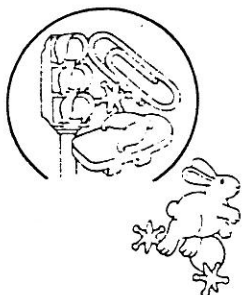


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Children's Museum

Museum Wharf  
300 Congress Street  
Boston, MA 02210  
(617) 426-6500

# FINAL REPORT

"New England Perspective:  
An Interpretation of  
Native American Cultures"

Grant Number PM-31689-78-817

*Elaine Heumann Gurian*  
Elaine Heumann Gurian  
Project Director  
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## "We're Still Here"

### Indian People in Southern New England, Long Ago and Today

Within the past ten years, the Boston Children's Museum has experienced a marked change in its American Indian programming. Since these changes were subtle and involved a new awareness of Native American concerns, there was little tangible evidence to indicate that these changes had occurred. A permanent exhibit statement was needed to share this new direction with the public. The "We're Still Here" exhibit, allowed the Children's Museum to present to its audiences for the first time, the basic message that American Indian people still live in Southern New England and participate in their Indian culture.

#### I. BACKGROUND: The Need For A New Exhibit

The Children's Museum has always been committed to teaching about Native American cultures and has always used its strong American Indian collections to enrich those experiences. In the early years, school programs, clubs, and exhibits concentrated on descriptions of major Indian cultures as they had existed in the past.

#### Focus on the Woodlands

Fifteen years ago, the museum looked critically at its Indian program and decided to focus more exclusively on the so-called "Woodlands cultures". This grouping included the peoples who were here in Massachusetts when the Pilgrims came; the peoples who are always studied about in school at Thanksgiving. To emphasize this new focus, a full-size reconstruction of an Algonquin wigwam was built and a new kit, "The Algonquins" was circulated from the museum's Loan Department. Both programs were developed by staff with the aid of non-Indian anthropologists; both programs concentrated on life as it had been lived more than 300 years ago: both generalized about the many Algonquin peoples whose territory stretched from Maine to North Carolina.

### The Dialogue Begins

With the opening of the wigwam, the Museum's Indian program was more exposed to public scrutiny. Criticisms began to be voiced tentatively, at first, by a few of the Indians living in Boston: "Face painting was sacred and an inappropriate activity for non-Indian children to engage in"; "The wigwam taught only about a past life style and didn't touch upon history or Indian people today." Staff listened politely but the program continued. As the year passed, however, staff became aware of all the "stereotype" baggage that visitors brought with them to the wigwam and realized that the wigwam, of itself, did little to dispel those stereotypes. As awareness of the exhibit's shortcomings increased, staff began to seek out and encourage dialogue with American Indian people in the Boston area. By 1970, convinced at last that the wigwam exhibit, by itself, was an inadequate and even inappropriate teaching program, the museum chose to close it down.

### The Dialogue Continues

In the next decade involvement with and commitment to the Native American community grew. During this time, with Native American advice and support, the museum developed a workshop on stereotypes; presented workshops and courses on American Indian history and culture; revised "The Algonquins" kit so that the new kit, "Indians Who Met the Pilgrims," begins in the present and looks back to the past; sponsored a two year Internship program to train Native Americans in museum studies; collected and fully documented contemporary work by Native Americans living in New England; and devised a special Study-Storage system that provides the Native American community as well as interested non-Indian visitors with increased access to the Northeast Native American collection.

### The Formation of an Advisory Board

A turning point in museum-community relations was the formal establishment of an eight member Native American Advisory Board in 1974. The close collaboration that began at that time has demonstrated that both the museum and the Board benefit from this inter-cultural exchange. The Advisory Board provides insights and perspectives that could only come from within a culture: the museum provides the Board with an opportunity to be heard and a vehicle to make those ideas

known to a larger audience. The support and participation of the Advisory Board is now an integral part of any project with Native American content.

### "Going Public"

By the late 1970's the museum found itself in a most unusual situation. Within the museum, there had been a significant change in consciousness about and sensitivity to Native American concerns. Externally, the general public was largely unaware of these changes. New resources had been developed that revealed these new understandings but only a limited audience had access to them. An upfront statement was needed to make visible, on a broad scale, all that we had learned in the past decade. With funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities, a major exhibit could be created to present these new perspectives.

## II. PROJECT ACTIVITIES: Developing the Exhibit

### The Development Team

The development team consisted of the exhibit developer, Joan Lester, who would have final responsibility for the exhibit's definition; Signe Hanson, the designer who would work in close collaboration with the developer to translate content ideas into exhibit formats; an in-house educational consultant, Judy Battat; and a seven member Native American Advisory Board. (See Appendix).

