worship speaks to the communal efforts made with the few resources assembled at that time. This multi-purpose building became the emblem of the fledgling Fredericksburg community.

Figure 5. View of Fredericksburg, from the late 19th century, showing the original Vereins Kirche located in what today is the middle of Main Street. Courtesy of the Gillespie County Historical Society.

**The Meusebach-Comanche Treaty**
Although Fredericksburg had begun developing as a town, the Adelsverein were still intent upon surveying and settling the Fisher-Miller lands; conditions of the grant required that the land be

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4 Ibid.
surveyed and settled by the fall of 1847. In January 1847, a treaty party of 40 men, including German settlers, American surveyors and Mexican interpreters journeyed into the Comanche territory to meet with tribal leaders. Accomplished within a few months, the treaty assured continued trade between the Comanche and the pioneers and made it possible to survey the land of the Fisher-Miller grant. By this time, the Adelsverein was bankrupt; many who had obtained land in the original grant sold it, preferring to settle instead in or near Fredericksburg, which had begun to serve all residents of Gillespie County as an economic, as well as socio-cultural and religious center, much as it continues to do today.

![Figure 6. Painting of the Meusebach-Comanche Treaty agreement, depicted by the granddaughter of John O Meusebach. Courtesy of the Gillespie County Historical Society.](image)

**Settlers Continue to Come to Texas**

Other settlers came to Gillespie County. Assured by the religious tolerance of the new German community, the Mormon community of Zodiac was founded in Gillespie County in 1847 by Lyman Wight and 200 followers. Although it endured only until 1851, the settlement, which included the first sawmill in the county, played an important role in establishing the economy of the county. Zodiac became a principal supplier of seeds, lumber and flour for the growing communities of Fredericksburg and Fort Martin Scott.

In 1848, the U.S. government established Fort Martin Scott two miles east of Fredericksburg, providing another level of protection from Comanche attack on the frontier, and fueling the economy of the growing town, including trade activity between pioneers and Comanche. Soldiers and town residents did not always get along; an argument between soldiers and town folk led to a fire that destroyed the records of the town from its first years in existence.

With the signing of the treaty ending the Mexican-American War, Fredericksburg became important as the last stop of the Emigrant Road connecting San Antonio to El Paso. Many travelers used this road on their journey west following the California Gold Rush in 1849.

**Traditions Renewed and Adapted**

Immigrants brought many social traditions and practices from Germany to the New World. Soon after the founding of the town, residents established specific cultural activities left behind in Germany. Distinctive German traditions, such as choral groups, shooting clubs, gymnastic clubs and social societies were important parts of community life.

Over time, the community established more than forty rural schools, built primarily on donated land with donated labor. The opportunity to obtain a public education was held in high regard.
among the citizens of Gillespie County. Germans meeting in San Antonio in 1854 petitioned the Texas legislature, resulting in the creation of the Texas public school system.

By 1850, Gillespie County was delivering significant agricultural product to markets in San Antonio. The successful establishment of agricultural practices can be attributed to utilization of practices employed in Germany and an openness to adaptation of certain Anglo American, Mexican, and Native American crops and farming techniques. German settlers also benefited from communal efforts for initial crop cultivation and fencing fields and pastures. Whereas many Anglo American settlers utilized either slave labor or hired labor, German farmers often employed the entire family, including women and children.

Prior to the Civil War, the political philosophy shared by many German settlers influenced an anti-slavery position and loyalty to the Union, putting many German settlers at odds with the increasing numbers of Anglo-Americans who were settling in Texas. After residents of Gillespie County voted against secession, while the majority of Texas counties voted in favor, Gillespie County suffered not only from the general disruption and turmoil of the war, but also from the Confederate “irregulars” who raided and generally terrorized the community in the name of the Confederacy, and from other outlaws who took advantage of a tumultuous time.

Following the Civil War, Gillespie County retained much of its relative isolation. Families expanded their landholdings, especially during the 1870s, and the use of hired labor became more necessary. Success in agriculture and industry fueled the local economy, creating more reason for the outside world to connect to Gillespie County.

