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The History of the Ethnographic Collections at the Fleming Museum

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The History of the Ethnographic Collections at the Fleming Museum

Anthropology Honors Thesis presented by Corrie Roe, Class of 2014

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Thanks
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I. Abstract

The formation of a museum collection is a process spanning time and space that involves the culturally embedded action and interaction of multiple parties. The resulting display both reflects and perpetrates ideologies that are consumed by its visitors. These ideas are explored through the examination of the history of the ethnographic collection at the Fleming Museum in Burlington, Vermont through analysis of the museum’s donors.

II. Introduction: How does a collection form?

Museum collections are the result of the gathering and organization of objects by both donors and curators. A collection can be broadly described as a group of things that have been selected to be together (Macdonald 2006:82). This process can be intentional and systematic, or random and unmethodical, but the resulting group is one embedded with meaning, and meant to represent a whole, even if yet incomplete (ibid.).

As Pearce (1993) explains, making a collection may be a way for an individual to organize their relationship with the physical world. Collections are a way of travel – of making “[...] other times and other places open to us” (Pearce 1993:51) – and also act as reminders and confirmation of identity, and for memory after death. The collector may have a particular goal in mind, from completing a series – all of something – to filling a space, creating an aesthetic display or assembling a sampling of perfect objects.

However, collections are not predetermined or instinctually formed; they are the result of cultural practices that involve many places, people and things. Bryne et
al. (2011), in their description of how to unpack museum collections, write of the Actor-Network Theory, the idea that to understand an object, there is a need to understand its place in its cultural and social context. The Actor-Network Theory explains human and object interaction as occurring within a network. This network is connected by the relationships between objects and agents, those who affect objects. Each agent can be seen as a node within a larger network, which requires the other parts of the network to function.

There are multiple actors that affect the path of an object, which is seen in the creation of a museum’s collection. With museum objects, any item has the potential to be affected by the decisions of the creator, collector, salesperson or middleman, museum or curator, and the public. With these agents, decisions about possessing – whether an object is selected, gifted, disposed of, sold or exchanged – classifying, exhibiting and the like influence the ‘life’ of the object and, in turn, shape other agents’ actions in the network. The path of an object to a museum is not necessarily linear, neatly progressing from one actor to the next, but most do move in this way, so that the actions of the creator affects those of the collector, which affects those of the curator, and so on.

The processes involved with this network occur within the specific cultural context inhabited by each of the agents. Collections can hence be seen as reflections of the ideological, political and social circumstances resulting from these cultural contexts. Everything in a museum’s collection is the result of a selection guided by a variety of criteria, from the intellectual, to the economic, to the idiosyncratic (Pearce
A huge range of factors – from a donor’s intellectual interests, finances, institutional history to social skills – must be considered to understand what was collected and why (Gosden and Knowles 2001:xx).

This thesis project focuses on these factors and processes and their effect on the formation of the ethnographic collection at the University of Vermont’s Fleming Museum. The research concentrates on the analysis of some of the most prominent donors of ethnographic materials since the collection’s beginning in 1826 through the mid-twentieth century, when museum operations and curation underwent significant changes.

The initial information about the holdings was gathered utilizing the museum’s archives. Object registers – one by nineteenth century curator George H. Perkins, and a pair of ethnographic object accession records – were used as a primary source on the items in the museum’s collections. Biographical research on the donors was completed using the museum’s donor files, and other information and records in the University of Vermont’s Special Collections. These sources will be described at length in the following chapter (VI) that examines the Fleming’s donors.

This research focuses on ethnographic objects. Ethnographic objects and collections are particularly interesting in their reflection of ideologies, especially those about other cultures, many of which stem from anthropology. However, labeling an object as ‘ethnographic’ is not an unequivocal designation. In this research, ‘ethnographic object’ refers to material culture that is treated as such, that
is, items from cultures that are not considered to be ‘Western culture’. The term is not without problems, which are touched upon in the research below.

An update of Kirshenblatt-Gimblett’s statement (1988) that “[...] objects become ethnographic by virtue of being defined, segmented, detached, and carried away by ethnographers” is that this occurs to degrees, and even more when objects are admitted to a museum (Wingfield 2011:121). Ethnographic objects have traditionally been displayed for the idea they convey, not necessarily their form (Davalos 2004:527). The object’s original function is emphasized in elaborate labels that present the item as an example from a culture as a whole, not a product of an individual maker (Clunas et al. 1998:44; Davalos 2004:527; Svasek 2007:140-1).

III. An overview of museum history

Ames describes museums as “artefacts of society,” in that they are created and influenced by a society’s current ideologies, from the academic to the political (1992:15). The following overview of the formation of the museum, its practices and movements will place these processes within a great societal and cultural context. The history of museums in the United States, and the collecting and display of ethnographic materials will be highlighted for a better understanding of the Fleming Museum’s history and ethnographic collection.

Though a tradition of collecting has been suggested back to prehistoric times, the modern museum institution began to materialize during the European Renaissance (Prösler 1996:27-8). It was during this time that the collecting and
arranging of objects emerged as a way to understand curiosities and new discoveries (Macdonald 2006:84). By the fifteenth century, the discovery of ‘new’ worlds and peoples encouraged a “culture of curiosity” among Europe’s elite (Prösler 1996:28-31). Collecting was focused on assembling objects demonstrating this expanded understanding of the world, as well as to explore all that remained unknown (ibid.).

These unsystematic assemblages of objects were to be placed in specific rooms designated solely for their purpose, with the earliest housed within churches or courts (Prösler 1996:28). The resulting “cabinets of curiosity” were often composed of displays of clustered objects that were meant to be awe-inspiring (Ames 1992:50). Objects were collected as trophies and souvenirs from travels to stimulate admiration of the collector’s knowledge, adventurousness, and privilege (Ames 1985:38-9). Cultural objects were often included among the curiosities in these collections (Shelton 2006:67). These items served as the precursor of ethnographic collections (ibid.).

Cabinets became increasingly institutionalized in the sixteenth century (Prösler 1996:30). With the intensification of colonization, and the corresponding expansion of exploration and collecting, a need for basic organization emerged (ibid.). Though collections remained haphazardly assembled, some form of a taxonomy system was often applied to collections by the turn of the seventeenth century (Macdonald 2006:85).
Beginning around this time, the diffusion of Enlightenment thought opened many private collections to a greater public (Pieterse 2005:169). Cabinets of curiosity had not been meant to have didactic purposes for the general public (Prösler 1996:27-8). Their restricted access reflected the access to education in general, and was limited to the ruling class (Ames 1992:16). The Enlightenment’s support of public education, coupled with political revolutions¹ and the Industrial Revolution’s facilitation of distributing knowledge², created a social environment that embraced the museum.