### A Look at Exhibit Issues

In the early stages of the project the developer concentrated on defining the basic exhibit problems that would have to be confronted and worked through as the exhibit took shape.

Misconceptions. The developer was aware that many people arrive at the museum with well entrenched preconceptions about American Indian people. These include the idea that all Indians are like the Plains Indians; that Indians still live as they did when the Europeans arrived; that the "Woodland Indian" has vanished or been completely assimilated into the mainstream and that there are no "real" Indians in New England today. The new exhibit would have to confront these misconceptions and attempt to replace them with more accurate information.



"Dead" Indians. The developer was troubled by some of the Indian exhibits in other museum. In these, lifeless artifacts and mannequins in fading regalia occupy glass cases. Their silence seems to imply that the people and their culture are both dead. The new exhibit would have to find ways to communicate a different message: American Indian people and American Indian culture are still alive in New England.

Beginning Learners. The developer also considered the problem of communicating values and perspectives that were different from those of most viewers. The Children's Museum had mounted two cultural exhibits in the recent past that met with only limited success. In both cases they assumed a great deal of prior understanding on the part of the casual visitor. The exhibits were understood and thoroughly enjoyed by people from within the culture, but tended to overwhelm and confuse the beginning learners. To reach this general audience, the developer and designer decided that the exhibit would select and present certain basic themes; that these themes would be restated in different formats throughout the exhibit and that a conscious effort would be made to keep the exhibit messages simple and concise. One test of a message's effectiveness would be whether it was successfully carried by the visual elements in the exhibits or whether it was dependent upon a written label to be understood.

Next Steps for Interested Visitors. A new set of problems was generated, however, by this decision to try specifically to reach this audience of beginning learners. What about the visitor who arrived at the museum with a good understanding of the issues? What about visitors who learned from the exhibit and were then ready and anxious for additional information? A commitment was made to also try to accommodate these special visitors by developing in-depth second level resources for them.

The "Magic" of the Wigwam. The original wigwam exhibit was closed because it implied that the Indian people who lived there had vanished. But the wigwam had also been a very popular exhibit. It successfully communicated the magic of another time and place and provided the visitor with a glimpse of 17th century Indian home life. Was there any way to integrate a wigwam experience into the new exhibit? To do so, the idea of a vanished people would have to be negated by contemporary statements, and other exhibit elements would have to be strong enough to pull the visitors away from the wigwam area. The

possibility of the wigwam's return was worth considering.

Hands-On or Hands-Off. Children's Museum visitors have come to expect hands-on learning experiences. This expectation posed a dilemma for the development team. The museum has a fine collection of Northeast Native American materials dating from the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries. But none of these objects could be used, unprotected, in such a highly active environment. A commitment was made to develop and integrate ways of looking at these permanent collection objects within the framework of a participatory exhibit.

A Mini-Exhibit Try-Out. There are museum visitors who expect Indian people to dress or behave exactly as their ancestors did three hundred years ago, unaware that a culture can change and still be viable. The developer wondered if objects from the permanent collection could be used to demonstrate how cultures evolve. Seven sets of old and new collection objects representing the same tradition (the same kinds of objects) were paired and displayed in a mini-exhibit. The label explained: "This exhibit shows how Indian arts in the Northeast have continued. There are six sets of similar objects. In each set, there are objects made about 100 years ago and objects made within the last five years." Visitors were asked if they enjoyed the exhibit and what else they would like to see. The response was heartening. Visitors did seem to understand the message of the mini-exhibit and indicated much interest in the final exhibit. Visitor's answers also confirmed that the exhibit problems being considered were appropriate: There were many misconceptions about Indian peoples; the audience included both beginning and second level learners; many visitors hoped for a return of the wigwam and more hands-on activities; and people very much wanted to see more of the American Indian collection.

### III. PROJECT ACTIVITIES: The Definition of Exhibit Content

Once exhibit problems had been defined, the selection of exhibit themes and specific content could begin.

#### The Advisory Board and the Museum Team

Exhibit definition evolved from the now combined efforts of the designer and developer team and the Advisory Board.

It was, in effect, a symbiotic relationship where the ideas of one group generated further or new responses from the other. The in-house museum team served as listeners, catalysts, and translators; the Advisory Board as experts, advisors, and editors. The Advisory Board voiced their feelings and described ideas that they wanted to see in exhibit form; the developer asked questions, kept exhibit constraints up front and tried to translate Board ideas into possible exhibit formats. Board meetings were usually run by the developer. At each meeting, work done by the developer or designer in response to previous Board discussions were presented. The Board accepted, rejected or elaborated upon the format(s) and the cycle began again.