A critical part of this story is not only that the pioneers survived but also that they learned to prosper while sustaining the natural resources of the landscape around them. The stories of trial and error, of getting to know the landscape and the natural resources it produced, are basic lessons that, today, fall to heritage museums to teach. They are lessons that museums should teach, in that they connect current generations to the environments in which they live, and help them see that they share the same concerns as past generations.

Figure 7. Men on the granite dome known as Enchanted Rock. Courtesy of the Gillespie County Historical Society.

The photographic collection of the museum suggests that people formed a special relationship with this landscape. Countless photos show groups of families and friends assembled at Enchanted Rock and other sites.
Other images convey wonderment and pride in the ability of the community to make use of natural resources, such as this picture of a family group posing at a quarry site.

Images showing the homesteads of early Pioneers reveal the resources they used to protect and sustain family life. Rainwater collection, kitchen gardens, swept yards (which created outdoor work environments and kept critters away from homes) and other practices reveal how each family operated within its own ecology. Small changes in practice or access to tools could significantly impact quality of life.

Immigrant culture transplanted values, traditions and arts to this new community. In this new context, the community established familiar traditions and practices, and often transformed them.

**Modern Fredericksburg**
Over time, farming and ranching changed from horse- or oxen-drawn equipment to the use of tractors. Windmills changed from wind power to mechanical pumps. With the completion of the San Antonio, Fredericksburg, and Northern Railway in 1913, and the construction of roads
serving automobile traffic, geography became less of a buffer against outside influence. Advances in agricultural equipment resulted in easier production of cotton, sugar cane and grains. Sears and Roebuck catalogs and other mail-order catalogs offered residents everything from shoes to prefabricated homes. For some, however, the conveniences of modern life, particularly electricity and indoor plumbing, did not arrive until as late as the 1940s, when major regional infrastructure projects were complete. Until the onset of World War I, Gillespie County continued to receive a steady flow of new settlers emigrating from Germany. German remained the dominant language of the county and part of the school curriculum.

A defining event for all Americans, World War I resulted in a range of experiences for German Texans.

Like much of rural Texas, Gillespie County suffered under the periodic severe droughts that occurred in the 1910s, 1920s, and 1930s. With the onset of the Great Depression, Texas experienced its first mass emigration of settlers, including those from Gillespie County, who could no longer make a living. Because of a steady development from agricultural to ranching and livestock practice, Gillespie County suffered less severely than other parts of Texas. Fueled partly by a post-war interest in American heritage and landscape cultivated by railroad expansion and the automobile, the landscape of the American West, including Texas, became a primary venue for tourist excursions in the 1920s and 1930s. By 1930, the natural and cultural heritage of Gillespie County became an economic driver in the form of tourism. Entrepreneurs began to market the town as a resort center with hunting and fishing opportunities.

In 1934, citizens organized the Gillespie County Historical Society and created a replica of the Vereins Kirche in Marktplatz in collaboration with the Civil Works Administration. The original was in disrepair and having served its purpose, was demolished in 1897. The “German-ness” of Gillespie County citizens and other Americans was scrutinized, again, during the events of World War II, yet many of the traditions established in Gillespie County survived intact through this period. Both agriculture and manufacturing in Gillespie County played important roles in serving wartime efforts. Texas again experienced a major population shift following the war, this time from rural town to city. In 1960, the population of Gillespie County reached its lowest for the period from 1920 to the present.

**PART III: CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT**

**Fresh Eyes on Hill Country Heritage**
In 1955, the Gillespie County Historical Society purchased the Kammlah Homestead for $10,000 and opened it to the public in 1958, relocating the Pioneer Museum from its location in the Vereins Kirche replica to the homestead site.