The conversion of private or royal collections was especially common for the first public museums, which were accordingly identified with a particular person or family and their worldview (Duncan and Wallach 2004:55-6). Before public access, collections had been seen as a private representation of the owner’s understanding of the universe (Prösler 1996:30). Collection cabinets were an indicator of social status and an expression of personal identity, intellect, and power (ibid.). Encouraged by the idea that the self could be made, collecting was a means of creating and reflecting on the self (ibid.). Hence, the earliest museums that opened to the educated public were personal statements of taste and expressions of power (Ames 1992:21).

¹ The French Revolution being the most prominent example, further discussed with its establishment of the Louvre below
² Particularly relevant features are the invention of the printing press, spread of education in vernacular language, increasing importance of the middle class, and the expansion of democratic systems (Ames 1992:16).
As more collections were opened to the public, however, they became expected to convey greater societal values (Ames 1992:21). Many private or royal collections had become property of the government or the people (Prösler 1996:35-6). These museums were the first to promote a collective identity through their collections and displays as they became both a symbol and a tool of the state (Pieterse 2005:169). The state, acting as a cultural guardian, reinforced citizenship by emphasizing certain values and a particular identity, which enabled the exclusion of some groups (Duncan and Wallach 2004:59).

The opening of these collections also prompted new means to organize a museum (Ames 1992:17; Duncan and Wallach 2004:58). Museums were being transformed into didactic instruments and, as such, began to utilize a systematic classification system and include some information and interpretation of the objects on display (Ames 1992:17; Fisher 2004:438-9). Instead of being organized by aesthetics, as previous collections often were, museums utilized schools, chronology, or object function to order their collections (Fisher 2004:438).

Which of these organizational schemes was best suited for the museum was a source of debate, most prominently in the late nineteenth century. The purpose of the museum in general was also disputed at this time, as the first formal United States institutions were founded in Washington D.C. (Hinsley 2004:161). Franz Boas and W.H. Holmes were two figures within the discussion. Their writings are valuable resources that demonstrate some of the ideas of the era, especially in regards to the display of ethnographic materials.
Holmes’ 1902 treatise outlines some of the ideological arguments for the various organizational methods of a museum. A geographic-ethnic organization was deemed a valid choice since it was thought that “uncivilized” societies develop their culture according to geography (Holmes 1902:488). Ordering by the supposed level of evolution was seen as less effective, as the degree of development was too difficult to determine, and this would also fail to show the relation between neighboring peoples (Holmes 1902:491-3). A proper display would include life-size models of a typical family surrounded by cultural objects, as well as a miniaturized model of a group (Holmes 1902:488-9). The ideal display would also illustrate the physical characteristics and dispositions of the people using things like skeletal evidence, casts or drawings (Holmes 1902:490).

Another organizational strategy suggested by Holmes was a typographic arrangement, meant to show the progression of certain elements within civilization, from the use of raw materials up through music and medicine (Holmes 1902:494-5). Most museums used a comparative system of classification, however, that used anthropology to validate social order, inequality, and colonization (Coombes 2004:235-6). The ways in which anthropology was both influenced by and influencing colonization will be expanded upon below.

Boas’ 1907 treatise more broadly outlined ideas about the purpose of the nineteenth century museum, especially how museums could be improved through their displays. While Boas thought museums could be for entertainment, instruction, and the promotion of research, he also judged that 90 percent of nineteenth century
museum visitors attended for the former (Boas 1907:921,924). Boas suggested certain techniques that would not detract from the museum’s didactic purpose and would educate the public, despite the common visitor’s general ignorance in the proper means to utilize a museum (Boas 1907:922). Boas argued that museums must find a way to focus the visitor’s attention, which could be achieved with either a smaller number of impressive objects on display, or a comprehensive and encyclopedic larger museum (Boas 1907:923). Boas favored the creation of these latter survey museums in the hope that massive displays could better represent complex ideas and ways of life (Boas 1907:923, 8).

Furthermore, Boas was responsible for popularizing the placement of objects in artificially created contexts, grouping them together to illustrate a particular meaning or way of life (Ames 1992:51-2). He argued this contextualization of items allowed for a viewing closer to a ‘native’ point of view (Ames 1985:40). Placing objects in a contextualized environment was meant to simulate the origin culture and most accurately represent the complex ideas associated with an object (Ames 1985:40; Boas 1907:928). The display of objects was not enough for Boas, who thought labels and explanations were also necessary components for popular understanding of an exhibit (Boas 1907:929).

In accordance with the new instructional purposes of the museum, the shift in the approach and access of education also corresponded with a different way of collecting that sought to create collections that would be similarly pedagogic. Curiosities and objects meant to draw crowds – a common previous objective –
were to be avoided (Ames 1992:17; DiMaggio 2004:463). Collecting trips organized by museums, first seen in Germany at this time, were meant to provide better-documented and controlled acquisitions (Shelton 2006:68). Combined with objects inherited from scientific societies and amateur collectors, these objects formed the first ethnographic-specific collections that began to emerge in the late nineteenth century (ibid.).

Also contributing to these cultural collections were the late nineteenth and early twentieth century politics, nation building and a personal search for prestige and adventure (ter Keurs 2011:165). World fairs, beginning with the 1851 exhibition at London’s Crystal Palace, called for national representations that led to a spike of interest in foreign peoples and provided a new context for travel (Kaufman 2004:273). Collecting objects was an important component of this travel, connected to Victorian society’s interest with the exotic, and was an important source of objects for many early museums (Pearce and Arnold 2000:21; Shelton 2006:65). The world expositions also presented museums the opportunity to expand their collections, especially those without the finances to fund collecting trips (Shelton 2006:67).

World fairs were laden with cultural ideologies, many connected to the prominence of colonization at the time. Colonization and colonialism had a major influence on society and anthropology in the nineteenth century, which were reflected in museum and collecting practices, as explored below.
Anthropology research and museums surged in two waves during the late
nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Shelton 2006:65). The first
anthropological museums were established alongside the discipline in universities
in the first half of the nineteenth century (Ames 1985:39). Anthropology was being
established as a field of study in the mid-nineteenth century and, especially in the
United States, had an undefined state (Hinsley 2004:163). It was a field coveted by
enthusiastic amateurs and scientists (Hinsley 2004:164). The lack of a standard
method and of institutional structures, combined with large amounts of data that
was previously unutilized, created great openness and competition in the field,
which trickled into the first museums (Hinsley 2004:165).

Early anthropology also heavily relied on individuals for funding their
research and fieldwork (Stocking 1985:113). Though this does not differ from
today’s funding process, anthropologists especially had to appeal to these donors’
ideologies in order to secure funding. Research that was funded in these early
days in turn shaped the development of anthropology (Hinsley 1985:121). The first
anthropological museum in the United States, the Peabody Museum, was guided by
the cultural ideologies of its donors. A collecting trip to Honduras, for example was
sponsored because of a donor’s personal interests in Central American archaeology
(Hinsley 1985:71). Central American archaeology also received more support
overall than, for instance, the excavation of Native American shell heaps, because
Central American cultures were considered to have a higher status than the latter

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3 Funded by George Peabody in the 1860s (see Hinsley 1985 for a comprehensive history)
(Hinsley 1985:71). “Primitive” people and American antiquities were not thought of as worthy for study as they were deemed inferior cultures, and so did not receive equal treatment at the Peabody (Hinsely 1985:51-5).