Here is an example of how this interchange worked:

At an early Board meeting all agreed that one exhibit area would explain that Indians were in America long before the Europeans arrived. At the next Board meeting, the developer presented a mock-up of a panel entitled "Indians Discovered America", depicting people crossing the Bering Straits. The presentation was greeted with total silence. Finally, Board members explained that the idea of Indians "discovering" America was alien to them; their mythology indicated that they had always been here. The panel was rejected and the developer was left with the task of finding another way to express long-term Indian residence in America.

#### The Exhibit Themes

By the end of the first Board meeting consensus had been reached on certain basic issues and themes: a strong stand would be taken on stereotypes; the exhibit would speak to both beginning and second level learners and provide new experiences for each; it would focus on Indian people in Southern New England and establish clear connections between past and present culture; it would re-introduce the wigwam if a contemporary exhibit vehicle could be found to balance its "power"; the trial mini-exhibit "Old and New" would be expanded and be included in the final exhibit; and a Study-Storage area would be installed adjacent to the exhibit to display the entire Northeast Native American collection.

#### The Content Evolves

From the first meeting on, the Board consistently perceived and explained issues from a "them and "us" perspective, pointing out how non-Indian approached a particular concept and how the same set of ideas

were seen by the Board as Native Americans. This particular approach played a critical role in the final definition of the exhibit's content.

The Introductory Area. The Board and the museum team agreed that the introductory area would deal with all Indian peoples and attempt to dispel some of the most basic misconceptions. Using the "them" and "us" perspective, the team selected five "mistaken" ideas: Columbus "discovered" America; Indians "emigrated" to America; all Indians are alike; Indian people are extinct or assimilated; and there is a recognizable Indian "look" and lifestyle today.

To give unity to these five different concepts and immediately bring a sense of people into the exhibit, the designer created a cut-out of a young Indian boy in contemporary clothing. He stated each misconception and then briefly explained the appropriate Indian response to it. (See color xerox 1).

A Wigwam and a 20th Century Home. The Board agreed that the wigwam could be used to describe the past if a means could be found to link that past with the present and demonstrate that Indian culture in New England had continued. A way to do this evolved from Board comments about Indianess and being Indian in the 20th century. Statements like "Can't we talk about what Indian homes look like today?"; "We all have our own Indian things that we do"; "You don't have to live in a wigwam to be Indian"; and "Indian people live in two worlds" led the developer to consider explaining the Indian present in the context of a American Indian home today. In it there would be objects that were uniquely Indian as well as objects from the dominant culture. It would stress the "two worlds" that Indian people live in today, and provide a balance to the wigwam. For nearly a month the developer worked intensively with the designer, testing out and shaping the idea to the point where it could be presented to the Advisory Board. Upon presentation it received unanimous approval, with the stipulations that the relationship between the wigwam and the house be very obvious and that visitors be able to actually see or identify traditions that had continued.

Subsequent meetings were spent brainstorming what might be in an Indian home and then working out in detail what would be there, given the space and thematic limitations of the exhibit. To assure a visual connection between the wigwam and the house, the designer prepared a floor plan that placed the wigwam and the house directly opposite each other. A person exiting from the wigwam would have to look directly into the contemporary home.

The Question of History. There now remained only the question of how to powerfully and yet succinctly make the transition from a 17th century wigwam to 20th century home. There was three hundred years of history to cover, with an audience whom, we suspected, would not read a great deal of information. Instead a simple but very strong exhibit message was needed to take the visitor from the wigwam to the home.

The question of history had been discussed, in some form, at every meeting. Whenever it came up, certain themes repeated themselves and feelings were intense. As a listener-observer, the developer finally felt able to translate the issues and passions (feelings) into a poem-statement. The poem was presented to the Board, critically reviewed, edited, re-written and finally approved as the major transition statement:

Fifty-five years after the Pilgrims came,  
Indian people were forced to change.  
The English fenced their land,  
outlawed Indian ceremonies,  
and told people how to live.  
A few of our ancestors  
chose English ways.  
For the others,  
there were only two choices:  
fight  
and face death, or  
obey the English  
and survive.  
Many people fought;  
they were killed or sold into slavery.  
Many others obeyed the English;  
they lived.  
We are descendants of those survivors,  
We are still here  
and still Indian.  
We'll be here forever.