Lyndon B. Johnson’s tenure as Vice President (1961-1963) and President (1963-1969) brought dignitaries to Johnson’s family ranch, known as the “Texas White House,” in nearby Stonewall and with them, journalists interested in describing the cultural context of these meetings. This attention awakened interest in the history of the Hill Country and its picturesque historic sites and buildings, many of which had fallen into disuse and disrepair. The attention paid to built heritage dovetailed with a growing national interest in Historic Preservation, which resulted in the passage of the National Historic Preservation Act in 1966. The Kammlah Homestead was one of the first buildings to be listed in the National Register of Historic Places. In 1967, the Nimitz Hotel was reopened as the Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz Naval Museum, to honor the accomplishments of Admiral Nimitz (a native son of Fredericksburg), and other servicemen and women, in the Pacific during World War II.

Preserving Heritage Today and for Future Generations
In the late 1970s, community leaders began cultivating heritage tourism, promoting bed & breakfast establishments and embarking on specific marketing efforts. The natural beauty of the county, a large number of historic structures, and, most notably, ongoing traditions such as the Gillespie County Fair (initiated in 1881) and numerous festivals have been successful in attracting not only tourists, but also newcomers seeking to make a home in a community with a vibrant, living heritage.
The current population of Fredericksburg is about 9,000, yet it has been estimated that as many as five million people a year visit the Hill Country. The top reason that individuals list for visiting Fredericksburg is “shopping.”

With tourists regularly forming a greater percentage of the persons on the street than residents, Fredericksburg faces some of the same social, cultural and economic dilemmas present in other historic cities (Venice, Salzburg, Santa Fe) about how to preserve authenticity while maintaining a viable residential community. There is a risk that a tourism-oriented economy will eventually oversaturate and that unchecked development will push out local residents, weakening the connections between residents, place and cultural traditions.

Influenced by the current director, Carol Schreider, the Pioneer Museum is striving to be an “audience-centered” museum, improving the way it serves local residents as well as tourists. Improving the quality of the visitor experience will provide for a deeper understanding of heritage, fostering increased visitation, more repeat visits and long-term stewardship.

Although this paper addresses the relationship between the museum and stewardship at the local level, it is also important to consider the physical location of the museum in Fredericksburg and its effect on current visitation to the Pioneer Museum by tourists. There is a substantial difference in visitation rates between the Museum of the Pacific War, located in the hub of tourist activity, and the Pioneer Museum, located several blocks west of this activity. While the Pioneer Museum is a fitting introduction for visitors as they begin their visit to Fredericksburg, its location away from concentrated tourist activity means that most visitors visit the museum at the end of their stay, if they visit the museum at all. Current limitations on parking, congestion on Main Street and a lack of any mass transit system are also factors in this situation.

Figure 14. Map showing Main Street. The bulls-eye marks the location of the Pioneer Museum and the circle marks the location of the Museum of the Pacific War. (Underlay map courtesy of Fredericksburg Convention and Visitors Bureau.)

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6 The difference in the visitation base between the Museum of the Pacific War and the Pioneer Museum is of course also influenced by the stories they address, and it should be noted that the Museum of the Pacific War does an excellent job focusing on the international scope of its story. Because many visitors to Fredericksburg are daytrippers, starting with the Museum of the Pacific War (which can take several hours to visit) means that it is often their “one museum experience for the day.”
Certainly, the museum would benefit monetarily from increased ticket sales and museum store sales from broader tourist visitation. The real missed opportunity, however, is the long-term benefit that would come from providing visitors a more substantive understanding of the town and its heritage, transforming them from “casual” to “vested” visitors. At present, the visitor experience is largely “consumer-based,” dictated by the specific shops they enter on Main Street. In addition to the work being done at the museum, it will be necessary to find creative ways to address some of these larger issues related to tourism management. Solving these problems will benefit not only the Pioneer Museum, but also the entire community, as well as the tourists who visit. The Fredericksburg Convention and Visitors Bureau is working to address these issues, including partnering with the Pioneer Museum to provide an “uptown” visitor center on the grounds of the Pioneer Museum. A high-quality, well-managed tourist experience is essential for ensuring that tourism develops in a way that sustains the resident population and its potential to participate in other economic activities beyond tourism.