The second deluge of anthropology museums, occurring between 1890-1931, found its basis in imperialism, rationalism and colonial collecting (Shelton 2006:65). This time period follows the 1884 Conference of Berlin, which organized the European ‘Scramble for Africa’, formalizing the colonization of Africa by European nations (ibid.). As anthropology was used to determine the colonized as lesser people, it was also manipulated to prove the value of colonies’ craftsmanship, partially through its collection of objects (Coombes 2004:237; Goldwater 2004:134). Nineteenth century collecting, based in colonial ideology, provided scores of materials for new museums, and remains the foundation for many ethnographic and anthropological collections (Ames 1992:51, Pieterse 2005:164).

The collecting style in colonial times varied depending on the style of colonialism in the region, the current trends in museums and anthropology, and the means of object categorization (Gosden and Knowles 2001:49). Even without the intention to form collections, colonists gathered objects from protectorate cultures as trophies and curios (Pieterse 2005:164). Those who did deliberately assemble items to form a collection sometimes did so with the justification of salvage anthropology, which was meant to preserve disappearing cultures (Pieterse 2005:164). Salvage anthropology was a common validation in early United States
American anthropology to ransack Native American communities for cultural objects (Berlo and Phillips 2995:7; Kreps 2003:87).

Social evolutionist theory was also used as validation for both collecting and colonial interventions in British and United States museums (Ames 1992:51; Shelton 2006:69). As mentioned above, this idea that certain cultures were more evolved than others also organized the collections, as cultures that were considered ‘primitive’ were ordered according to taxonomy similar to what would be used for scientific classification (Ames 1985:39). Comparatives were essential in the display of ethnographic objects, as they were classified and presented according to either geographical origin, the perceived evolution of the culture, or similarities in form (Ames 1985:39; Ames 1992:51). Cultural relativism, which views cultures as separate, unchanging wholes, was especially relevant in ethnographic displays, as they were, “strongly influenced by the perception and interpretation of cultures as distinct configurations which could be represented through ‘typical specimens’” (Pieterse 2005:169).

The Pitt Rivers Museum at Oxford has a well-documented history that is particularly demonstrative of shifts in nineteenth century museum and collecting ideology. As described at length by Chapman (1985), Augustus Pitt Rivers began forming a collection with a series of guns that emphasized the exotic around 1851. As many colonial and military collectors did, he expanded his collection, mostly with archaeological materials, during service overseas. After semi-retirement from the army, he worked in the sciences and with museums, increasingly with ethnography.
Heavily influenced by Darwin, he continued to collect in hopes of showing the evolution of human technology. Pitt Rivers believed the comparison of artifacts would provide further evidence for evolution where other methods had failed, and, furthermore, that modern object forms could show common origins. His interest in comparing objects as a tool led him to a typological arrangement that organized the collection by type of object to show a progression in technology. In 1884, Pitt Rivers donated his large collection of materials to establish a museum at Oxford that was to be named after him and organized according to his requests.

The methods of Pitt Rivers as a collector were not unusual in the nineteenth century; however, social change of the twentieth century created major shifts in the collecting and museum world (Pieterse 2005:164). After World War II, there were less emphasis and funding for material culture research within anthropology, which showed in collections (Gosden and Knowles 2001:55). Cultural relativism came to be seen as an outdated ideology, as cultures were increasingly acknowledged as changing and heterogeneous (Pieterse 2005:167-8). Postcolonialism and multiculturalism most affected ethnographic museums, as globalization allowed for multiple identities and sources of self (Pieterse 2005:164, 170).

Beginning in the 1960s and escalating in the 1980s, there have been considerable upheavals in the way museums operate, some due to an increase in the number of museums overall, and a more equal distribution of museums geographically (Hudson 2004:90). Newer museums were often smaller and specialized (Hudson 2004:90).
Davies and Paine (2004) conducted a survey of museum curators to pinpoint their perceived changes of the new museum age. Along with better care for collections, the majority of the recognized changes stem from the 1980s ‘managerial revolution’, which established the museum professional and the museum’s focus on its visitors (Davies and Paine 2004:57-8; Hudson 2004:87). The International Councils of Museums’ definition of a museum reflected these changes in its definition of the museum as an institution for its visitors, which forty years previous was not a concern (Hudson 2004:85).

Today’s museums continue to be influenced by a changing society. The availability of computers, the Internet, television and other media technology has changed the way people utilize their leisure time and get information (Burton and Scott 2003:58; Macdonald 1996:1-2). The museum’s position as the highest cultural authority is increasingly challenged, as information is easily gathered through other means (Burton and Scott 2003:58). Mobile and heterogeneous consumers also demand that museums find different ways to connect to and entice the public, who are key to funding the museum/business (Burton and Scott 2003:64-5; Davies and Paine 2004:58). The focus of museums, especially those small and independently funded, on the visitor as a customer has completely reoriented many museums, their internal structure, and their displays (Ames 1992:9-11; Davies and Paine 2003:59).

The need for public support also emerged simultaneously with the acknowledgement of increased stakes held by the people on display in a museum
These two interests have the potential and often do conflict, as general consumers are, “more focused on being informed about and entertained by glimpses of others cultures and earlier times (the more exotic the better),” while native peoples and other displayed groups are, “more concerned about how their own cultures and histories are being used as exotic entertainment by and for others” (Ames 1992:12).

The very existence of ethnographic and anthropological museums is increasingly called into question on a matter of principle: are they necessary, and are they more detrimental than didactic? Ethnographic objects and collections have increasingly been incorporated into other display settings so that history, art and ethnographic museums are progressively less distinct categories (Pieterse 2005:171). In the case that they are not, however, critics argue that cultures are still exoticized or marked as inferior (Ames 1992:23, Pieterse 2005:169). Even with the acknowledgement of the ‘native’ voice or of a collection’s tumultuous history, critics argue that placing objects in a museum results in sanitized, segregated displays that control and subordinate those cultures, marking them a source of entertainment (Ames 1992:23). It has been argued that even utilizing a ‘native’ point of view is still an outsider’s perspective, as it is museum maker’s construction of these perspectives (Ames 1992:54). The challenge of the contemporary museum, Pieterse writes, is to find the appropriate compromise between “cultural apartheid and global standardization” (Pieterse 2005:169).
To combat the problems with univocal museum displays, some museums are working closely with the people they display to create exhibits with multiple perspectives and interpretations. This is best seen in the work done in collaboration with Native Americans and First Nations peoples, especially following the institution of the United States’ 1990 Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (Kreps 2003).