The designer created a lifesize cut-out of an Indian man, in contemporary dress, to "speak" the poem. The young Indian boy from the Introductory area stands besides him, as if he were his son. (See color xerox 2).

#### IV. PROJECT ACTIVITIES: The Physical Creation of an Exhibit

With the approval of the transition poem, all content had been defined and the exhibit could be produced.



### The Exhibit Assistant

As the exhibit entered this new phase, an exhibit assistant was needed to do research, contact community people and gather materials. A Board liason person was also needed to participate in last minute changes and decisions that did not allow for a formal Board meeting. Helen Attaquin, a Wampanoag, longtime member of the Advisory Board and an educator joined the project as exhibit assistant and Board liason. The "marriage" was ideal. Helen was at a transition point, had become interested in the possibility of museum work via her Board association and saw this as an opportunity to try out a new profession. From the museum's perspective, Helen, as a much respected member of the community would be an effective network person. This proved to be true. If a fish net was needed, Helen knew where to find one; a 17th century dictionary, she knew who had one; photographs from Indian communities in Connecticut, she knew who to call and how to convince them of the credibility of the project. Her dedication and humor made a significant contribution to the exhibit's final definition.

### The Gathering of Materials

All the Board members contributed generously to the pool of "stuff" that would, ideally, make the Indian home come to life. One Board member loaned his carefully collected scrapbook of the Mashpee trial and allowed it to remain at the museum for many weeks for study and final xeroxing; another loaned his eagle feather permit; several Board members contributed their modern everyday clothing: everyone dug into their past for photographs of themselves, their family and their ancestors participating in both Indian and non-Indian activities. Snapshots of Christmas, cubscouts and birthday parties were offset by Indian weddings, community meetings and pow wow festivities. Few museums possess such resources. The support and committment of the Advisory Board helped create an exhibit environment that was rich with a sence of Indian people and real Indian possessions.

### The Building of the Wigwam

Native American staff from Plimoth Plantation built the wigwam for the Children's Museum. They began by cutting the young trees in a swamp, stripping their bark and transporting the saplings to the museum. Each young tree bounced as it was hand carried into the museum. Once the trees arrived, the real work began. How do you build a wigwam inside a museum? Outside, poles can be inserted deep into the earth and then bent toward the center to form the needed wigwam arches. Wooden flooring presents a different problem. After several false starts, angle irons were set up and drilled into

the floor on either side of the poles to hold them in place. Three people on each pole were then needed to bend the pole into the proper curve while one or two people joined two such poles together to create a full arch. It took two days to complete this framework. After it had dried and set, the framework needed to be covered. The same crew sewed the mats to the framework with matting needles and English hemp. When all was completed, everyone agreed that an unique, living entity had, unexpectedly, been created within the confines of a museum exhibit. (See color xerox #3.)