Figure 15: The Pioneer Museum complex is a 5-acre site; located at the corner of Main Street and Milam Street. Photo manipulated from Google Earth view.

When addressing the relationship between the museum and the local community, it is necessary to understand the diverse interests and needs of this community, as well as the nature of its ties to the Pioneer Museum. Whereas the founders of the Gillespie County Historical Society and its subsequent leaders who purchase the Kammlah Homestead were a generation or two removed from the original pioneers, the relationship of current and potential stakeholders to this heritage is different. In fact, a large number of individuals active in the historical society have relocated to Fredericksburg as adults; not all have direct family ties to Gillespie County.

From discussions with stakeholders, we found that reasons for being vested in the Pioneer Museum are diverse. These include, but are not limited to:

1. Family and cultural identity. The museum supports the role of elders within the community and connects youth to their shared heritage.
2. Social experience. The museum provides residents, both established and new to the community, a place where they can develop relationships with others.
3. Entertainment. Events such as the Roots Music Festival provide entertainment not offered elsewhere in the area.
4. Education/interpretation. The museum helps visitors interested in history understand how the past has informed the present, whether they have ties to Gillespie County heritage or not.
5. Pride. The museum acknowledges the diversity of the community’s cultural heritage. (This is a work in progress; particularly those of non-German heritage cited the potential of the museum to do this.)

6. Civic purpose. Stakeholders feel that involvement at the museum is a viable way to contribute to the community. For business owners, involvement also conveys a “good faith” relationship.

7. Economic development. Stakeholders with businesses that directly benefit from tourism recognize the importance of the museum for economic development. Others emphasized that having strong cultural institutions makes Fredericksburg more competitive in attracting new businesses and other high-quality development.

Beginning with a better understanding of this immediate stakeholder base, including its interests, needs and objectives, the master planning effort focuses its attention on enhancing the relationship between the museum and the local community. From a management standpoint, the purpose is to allow stewardship responsibilities to be shared by a broader group of stakeholders. From a resource utilization standpoint, the purpose is to make critical changes so that more individuals will make use of the museum and its resources. In doing so, the institution will intrinsically be engaged in the process of addressing contemporary community needs. (Two programs already in place include the museum’s involvement in a community leadership training program, and a partnership with the county parole program, which allows parolees to put their skills to use at the museum to fulfill their service requirements.)

Addressing the Specifics of the Physical Site

At present, the visitor entrance to the site is still the Kammlah House, through a front room that was once a dry goods store operated by the Kammlah family. Over time, the museum acquired the Fassel-Roeder House and additional adjacent land, including the First Methodist Church building and its former parsonage, which today house museum administration, collections storage and a multi-purpose meeting room. Since 1958, the museum has received four other historic buildings to the site and has constructed a restroom facility and an open-air frame structure for its buggy collection. Also constructed on site, by a different organization, is a building that displays two historic fire engines.
Together with its artifact collection, which ranges from an extensive collection of furniture and woodworking tools to the photo archive of the Radio Post newspaper, the buildings and site features represent an extremely wide range of physical resources deemed important by the Gillespie County community and entrusted to the museum. In the early 2000s, it became apparent to the museum board that sustaining the current level of operation would not keep up with the myriad collections management needs of the museum, particularly as artifacts and buildings continue to age. Evaluating the museum’s messaging led to a realization that site and artifact presentation needed to be realigned with storytelling objectives.

Remedying the Gray Areas

In April 2005, Overland Partners, a San Antonio-based architecture firm, was hired by the Pioneer Museum to develop a master plan, concurrent with the completion of an internal assessment by Dini Partners, a development and non-profit management consulting firm.