Canadian and United States anthropological museums and collections have avoided some of the contemporary contentions seen in European museums, as they increasingly include indigenous perspectives, “acknowledging the importance of cultural over object preservation, the right of native communities to use museum objects, and the authority of Native American philosophies on the understanding and care of collections, clearly aligning itself with indigenous interests” (Shelton 2006:75). A display at the Royal British Columbia Museum in Victoria, for instance, had success with hiring First Nations peoples as exhibit interpreters (Harrison 2005:39). In another First Nations exhibit at the Glenbow Museum in Calgary, Alberta, Blackfoot elders determined the content, selected objects and approved of the final labels and design of the exhibit (Harrison 2005:33). An exhibition at the Ethnography Gallery at the Birmingham Museum incorporated multiple perspectives in its display of objects from Papua New Guinea, with interpretations from four different sources (Pieterse 2005:178). These collaborative exhibits challenge the singular narratives that museums have utilized in the past (Harrison 2005:40).
Many modern controversies in museums are based on conflicts of representation and memory, especially with the way difficult topics like war or other violence are depicted (White 1997:9). One of the best-known examples of such a conflict is the 1995 display of Enola Gay, the first airplane to drop an atomic bomb in World War II, in the Smithsonian’s National Air and Space Museum (White 1997:10). The disagreement over the display stemmed from the way in which the plane was shown, which was a confusion of commemoration and historical treatment, and especially problematic in a national institution speaking for the collective national ‘we’ (White 1997:10-1). As the event had occurred within living memory, there were multiple living perspectives of the event, all of which were not included (White 1997:10).

As written by Ames (1985), perhaps the best method a modern museum has adopted is to acknowledge both its capabilities and limitations as an institution:

“It is more important for a museum to concentrate on what it can do best, which is to present its own point of view as a professional institution, recognizing the limitations that implies, and to work in partnership with the museums and cultural organizations of the ‘native’ or indigenous peoples. A museum is only one volume in an encyclopedia of culture that is always in the process of being written” (Ames 1985:47).

Calling attention to the problematic nature of the museum in its own displays has been one method utilized by conceptual artist Fred Wilson (Berger 2004:500-1). Typically, the circumstances and processes that create a museum are discreet if included at all within public view, especially when museum professionals operate on the premise of objectivity (Porter 2004:106). This is especially true with ethnographic displays, which often omit the shared time and space that enable
researchers to gain information during fieldwork (Riegel 1996:88). This denial makes participation into an activity of observation and difference (Riegel 1996:88). Displays emphasize the universal quality of the cultures they display while distancing themselves from often problematic histories (Pieterse 2005:165).

With a vastly different approach, Wilson is known for his critiques of museum displays – which he argues foster racism and stereotypes while excluding certain parts of history – through the creation of exhibits that explicitly call attention to the problematics in a parody of traditional museum displays (Berger 2004:500). This approach can be easily misconstrued, however, as other institutions that have attempted to replicate this method have done so less successfully. The wildly criticized exhibit ‘Into the Heart of Africa’ at the Royal Ontario Museum in 1990 was condemned for its ambiguous use of irony, which only served to normalize colonial discourse, according to critics (Riegel 2004:92; Schildkrout 2004). The museum’s attempt to deconstruct the museum as an institution and critique colonialism failed to created a dialogue with visitors who were not familiar with the history surrounding the displayed objects, which had been gathered by missionaries and colonists (Riegel 2004:92; Schildkrout 2004:182). The exhibit lacked an overall explicitness, including background information on colonialism and multiple voices in the narrative (Schildkrout 2004:187-8).

Central to these modern challenges for museum makers is the construction of ideology, which is increasingly acknowledged and researched, and which is the topic of the next chapter.
IV. The construction and reflection of ideology in museums

Since its beginning, the museum has been constructed as the keeper and expert of culture. In her extensively utilized conjecture, Carol Duncan (1995) argues that the museum owes its authority to its elevated status in society, which originates in its equivalence in function to a temple. The museums of the sixteenth and seventeenth century were often modeled after ceremonial monuments, both in function and architecture (Duncan 1995:10). The latter practice has certainly not stopped in contemporary museum construction, as seen with the museums on Washington D.C.’s National Mall, or even with the monumentality of modern art museums seen at the various locations of the Guggenheim Museum and Foundation.

Duncan also argues that the museum continues to operate as a temple. Most of today’s predominant museums were established in the nineteenth century to act as the cathedrals and guardians of modern scientific society, and to ultimately to spur civilization and encourage industrialization (Luke 2002:xiv). These museums are places that still teem with the symbolism of ritual, which can be seen in something as typical as Duncan’s example of a museum map. Visitors are given a map when they enter a museum space to guide them and to help them navigate the universe of the museum. By following the suggested path, visitors follow a prescribed narrative in a process very similar to a ceremony. The semblance between the museum and the temple allows for the former to be recognized as an institution with authority, and to also be studied as ritual spaces (Duncan 1995:12).
This connection can contribute to a better understanding of the museum in society and its role in imposing meanings in this capacity (Duncan 1995:11).

The perception of museums as authoritative institutions gives them the power to define and control a particular projection of reality (Riegel 1996:85). Museum displays are one of the primary ways societies represent themselves (Dubin 2006:479). They are expected to educate their visitors on a particular topic and, furthermore, to tell the truth – to show the displayed material as it really is or was (Porter 2004:106). This reputation grants a certain amount of power to those at the helm of museums, as they preside over what are accepted to be facts (ibid.). As encapsulated by Duncan (1995:11):

To control a museum means precisely to control the representation of the community's highest values and most authoritative truths. [...] What we see and do not see in art museums – and on what terms and by whose authority we do or do not see it – is closely linked to larger questions about who constitutes the community who defines its identity.

Whether intentional or otherwise, museums, in their position of authority, have the potential to create, promote, and dismiss cultural concepts, ideologies and narratives. Culture, the key concept of anthropology, is viewed as something that is constructed and must be maintained (Luke 2002:82). Museums, as cultural authorities, are an institution where values, meaning and identity undergo this construction and sustainment (Luke 2002:82). They give tangibility to ideas by reflecting and perpetrating particular cultural views, ideologies and principal, and so are not considered neutral spaces by modern researchers (Dubin 2006:479; Riegel 1996:89).
At the extreme of this conjecture, some argue the primary function of a museum is ideological, with the resulting institution as one that purposefully bestows societal beliefs and values (Duncan and Wallach 2004:52). A museum’s presentation of culture, history or politics is generally one that is socially accepted, if not within a hegemonic narrative (Preziosi 1997:6). As Luke (2002:xxiv) writes, museums are, "sites of finely structured normative argument and artfully staged cultural normalization". Museums display the past through the lens of the present and, in doing so, enable the creation of both history and identity (Ames 1992:117, Duro 2004:77). Even with the absence of a dominant ideology, museums will always display a narrative or identity (Preziosi 1995:13).