### The Building of the 20th Century House

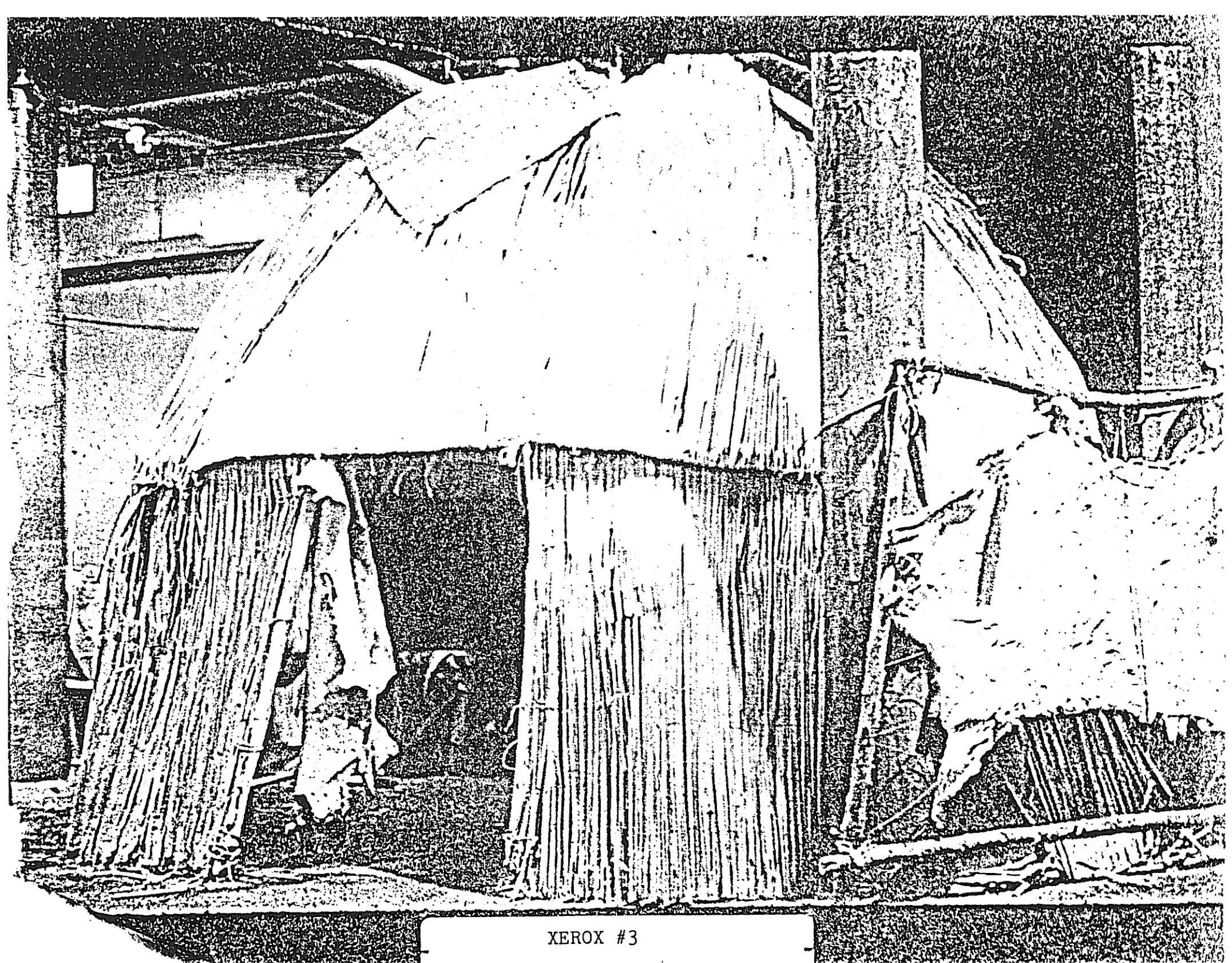
The final floor plans for the contemporary house called for a kitchen, a living room, a bedroom and a child's room. Each would contain a mix of objects and activities that reinforced the exhibit's major themes. But how would all the furniture that usually goes into such rooms fit into the designated exhibit space? The designer solved the problem by suggesting that a mix of real and symbolic furniture be used. If a real piece of furniture was needed it would be included; if not, two dimensional cut-outs would be substituted. Thus real chairs, bookcases, a small table, a kitchen counter and shelves, co-exist with cut-outs of a refrigerator, a T.V. set, and a bed. This mix of real and unreal elements is consistent with the "stage-set" quality of the entire exhibit. Cut-outs carry key messages in the introductory and transition area: the wigwam is composed of real materials, artificially supported, in an unreal (museum) setting. The house, like the rest of the exhibit, reads as a symbol, rather than as a real house.

### Labeling

Many members of the development team contributed to label writing. The general theme labels were written by the developer, and edited by the Advisory Board. Labels in the house were written in the first person as if Native Americans were talking. These labels were written either by the exhibit assistant or by the entire board.

For example, the label describing a Pow wow, written by Helen Attaquin states: "When we are away from our own people, we sometimes feel as though we are among strangers. When we put on Indian regalia and go where there are other Indian people, we feel as though we are back home among friends."





XEROX #3

A special labeling system was developed for the wigwam. A tag attached to each object included its Narragansett or Wampanoag name (if known), its English name and a line drawing of an equivalent non-Indian object. Thus, the tag for a hafted stone hoe read "monaskunnummautowwin", hoe; and included a line drawing of a metal hoe. A drawing of a contemporary sewing basket filled with needles and spools of thread is attached to an ash splint basket filled with bone needle, sinew, shell beads and porcupine quills. This labeling system allowed the museum to teach the widest possible audience (pre-readers and non-readers) and incorporate Algonquin language into the exhibit.

#### V. PROJECT ACTIVITIES: Second Level Learners

Once the exhibit was open, the development team and Advisory Board could turn their attention to "second level learners", that segment of the audience ready for more information about Native Americans. Two appropriate formats for second level learning already existed at the museum: A "Study" and Study-Storage. Both would be utilized. A "Study", housed resources (books, records, film strips, activity kits, magazines) on a particular theme or topic. The team would assemble the resources needed for a Native American Study. A Study-Storage area housed and provided increased access to the museum's Northeast Native American collection. The developer/curator would prepare the object for integration into this system.