To date, the activities undertaken by the museum and its consultants include:

- Conducting an internal assessment and formulating a strategy plan
- Completing the master plan (site use strategy and programming, planning concept, a three-phase development strategy, storyline research)
- Hiring a new executive director
- Planning and undertaking a capital campaign
- Purchasing land on Main Street and remediating the site (which was once operated as a gas station)
- Reconstructing the Dambach-Besier House at the corner of the site
- Hiring a full-time collections manager and a part-time programs coordinator
- Implementing a collections inventory, which was necessary to inform collections management, facility programming and interpretive planning. “The Conservation Assessment: A Tool for Planning, Implementing, and Fund-Raising” served as a guide for this endeavor.
- Developing an interpretive master plan

Future anticipated activity includes:

- Revising the collections management strategy, specifically improving the collections database
- Developing a detailed facility program
- Completing a new building that includes an orientation theater, museum store rotating (multipurpose) gallery, and concession area
- Implementing new exhibits and interpretive programs
- Developing a new identity/branding approach
- Completing a new building that includes space dedicated to exhibits, collections management, collections storage and administration

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The planning process has been stakeholder-intensive; this is important not only because it gives stakeholders a vested interest in the success of the project, but also because it allows the consultant team to observe the institution’s capabilities, from which we can develop appropriate recommendations.

Current Conditions at the Museum
The current conditions at the museum speak to the relationship between physical, economic and social sustainability of the museum and its resources. I will mention a few highlights of what we found.

If one thinks in terms of “gray areas” being areas of stagnation, the site faces physical challenges such as how to deal with landscaping, which collects moisture and harms foundations, planted close to the buildings. In operational terms, we are challenged to increase visitation and populate the site with activity, while also maintaining the rather tranquil sense of place that the site offers today. We address both of these by creating distinct zones of activity, and considering visitor experience, interpretation and conservation objectives in the decision-making process.

In terms of architectural conservation, there is a need to sustain the evidence of use, such as smoke patterns on interior plaster, while achieving a point of relative stability for the structure. Sometimes, these two objectives suggest seemingly contradictory solutions. In this case, the evidence of past preservation interventions, such as plaster stabilization, becomes a physical attribute to interpret, in addition to the original historic fabric and its patina.
Books on display in the White Oak School, one of the relocated historic buildings, are presently exposed to temperature and humidity fluctuations, extensive natural light, and, perhaps most critically, theft potential. They also demonstrate the need to examine artifacts in the collection for contextual significance as well as for individual merit. During the survey, we found within a series of Mark Twain novels an anomaly in the printing of Twain’s inscription and signature, which appears opposite the title page. (In one inscription, the word “all” is missing.) Being able to describe artifacts on the basis of multiple values instantly expanded the museum members’ interest in stewardship of this collection. It also prompted review of privately-held collections and discussion about potential future acquisitions.

As we proceeded with the collection survey, we found a cache of unaccessioned artifacts that had been temporarily stored in a storage cabinet below an exhibit case in the Kammlah House. The artifacts were dust-covered and damaged by pests. Rather than viewing this condition merely as mechanical failure or human error, we interpreted the cache of artifacts as a sign of weakness in the overall collections management strategy. If a housekeeping plan were being thoroughly implemented, the cache would have been located long before it was discovered in the survey process. Findings such as these prompted the museum to consider the reality that future acquisitions will only increase the need for resources dedicated to preventive maintenance; it also prompted them to consider how to continue to rely heavily on volunteer activity, but with more specific protocols and more redundancy.
The museum includes a notable collection of woodworking tools beautifully displayed in the Kammlah Barn. Particularly when speaking to an audience that doesn’t have a great deal of knowledge about specific practices, interpreters must explain the purpose of the artifacts. Otherwise the visitor’s appreciation is limited, and the artifacts are simply perceived as “a collection of old tools related to woodworking.” Other than having seen the artifacts, the visitor does not come away with more of an understanding than he had before he experienced the exhibit. To expand interpretation, we recommended that the museum involve and rely upon carpenters, masons and other such workers from the community. These craftsmen retain specific knowledge about the use of these and other tools, and their involvement might influence them to become engaged in what the museum is trying to accomplish.