Museum narratives are often constructed in covert ways. In anthropology museums especially, the construction of narrative and identity is tied to the process of ‘Othering’, the idea in anthropology that your ideas of self, identity and the groups you consider yourself a part of – the ‘us’ – are created by defining yourself and what you are not, which becomes the ‘them’ (Karp and Kratz 2000:195). Museums act as ‘contact zones’ between cultures and peoples, creating a space where the contestation and reinforcement of self and Otherness occurs (Clifford 1988).

Othering and identity creation can occur through emphasized differences or asserted sameness and familiarity between the audience and those displayed in a museum (Barthes 1984:194; Karp and Kratz 2000:197). In this way, museum displays may be considered either, respectively, exoticizing or assimilating (Pieterse 2005:165). The latter process aims to communicate universal human
understandings with a narrative that shows the similarities between all people (ibid.). This has been the conscious preferred strategy for contemporary museums, especially anthropology and ethnographic, since the mid-twentieth century’s new museum age to promote the universal qualities of the cultures they display (Pieterse 2005:165).

In contrast, exoticizing is said to occur when an object or display is meant to exude or call attention to differences, particularly between the museum visitor and the cultures on display (Lionnet 2004:98). The exhibited objects and peoples are highlighted as strange or exotic – an Other – through exhibition discourse and display methods (ibid.) This approach is condemned in modern practice and is often a common source of critique. Explicit exoticizing is associated with early museums and their displays of curiosities, especially those that collected ethnographic materials (ibid.).

A particularly accessible example of identity created in a museum setting is the construction of national identity. Many of the first major museums of the early nineteenth century were national museums, created to act as an encyclopedia and a place to stage the state’s history (Duro 2004:75). Objects displayed in national galleries and history museums were and are meant to communicate the epitome of culture and history, thereby creating and reinforcing a certain view of that country, its society, and culture (Svasek 2007:124, 138). As White (1997:23) writes, “The presence (or absence) of certain objects in the context of a national museum works
to select and define events as historic, significant, and deserving of collective recognition”.

Countries also use national museums to project a particular view of their country and culture, often emphasizing their progressive nature and national achievements (Ames 1992:113). The display of French art juxtaposed with classical art in the Louvre, for example, was intended to mark France as the, “true heir of classical civilization” (Duncan and Wallach 2004:61). The museum’s display of looted objects in the nineteenth century also served as reinforcement of France’s superiority over other cultures, aligning with the idea that, “The power to represent or to consume other cultures is a form of domination” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1992:304).

Just as history and national museums create a particular identity, ethnographic museums also create an imperial or colonial identity (Pieterse 2005:169). Quintessentially, anthropology has historically been considered to be the study of the Other (Clifford 1988:9). Inherently, anthropological museums have likewise been concerned with the image of the Other – according to Ames (1985:37), specifically, with, “third world peoples and ethnic minorities” – rather than the self, and have sometimes been judged to be institutions that are actively involved with Othering (Pieterse 2005:163). This is a recurrent critique of the field of anthropology, which is charged with the active construction of the people it studies (Ames 1992:59). According to some like Clifford (1988:9), ethnography and
ethnographic museums are, “always caught up in the invention rather than the representation of cultures.”

Display technique is another important factor to consider in the construction of museum narrative. Today, anthropological collections that have not been dissolved or incorporated into other museums tend to favor an aesthetic presentation of ethnographic objects (Shelton 2006:74). This aesthetic or formalist perspective is in many ways a response to Boas’ contextualism (Ames 1985:41). The formalist perspective argues that anthropologists create the world on display, the solution of which is to emphasize form over content (ibid.). Supporters of contextualism continue to postulate that this decontextualization has the potential to distort, appropriate, and dominate cultures (Ames 1992:71; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998; Lionnet 2004:92). These critics argue that displays decontextualizing simple objects from ‘exotic’ cultures also exploit and magnify their unfamiliarity, Othering these cultures and making a spectacle of the quotidian (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998; Lionnet 2004:92). Visitors remain separated from those cultures on display, which, in effect, reinforces their own beliefs and identity (Lionnet 2004:94). For some, museums are, no matter the display technique, unavoidably, “cannibalistic in appropriating other peoples’ material for their own study and interpretation, and they confine their representations to glass box display cases” (Ames 1992:3).

As demonstrated here, the location of an object has consequences on its meaning. Even more elemental than the categorization of an object as belonging to
one museum or another is the very display of an object. The majority of objects that are on display in museums were not created with the intent of being put there\(^4\) (Fisher 2004:441). As explained by Fisher (2004), these items, especially ethnographic ones, often begin their ‘life’ with a very different purpose and setting – geographically, socially, spatially – and are ‘resocialized’ with a change in these elements. An object that has been used and preserved, collected, or otherwise marked as worthy has the potential to be regarded as sacred or treasured. When such traits are emphasized through resocialization processes, they may end up in a museum.

Fisher writes that when placed in a museum, objects have been resocialized yet again, embedded into a new social world. The original cultural and social contexts from which an object has been stripped are muted after resocialization, which results in new images and associations. The inclusion of an object in a museum setting has the power to resocialize the ordinary into something worth studying or seeing (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998:51). With its authority, the museum can transform the ordinary into spectacle, or the looted into a symbol of power (Fisher 2004:447; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998; Lionnet 2004:92).

Objects can and do exist in multiple social worlds, with certain traits more or less visible in each (Fisher 2004:446). The view of an object is transformed in different times, spaces and juxtapositions; a combination of these factors creates a

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\(^4\) This is not the case with non-representational objects of modern art, made specifically for the museum, which requires different analysis (Fisher 2004:448).
particular context in which the object assumes a unique meaning (Fisher 2004:436-7; Svasek 2007:123). This process is especially relevant to consider with objects in museum settings, as the context in which an item is displayed has the power to change its meaning (Barringer 1998:12).

**V. A historical overview of the Fleming Museum**

The creation of the University of Vermont’s collections coincided with the founding of the College of Natural History in 1826 (Markoe 2006; The Fleming Museum 2013b). The original cabinet, housed in the campus building known as Old Mill, was a central part of the teachings of the College. The collection – at its earliest, an assortment of natural history objects like geological specimens and ancient cultural objects like Greek coins – was formed from donations from professors and community members. By 1829, the collection had outgrown its space and in 1832 was moved beneath the university’s chapel, with funds allocated for new display cases. The first major purchase to expand the collection was made in 1832 from a professor’s private cabinet of minerals.

Little is known about the collection between 1851, when the College disbanded because of finances, and 1862, when it was moved to the new Library Hall, today’s Torrey Hall. This was the first new structure on campus in about 30 years because of financial difficulties and the decreased enrollment due to the

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5 Unless otherwise noted, the following information comes from a history of the Fleming Museum written by former curator Glenn E. Markoe in 1988, with an update added in 2006.
outbreak of the Civil War. The collection, which offered public access\(^6\) to ‘rare’ works, was mostly supported through the subscription of the Burlington community, which grew increasingly interested in the collection and its new acquisitions.