#### The Study

The Study provided the team with still another opportunity to communicate with the museum's audience. It also allowed the team to present ideas that had been too complex for the exhibit and to expand upon ideas that had been only briefly presented.

#### Many Nations

The exhibit only touched upon the existence of the many Indian nations in America, focusing primarily on Indian peoples in Southern New England. The team decided that the Study should include resources that described all of Indian America.

Gathering the Resources. To compile a pool of appropriate resources representing different nations, the museum's current collection had to be evaluated and new materials reviewed before a Study could be created. The final selection of resources included a representative sampling of materials about all of Indian America and an in-depth coverage of Indian peoples in the Northeast.

Sorting the Resources. In most libraries books are sorted by topics like history, art, music and children's stories and shelved in different locations. In order to fully study the resources describing a tribe or nation one must physically check out all those areas. To avoid this kind of fragmentation, the team decided that all resources would be sorted by Culture areas, and that a cross reference file would be provided for those learners who were more interested in general topics.

### Stereotypes

Throughout the development of the exhibit, the development team had struggled with defusing stereotypes. Attempts at all but the most basic statements had turned out to be too wordy and too complicated for use in the introductory area of the exhibit. Team observation of the now opened exhibit confirmed that the basic statements were inadequate. Stereotypes were still present among the museum audience. The study provided still another opportunity to confront this issue.

The Big Book. In the process of evaluating possible Study materials, the team was again reminded that books are a prime source of mis-information about American Indian people. The books being evaluated for the Study seemed to fall into two categories: those that led the reader to generalizations or misconceptions and those that were sensitive to Native American concerns. The team decided to demonstrate this dichotomy for Study users. Ten major themes were selected that, from a Native American perspective, were inaccurately presented in the literature. An open book format was then created, with the non-Indian generalization on one side and a Native American explanation of the same concept on the page facing it. The developer's experience with librarians and teachers had indicated that simply pointing out the limitations of a particular book was insufficient. The user needed an acceptable alternative in order to switch. For each concept, books that supported or explained the Native American viewpoint were recommended.

### Status of the Study

Resources for the Study are now being processed by library staff and a special signage system is being created to link key exhibits to their Study and its second level resources. When these two tasks are completed, both beginning and second level learners should benefit from the "We're Still Here" exhibit.



### Study-Storage

An early decision was made to prepare and install the Northeast Native American collection in a Study-Storage area next to the "We're Still Here" exhibit. This Study-Storage area would offer second level learning experiences and provide a display space for the entire Northeast collection.