Lydia Fishel (Figure 22) is one of three docents who has worked at the museum for more than 10 years, making her a unique asset. When I first began observing the museum environment, I was critical of many of the practices I noticed, such as a lack of consistent monitoring of temperature and humidity. It was only through conversation with the docents that I understood that Lydia and her colleagues maintain an acute knowledge of the environmental conditions of the museum. They also understand how resource conservation has been practiced in Gillespie County over time, and can explain it in culturally specific terms. Lydia explained, “These people knew about ecology. They didn’t throw water away. Saturday was bath day: a family would start with the cleanest person first. After that person was done bathing, the next person in line would make use of the same bath water.”

While there is a need to establish a collections management strategy that can be followed by more than a small number of individuals, dialogue with the docents was a turning point in the
way I viewed the museum’s ability to operate in an extremely resource-efficient manner. The history of operation advocates for improving facilities and systems in a way that keeps processes simple and continues to rely heavily on volunteer support. The museum needs volunteers, and volunteers need to be part of the museum.

**Planning Concepts**

One of the most important things about the Pioneer Museum’s planning process is that it has considered physical, financial and social/cultural sustainability concurrently through the many initiatives at work. The credit for this goes to the leadership of the museum board who, like the original pioneers, are taking the long view on their investment of time, energy and money.

Like any cultural institution, the Pioneer Museum serves a dual mission of preserving and presenting cultural heritage. The tension of this mission tends to put people into two camps: the conservator versus the programs director. The more emphasis that is placed on cultural knowledge as the primary resource, the greater the inclination for the institution to be manifest as a place of living culture. The more the institution is object-based, the more restrictive or re-active conservation policies are likely to be. The reality is that culture is not merely the idea or the object, but also the relationship between the two. That relationship is defined in human terms: intellectual, emotional, economic, social, and physical. The challenge is to strike a balance between preservation of the physical resource and the need to access, use and even alter the resource. No decision is perfect, but from the difficulty of deciding how to proceed comes a deeper understanding and appreciation for what is at stake. In the process, stakeholders assign value to the roles of both cultural heritage and the cultural institution, positioning us to take the necessary actions as stewards of these resources.

From a site planning standpoint, the consultant team addressed this tension by balancing conservation needs with interpretive objectives and by delineating the way different historic buildings are treated on site. The treatment of the Kammlah Homestead and Fassel-Roeder House, in-situ resources, will follow the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Restoration of Historic Buildings. Historic buildings located in the other zone of the site will follow less restrictive Standards for the Rehabilitation of Historic Buildings. In addition, this zone will carry the load for diverse visitor services and activities that respond to the broadest visitor interests.
A reconfigured site entry heavily emphasizes the need to “bring people in the door” and to provide an enjoyable place to socialize and interact once they have arrived. In particular, this is something the current entry sequence is not accomplishing well. The site configuration responds directly to the documented interests of visitors to Fredericksburg, while also providing orientation, information and route options for the sake of better visitor management.

A concept design rendering, developed by Overland Partners for informational and fundraising purposes, conveys the site development in terms people can understand, acknowledging that the planning and design process is crucial for building excitement and support by the local community. Taking a “come join us” approach, use of the rendering acknowledges the benefit of inviting the entire community to play a role in the stewardship of this institution.

During the course of this symposium, the word “stewardship” has come up several times, and Dr. Gracy has encouraged us to think of ourselves as marketers. As a consultant, my role is important, but compared to the day-to-day impact of stakeholders, it is a mere blip in time. As heritage conservation professionals, we are positioned to navigate among layers of stewards (society members, staff, the broader local community, tourists, etc.). We must focus on strengthening each layer, as each can play a specific role.
In the same vein, the consultant team explained potential “sustainable strategies” (derived from the United States Green Building Council’s LEED Program) by using the language of the local community and by reflecting its values. This not only expanded the stakeholders involvement in the conversation, but also generated powerful ideas for interpretive programs.