In 1873, George Henry Perkins, Dean of Arts and Sciences, began what would become an extremely influential 54-year term as the collection’s curator.\(^7\) Perkins’ influence is embedded in the history of the museum, which he describes in his first encounter with it in the 1860s:

“I saw, as we entered, a small but good collection of birds, a few mammals, shells and Indian relics, more minerals and a very few geological specimens... As a museum it was not very important nor attractive but it was to be my museum” (Markoe 2006).

One of Perkins’ first undertakings was the expansion of topics included in the collection. Like other museums with cultural objects, the Fleming’s ethnographic holdings were established alongside anthropology as a discipline, but also with ties to colonialism. Perkins’ interest in human culture, responsible for the creation of one of the first anthropological courses in the United States at the University of Vermont, introduced more archaeological and ethnographic objects into the collection’s holdings. The first major ethnographic donation – of 140 Native American objects from Ogden B. Read, an army officer during the Indian Wars – came in 1881. Perkins secured more ethnographic materials from Native American, African, and Oceanic cultures over the next 30 years, given increased space in

\(^{6}\) Like many collections of the era, permission was required to view the collection, and so attendance was fairly minimal.

\(^{7}\) Since moving to the library, a natural science faculty member had acted as the first curator.
Torrey Hall, where the collection would remain until the 1920s. The addition of a floor in the building allowed the collection to be separated into geological and zoological objects on one floor and fossils, archaeological and ethnographic objects on another.

The university's collection continued to expand from gifts and bequests and from numerous collecting trips Perkins took during his term as curator until it had once again outgrown its space. The contributions of businessman James Wilbur and Katherine Wolcott, the niece and heir of Robert Hull Fleming, allowed for the building of the Robert Hull Fleming Museum building in 1931, where the museum currently resides (Markoe 2006; The Fleming Museum 2013b). This space gave the growing collection its first proper housing and opportunity for organization, which was visited by an average of 25,000 people annually by the 1930s (The Fleming Museum 2013b).

The modernity of the Fleming was emphasized at the dedication ceremony: the museum was no longer to be an old-fashioned curiosity cabinet but a modern institution for the education of the public. The organization of objects up to this point, though not extensively documented, is likely to have been similar to that of a curiosity cabinet. Perkins' description of the early museum places geological, zoological and cultural objects together for display in cabinets. During his curatorial

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8 Fleming, a University of Vermont alumnus, class of 1862, became a successful Chicago businessman and spent his later life traveling with niece Katherine (The Fleming Museum 2010). In his trips to Europe and Asia he collected, "exotic objects along the way" that reflected the twentieth century American tourist's fascination with the foreign and exotic (The Fleming Museum 2000, 2010). Many of these items were donated to the Fleming in the twentieth century (ibid.).
term, the collection came to be organized by the broad type of object, that is geological with zoological items; and shells, fossils, archaeology and ethnographic objects together. These displays were plausibly decontextualized groupings of objects, however, there also was a period room, the Cannon Room, created in 1898 from the donations of Henry LeGrand Cannon that recreated Cannon’s own “India room”. Though this is not exactly what Boas referred to with his suggestions to recreate an environment for museum display, this contextualized display had the same effect in the exhibition of a specific ideology. Not much is known about the specifics of the organization of Fleming’s displays beyond this, until the collection moved to the Robert Hull Fleming Museum.

When the new museum building opened in 1931, the collection retained some of its eccentric arrangement. The East Wing of the first floor was dedicated to the Cannon Room, which was designated as the gallery for ethnographic art. Beyond this space for cultural objects, tapestries and Asian art objects collected by Fleming were also shown together in a separate gallery. The remaining items were separated into galleries for art, fish and reptile samples, industrial products, geological objects, and historical artifacts of Vermont history. With the slow removal of natural history objects over the next 20 years, this organization transitioned closer to today’s geographic-cultural organization through several reorganizations by directors and curators.

In the mid-twentieth century, the Fleming refocused itself as just a museum of art and anthropology (The Fleming Museum 2013b). By this time, most of the
natural history and zoological materials from the original collection had been given to the appropriate university department (ibid.). This process had started with the awareness of limited storage space, and the subsequent condensing of the zoological rooms for more Primitive Art galleries in 1939 (Perkins 1939:6,23). Ethnographic objects were moved to the upper floor in the 1940s, so that the art collection would be more accessible. In the 1970s, the museum’s ethnographic materials were divided into the Primitive, Antiquities, and Oriental galleries, while the Cannon Room remained a space for Edwardian curiosity with “exotic” objects from Asia (The Fleming Museum 1974). The Oriental Gallery was designated for Chinese dynastic bronzes and terra cottas, Islamic manuscripts, and Japanese ivory carvings (The Fleming Museum 1976).

A $1.4 million renovation in 1984 allowed for a more flexible and well structured museum space (The Fleming Museum 2013b). New Asian art galleries were opened, and European and American galleries followed. By 1990, the collection was divided into the American Gallery; European Gallery; Chinese ceramics, metal-work and Japanese ceramics; and Indian bronzes, Southeast Asian temple sculptures and Ancient Egyptian art (The Fleming Museum 1989). This was further arranged into today’s organization of the permanent ethnographic collection into a Native American Gallery, an Ancient Egyptian and African Gallery, and the corridor cases of Middle Eastern, Chinese, Japanese, Islamic and Ancient art, and Hindu sculpture (The Fleming Museum 2004, 2006). Especially within the last 15
years, there have been consistent exhibitions of ethnographic materials (The Fleming Museum 1972-2014).

Today, the Fleming Museum’s collection includes over 25,000 art and cultural objects (The Fleming Museum 2013a). Its mission is to inspire discoveries about art and culture, and act as, “a gateway for active cultural exchange and critical thinking in our communities and an essential learning resource for the University of Vermont” (The Fleming Museum 2013a). At the time of the opening of the Fleming Museum in 1931, museums were first becoming more community-orientated (The Fleming Museum 2013b). The Fleming Museum was meant to be a place of learning, not just for growing a permanent collection and was dedicated as community cultural center within its first decade of opening. The Fleming established this role with its educational programs, lecture series and other public services, which continues to be a defining feature (ibid.).

I had the opportunity to speak with the Fleming’s current Director, Janie Cohen⁹, and Manager of Collections and Exhibitions, Margaret Tamulonis¹⁰, about their experiences in the museum field, in which they each have been active for over 20 years, and specifically of their background at the Fleming.

Tamulonis joined the Fleming’s staff in the early 2000s working on digitalizing the museum’s catalogue cards, after which she worked with the registrar and later became appointed to her current position. One of the biggest changes she

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⁹ Interview with Janie Cohen conducted by the author, April 18, 2014
¹⁰ Interview with Margaret Tamulonis conducted by the author, April 9, 2014
has encountered in museum practices has been related to the treatment of certain cultural objects, especially with regards to sensitive materials that have been affected by regulations like NAGPRA. Though she has not experienced the repatriation of objects during her time at the Fleming, Tamulonis said her knowledge of the collection has given her an appreciation to the possibility of working through possible future requests:

Working here and working with our collections, understanding more about the history of how our collection was acquired and working with different representatives of Native American cultures, [...] I wouldn’t have a second thought about working with people from these different culture groups, talking to them about these objects and learning from them, [...] and then also talking about returning them.