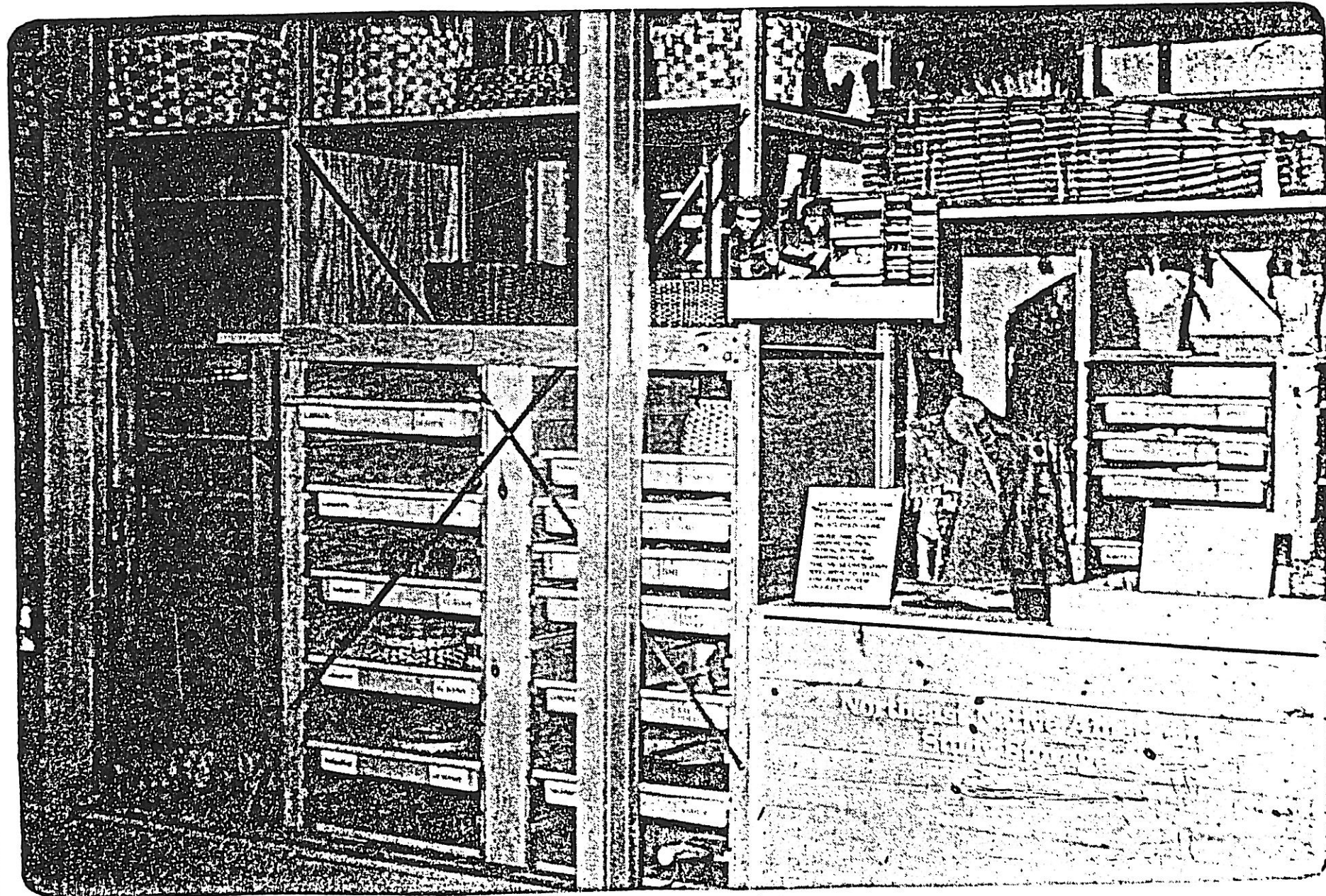
Once the Study resources were developed, the curator was able to devote her time to preparing the collection for the installation. This work is now completed and Study-Storage serves both casual visitors and second level learners. All who visit the "We're Still Here" exhibit may look through a large window wall and see the extent of the Museum's Northeast Native American collection. Those visitors who are interested in deeper exploration may make an appointment to work directly with the Study-Storage collection. (See color xerox 4).

### VI. FINDINGS: Exhibit Results

The "We're Still Here" exhibit allowed the Children's Museum to present and share with its audience the message that there are Native American people still involved in their culture in New England today. The creation of this exhibit also provided the museum with new understandings about the development and possible impact of such cultural exhibits.

#### Stereotypes

With all of the creative energies invested in correcting misconceptions, stereotypes still persist. People come to the exhibit so laden with misconceptions that it is, in the opinion of this developer, all but impossible to eliminate them with a single exposure to a new perspective. In a sense, the exhibit, simply by being an American Indian exhibit, elicits people's stereotypes. Both children and adults, when they arrive at the wigwam almost automatically begin to talk in stilted language, engage in "war whooping" and refer to the wigwam as a "tepee". Ironically, these responses may, in part, come from the success of the exhibit. People immediately understand that they are in an Indian environment and conjure up the only Indian responses they know! Perhaps the best we can hope for, given this limited exposure, is that the messages of the exhibit will get added to the inappropriate baggage already being carried so that when and if more accurate information is acquired, the stereotypes will eventually be discarded. This can not happen in a single exhibit but is, in fact, the continuing responsibility of all who work in the humanities.



Question: How much of America was Indian before the Europeans came?

Answer: All of it.

Question: What would you be eating for Thanksgiving dinner if the Wampanoags hadn't helped the Pilgrims?

Answer: Nothing.

Both these jokes were translated into exhibit formats. In the first, a panel with all of America lights up: In the second a Thanksgiving dinner plate disappears. Many visitors keep repeating the activity because they simply don't understand the intended humor. Communicating perspectives from another culture is extremely difficult. Perhaps sharing one's humor is possible only after other perspectives are known and accepted.

### Hands-On and Hands-Off

The developer and the Board were committed to including irreplaceable objects from the permanent collection in the exhibit. Several solutions were devised that comfortably integrated "looking only" experiences into an interactive exhibit environment. Ash splint baskets for the wigwam were fitted with plexiglass covers so that collections objects like moccasins, necklaces, and fish weights could be arranged within them. These baskets are carried around in role playing situations while the contents remain protected. Similarly, in the modern home, a closet, a suitcase, two bookcases and a sewing box were turned into protected exhibit cases by the addition of plexiglass fronts or covers. These "cases" are so well integrated into the feel of the house that the casual visitor does not perceive them as exhibit cases but, instead, as elements in the house itself. There is an important lesson here. It is not necessary, always, to make a choice between interactive and looking only exhibit formats. Each can support the other with a flow between the two that feels natural. People can learn from both modes and either format can reinforce and enrich the other. (See color xerox #5.)