Addressing the systems that help manage these resources, the collection inventory included a survey of all locations dedicated to managing, storing and exhibiting artifacts, and a review of the information systems that support collections management. The Canadian Heritage Information Network’s Collections Management Software Evaluation (evaluating 15 distinct collections management programs) and questionnaire, written for institutions to establish priorities for a broad range of collection management activities, have been invaluable resources for this process.

The current collections database, developed in Filemaker Pro, includes approximately 12,000 entries. Two incredibly dedicated volunteers have worked diligently to add to this database. This presents several issues. With an estimated 338,000 historic photographs and thousands of other artifacts, it is imperative to expand the rate of information input into the collections database. The database originally resided on a single computer (albeit with backup copies.) Though the database does not yet exist on a network, we have created duplicate copies for all staff and consultants who need to access the information on a regular basis. Making this database available on the web will significantly increase the public’s access to museum resources and appreciation for the museum’s role as a collection manager.
Another “greening” of the museum is manifest in the museum’s efforts to research and interpret the history of Gillespie County’s non-German residents and pioneers. There is growing scholarship about the occupation of the Gillespie County lands by Spanish, Mexican and mixed race peoples, although the area was not formally settled under Spanish land grants. Settlement records are incomplete, but there is a record of oral tradition and material culture maintained by families who reside in Gillespie County today. In addition, historical records can serve as the basis for interpreting the lives of permanent residents and the migrant worker communities that support agriculture. There is also a rich heritage of the coming together of German and Hispanic cultures, manifest in intangible cultural practices, such as unique cuisine and Cinco de Mayo celebrations.

This activity is critical for securing a broader stakeholder base with greater ethnic diversity and for developing an understanding of the convergence of cultures between Native American populations, German, Mexican, Anglo-American settlers, African American and other European immigrants. Providing opportunities for dialogue on common ground is a way for the museum to engage issues relating to racial, religious and political differences that impact the community.

In closing, the Pioneer Museum illustrates three broadly applicable lessons. The Pioneer Museum seeks to steward both the tangible and intangible culture of Gillespie County, as well as the relationship between the two. By means of this purposeful practice, the museum contributes to quality of life and also helping the community to define collective actions for developing and sustaining this quality of life.
Public programs and special events educate and create strong ties between the community and the museum. By strengthening connections between the community and its intangible aspects of culture, the museum is able to demonstrate ways in which the community can gain broad cultural experiences. At its root, the relationship between the cultural institution and its community gives the institution its purpose. Therefore, supporting this relationship, especially in periods of significant change and development, is paramount. To be sustainable, cultural institutions have to be of a size and complexity that the community is willing to support for the long term. Conservation activity is not limited to the physical treatment and storage of artifacts and information any more than interpretation is limited to the visitor’s experience within specific exhibits. Rather, it is the entire activity of the institution, considered collectively, that justifies it present and future generations.

On an individual level, cultural institutions help people to find meaning in their lives and to better understand their relationship with others and with the world around them. The challenge lies in finding ways to effectively and economically connect individuals to the resources of cultural institutions, so that individuals perceive the relevance of the cultural institution to their own pursuits.
Pictured in Figure 33 are Linda Langerhans and her husband. Linda is a former Mayor of Fredericksburg, as was her grandfather. One of her most recent artifactual finds includes eight hand-drawn awards bestowing titles to the committee chairmen of a Gillespie County fair in the late 1930s. Depicted with humor and wit, they are the Gillespie County equivalent of a New Yorker Magazine cartoon. Linda found the awards on Ebay. The seller, who was based in Indiana, reports that he purchased them in Iowa. Today, these artifacts once again reside in Fredericksburg.

Finally, when I began this project in 2005, the name “Pioneer Museum” was the first thing that I perceived should be changed. As the project evolved, I realized that rather than discard the name and start over, we should continue to use it, guided by a new paradigm. Our task is to help visitors and the community to consider what it means to be a pioneer, not only in the 19th century, but also in the 21st century. It is also our task to define what it means to be a museum in the 21st century: a steward of knowledge and culture; a resource for facing the challenges of the day; a physical place that fosters relationships, community and discovery; a place of living heritage.
REFERENCES