Tamulonis’ cooperative attitude and support of working with cultural groups is one that has echoed in the museum’s ethnographic displays. Often the result of collaboration with university students, these displays often challenge the traditional museum presentation of culture, with exhibits that show curatorial and collecting processes and cite multiple narratives. The often-problematic processes that have contributed to the creation of the museum’s collection are acknowledged; reaffirming this, Tamulonis stated, “I believe in caring for the collection and am responsible for it as a staff member at UVM, but I do know that as a museum person I have a responsibility to acknowledge the history of collecting.”

According to Tamulonis, another important aspect of the curatorial process that has become ever more important is provenance, which in the museum environment refers to where and how an object is acquired, and who it is coming
from. As most ethnographic objects previously donated, and those that continue to come to the museum, are those collected during travels, Tamulonis said an important part of the curatorial process is to try to procure the provenance. Some of these items are not very personal and were made for sale to foreigners: the challenge of curating – and, though infrequent, purchasing – ethnographic objects is to garner some information about the object.

The knowledge of an object is one of the ways Tamulonis described the distinction between ethnographic and fine arts objects at the Fleming. Ethnographic objects have historically been separated from and filed differently than fine arts objects at the museum. As with many other ethnographic collectors, cultural objects are often given without an individual maker’s name. Additionally, the type of object and the way in which it is stored and treated make an important differentiation. Though fine art may also have specific requirements for display and storage according to the maker’s wishes, Tamulonis said that ethnographic objects are characterized by the needs and requests of the origin culture.

Cohen began work at the Fleming in 1991 as Curator and Assistant Director, and becoming the Director in 2002. One of the notable changes in recent Fleming history that she has been involved with is the reorganization of the galleries during her time on the staff. She was partially responsible for the combining of the European and American galleries to create additional space for the Native American gallery and rotating ethnographic exhibit. This was done to modernize what felt like an outdated organization of the collection, which Cohen said is a persistent concern.
for the museum, as practices, relationships, and understandings are always changing. Cohen said these constant recalibrations are perhaps the biggest curation challenge of ethnographic objects at the Fleming, even more so than the display of controversial objects.

Cohen was also a part of the museum’s name change, which has been formalized within the past few years. Originally the Robert Hull Fleming Museum of Art and Anthropology, the name was shortened to UVM’s Fleming Museum of Art after discussions among the museum staff and focus groups. Cohen said that the name was changed to tell what the museum was actually about, and refocuses on its global art collection. When asked about the name change, Tamulonis said she had been apprehensive at first, concerned that ethnographic objects could become secondary; however, she said she was confident in the museum’s strategic plan and Cohen as a director. Tamulonis sees both ethnographic and fine arts objects at the core of the Fleming’s collection, with both types of objects able to tell a story.

VI. The donors of ethnographic materials at the Fleming Museum

The formation of the Fleming Museum’s ethnographic collections can perhaps best be analyzed through examination of a few key donors’ background and history. In many ways, a collector’s life history is embedded in their collections, and so this research has approached collection formation from both the museum’s records and the donors’ backgrounds (Bryne et al. 2011:16). The following donors
were selected for their proclivity for donation, uniqueness of contributions, and availability of biographical or background information.

This research has approached donors as a set of actors within the Actor Network Theory model. Each object in the Fleming’s collection is connected to the donors, as actors within the network, by the relationships and processes that surround that object. As means of illustration, consider a Pueblo vase given to the museum in the late nineteenth century by Elihu Taft, one of the donors described below. This object arrived at the museum by traveling through a series of actors, whose decisions affected those of the other actors within its network. The vase first had to be made by a Puebloan person, with either the intent to be sold or given away, or the development of such a choice. Taft had to have contact with the vase’s producer, or to a middleperson, in order to have access to the item, which he then decided to purchase. This vase was later donated to the Fleming, which involves the determination by Taft to give the object to the museum and that by the curators to accept the item, and possibly display it. The decisions made by each of these agents – the producer, collector and curator – were made within the network surrounding the vase, which cannot be understood without consideration of each agent’s social and cultural context. Each choice that affected the others, so that the sequence of decisions ultimately ended with the vase coming to the museum. A donor is clearly not the only agent acting on an object; other pieces of the network affecting the

11 The former is more likely in this example, however: see the details on the development of the southwestern Native American pottery trade in Taft’s section below.
actions of a donor must be considered to properly contextualize a donated object. Related to this, the process of how an object has come to the Fleming, of its resocialization, should be considered.

As mentioned in the introduction, the Fleming’s archives were a main source of data in this research. Since Perkins’ appointment as curator in 1873, the museum has had some sort of record of its growing collection. Perkins’ record keeping is one of the best sources of information on the formation of the early collection.\textsuperscript{12} Perkins noted the known information – including the description, location, donor, and material – of each of the upwards of 6,000 items he recorded. Though there are certain aspects that are uniform for each of the entries, the register is often variable; the inconsistencies can perhaps provide some insight into both Perkins, as a curator and collector, and the donors of this time at the museum. However, the reading of these variations should be taken as interpretation and possible correlation, not as fact: other factors, from human error to general inconsistencies in museum practices, are also at play.

One of the most apparent aspects of the register is a lack of information the donors – and Perkins as the curator – had about the objects given to the museum. This is documented in the register in question marks, ‘probably’-s and blank spaces. The variety of description also provides a clue about collecting habits or perhaps what Perkins valued as a collector. Descriptions range from simple listings of an

\textsuperscript{12} See Appendix A for scans from Perkins’ register illustrating some of the following examples.
alabaster vase\(^{13}\) with no other descriptors, to pestles\(^{14}\) listed with their material, length and location. The former is more likely, however, and is exemplified with pages of “point” or “knife” from Vermont with no differentiation between these objects\(^{15}\). Some items are regarded as more valuable than others – as with a “fine black pipe”\(^{16}\) from Vergennes, Vermont in the Griffin collection – which also is the case with the items that Perkins himself helped to collect or purchase, as with those bought at the Columbian Exposition in 1893\(^{17}\) and from the Cairo Museum in 1910\(^{18}\).

This variability can be tied to a combined lack of information from donors, and curator knowledge and interest, which are a result of the ideologies of the time. Many donors at this time collected in a manner that exemplified the nineteenth century fascination with exotica: items that exemplified exotic cultures of were those that were often collecting and admitted to the museum’s collection. Perkins often lacked information about the items he had collected himself, as seen in the description of the Egyptian objects bought at the Cairo museum, which paid more attention to the object’s material than any other characteristic\(^{19}\).