### Working With An Advisory Board

The "We're Still Here" exhibit was realized because the Board was willing to share their feelings, insights and expertise with the museum and because the museum was equally committed to their participation. This kind of co-operation brings special benefits to both groups. The Museum receives an exhibit statement that is representative of the community and sensitive to community perspectives: the community has an opportunity to make itself heard in a major museum setting.



### Houses as Contexts

Restoring an object to its context enhances its meaning and eliminates the need for extensive labeling. When an object is removed from its culture and placed in a traditional exhibit case, it is cut off from the people who created it and from all their associations with the object. When it is restored to a simulation of that context the object and by association the people who created it may come alive.

The Wigwam. As anticipated, the wigwam provided a believable context for the Native American past. Rich with Native American objects and activities, people know how to read the wigwam and how to interact with it. They understand that it is "in the past"; they feel the Indian connectedness and respect for the natural world and they also seem to sense that the wigwam was both a reasonable and comfortable home. Role playing evolves naturally and may lead the visitor to a greater appreciation of Indian solutions to basic human needs.

The Modern Home. Unexpectedly, the modern home does not function in the same way. The development team assumed that as the wigwam established a context for the past, the home would establish a context for the present. Some visitors successfully make the transition from the wigwam to the home and understand the strong connection that exists between the two. For most, this transition is less successful. It may be that the idea of a house is so common that visitors do not see an Indian home but only something already known to their own experience. The more subtle message that it is a non-Indian structure that holds within it an Indian world is simply not received. There may be still another reason why visitors do not get as involved with the home. It is too "clean". In an effort to keep exhibit messages simple, the designer and developer only included objects that carried a particular idea or supported a specific theme. The developers now realize that a convincing home would have had more clutter and more sense of human occupation.

Ironically, the powerful pull and magic of the wigwam has not been "offset" by this home. The wigwam is richer, more appealing and even more convincing than its 20th century counterpart.

### Indian Humor

In the same way that the house's deepest meaning was too subtle for most visitors, so too was the inclusion of Indian humor. Two Indian style "jokes" appear in the exhibit:



But both parties also have to contribute much to reach this goal. Working with a Board is more time consuming for a museum. The museum must be willing to commit staff time and exhibit development time to allow group decision-making to happen. The task for the staff developer is also a difficult one. As a staff member, the developer is fully aware of museum needs, schedules and exhibit limitations: as a person close to the community, the developer is also very sensitive to Board issues and concerns. Inevitably, there are moments when the staff person is pulled between two conflicting sets of needs and demands and may have to even choose to support one over the other.

The demands placed upon the Board are equally difficult. The Board is a group of individuals, not a monolith and yet they must strive for consensus in order to create the exhibit. Even more difficult, they function primarily as advisors, rather than true developers. They therefore have to accept the limits set by the institution and rely on museum staff to select and effectively translate their passions (deepest feelings). Given these parameters, the creation of an exhibit that met the goals defined by both parties is noteworthy and exciting.

#### A Native American Staff Member

A Board is critical to an exhibit's perspective and content as it is being created: Native American participation is just as critical once the exhibit is completed and opened to the general public. Intense involvement with the newly opened exhibit did continue, through the work of the exhibit assistant. As part of the grant, Helen was able to spend two days a week on the space as a Native American "presence" - observing visitor reactions, answering questions, responding to chance remarks, initiating discussions and training the museum staff who had day to day responsibility for interpreting the exhibit to the public. Since the grant terminated, the museum has been able to fund Helen part time to continue this critical role.

\* \* \*

If one looks back and compares the development process and content of the 1968 wigwam exhibit with 1979 "We're Still Here" exhibit, major changes can be seen. Instead of non-Indian anthropologists, Native American people participated directly in the creation of the exhibit; instead of only describing the past, the new exhibit stresses the cultural continuum that links past and present; instead of generalizing about all Indian peoples between Canada and North Carolina, the new exhibit focuses on Southern New England and strongly states that Indian people are still here and still connected to their culture.

\* \* \*

This report has been prepared by Joan Lester, Curator and Native American Developer, Boston Children's Museum.

APPENDIX G

Sample/Catalogue Card