After Perkins’ retirement, the museum documented the donations of ethnographic materials in ethnographic accession records. These records are much

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\(^{13}\) Perkins’ Register, item 3642 (items from Perkins’ register were listed with an item number, which will be cited as this object has been here, if applicable)

\(^{14}\) Perkins’ Register, items 612-4

\(^{15}\) See Appendix A1 for one such page of Perkins’ Register.

\(^{16}\) Perkins’ Register, item 852

\(^{17}\) See Appendix A2 for the listing of a few items purchased at this exposition.

\(^{18}\) See Appendix A3 for a listing of some of these items.

\(^{19}\) See Appendix A3 for a listing of some of these items.
more uniform and systematic than Perkins’, but still retain some inconsistencies between entries. Generally, each object is listed with its donor, accession number, E-number, and a short description\textsuperscript{20}. In some cases, locations, measurements or object material are included, and in others, extensive descriptions are catalogued. These variations are similarly important to consider, and will be expanded on below.

Donors’ biographical information was gathered using the museum’s donor files, and records in the University of Vermont’s Special Collections. The Fleming’s donor files contain a mixture of correspondence, donation records, and gathered biographic information. While some of these files were dense and rich sources of information, still others only contained a list of donated materials. Additional information was searched for in the case of the latter; insufficient records resulted in an inability to analyze and the consequent exclusion of donors.

Through not exhaustive, this analysis aims to illustrate the influence of prominent donors and the general trends in the history of donations to the Fleming. The objective with the donors included here is to most accurately represent the major trends seen in the Fleming’s history as a whole, but the choices are not meant to be proportionally representational of the amount of donors influenced by the respective collection movements. The trends can best be explored through the

\textsuperscript{20} Both the accession number – generally consisting of the date given, a number assigned to the donation, and the number of the object in the format YYYY-Donation #.Object # – and E-number are included below if applicable and available in the form E-number/accession number. Also included will be the volume in which the item is listed, E-book vol. 1 or vol. 2, which refer to the Ethnographic Accession Records in the Fleming’s archives, split between two binders. Sample scans from these records, which highlight some of the items given by the donors described here, are included in Appendix C.
cultural, social, and political context in which collectors gathered objects. While I separate donors into collecting trends and movements and I acknowledge this has the potential to ignore other aspects of their history, personality and culture, this is not meant to be reductionist. The categorization of these donors is meant to provide examples to support the general categories of donors and donation movements seen in the Fleming’s history, as well as the identities and narratives in its collection.

**George Henry Perkins: The Fleming’s Curators**

The history of the Fleming’s collections cannot be discussed without mention of its first noteworthy curator George Henry Perkins. Perkins was not only central in the formation of the museum for his role as curator in its early years: he is also prominent in the history of the museum’s ethnographic collections with his contributions of objects (Markoe 2006). Though he may technically not be considered a donor, since he generally made purchases on behalf of the museum, these items are important in the formation and foundation of the museum’s collections.

Perkins focused on expanding the museum’s ethnographic and archaeological collections after his appointment as curator (ibid.). He personally obtained a number of ethnographic objects for the museum during his 54-year tenure through international travel (ibid.). During his first thirty years as curator, Perkins, known to have traveled throughout the United States, Canada, and to Japan, China, India, Philippines, and Tibet, among other places, is responsible for obtaining
most of the Native American, African and Oceanic ethnographic materials added to the collection (Markoe 2006; Perkins’ Register).

Perkins frequently went on research trips to keep his university position in the sciences, especially traveling to mining locations to study and collect for geology (Dann 1991:147; Fairchild 1934). Besides a donation from a former student in 1883 – which allowed Perkins to collect fossils in Yellowstone National Park in the same year – he received virtually no financial assistance for research (Dann 1991:147). His wife Mary traveled with him, and, writing to son Harry in 1899, described Perkins’ practice of collecting representative quotidian objects, during a trip to Alaska:

People are ‘stocking up’ in baskets and halibut hooks, etc. for gifts and cabinets, while your father selects the dirtiest and lowliest specimens he can find, as having been actually used and as more characteristic [...] (quoted in Dann 1991:147).

Some of the earliest known museum purchases by Perkins are those bought at the 1893 Columbian Exposition (Perkins’ Register; The Fleming Museum 1990). According to his Register, these items were purchased from the government booths of Java, Fiji, Solomon Islands, and New South Wales. As mentioned in the chapter focusing on the history of museums, nineteenth century world fairs presented museums and collectors with an opportunity to purchase wares from around the world (Kaufman 2004:273). They also were the embodiment of cultural relativism and social evolutionist theory, as items on display and available for purchase appealed to the perceived exoticism and evolutionary lull of other cultures (Shelton

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21 See a sampling of these items as listed in Perkins’ Register in Appendix A2.
2006:65). Perkins was undoubtedly among the visitors who purchased ethnographic items at the fair because of this intrigue. These objects were meant to represent whole cultures in the display of the exotic Other.

Perkins later went on a collecting trip for ethnographic materials to Lake Louise and Sitka, Alaska in 1899 (Ambrose 1991:259; Perkins’ Register). On this trip, Perkins collected items mostly from First Nations and Native American peoples, including masks, models, weapons, cookware, and carvings (Perkins’ Register). His travels took him though Victoria, British Columbia, where he purchased additional First Nations and Native American baskets, pipes and utensils, but also bought Zulu shields and spears (Perkins’ Register). A trip to Hawaii in 1905 was also focused on collecting ethnographic materials (Ambrose 1991:259). There, he gathered items such as “native” sandals\(^{22}\), cooking ware, clubs and lamps (Perkins’ Register). After this trip, he traveled to Europe for more collecting in 1907 and also purchased a number of Egyptian objects from the Cairo Museum in 1910, including a stele painting\(^{23}\), alabaster vase\(^{24}\), figures, and amulets\(^{25}\).

Perkins’ collecting is consistent with the practices of the era, which were embedded with the relative valuation of other cultures. Perkins, like many in the late nineteenth century American society, held certain cultures in higher esteem.

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\(^{22}\) Perkins’ Register, item 5115
\(^{23}\) Perkins’ Register, item 3616
\(^{24}\) Perkins’ Register, item 3642
\(^{25}\) See Appendix A3 for a sampling of these items.
than others and believed in racial determinism; this is influential on the items he both collected and accepted to the museum (Dann 1991:154). Objects from the Cairo Museum, for instance, would have been prized as examples of high culture, while the numerous points from throughout the United States, while still collected, were not valued as individual objects with much worth, as shown in the pages of undifferentiated lists in Perkins’ Register. Perkins’ view of anthropology as the study of the growth, action and development of humankind was concretized in his appraisal of materials for the museum (Dann 1991:154).

The importance of a curator’s views of other cultures and their art is not unique to Perkins. As suggested by Bryne et al. (2011) curators are as important as donors to forming a collection. Curators are a key set of agents in the determination of what donations are accepted to a museum, and furthermore, which items are displayed. The objects that curators deem to be valuable – either to the museum’s collections, or in and of itself – will be accepted and shown by a museum. An item may also be seen as worthy because of a particular characteristic with a collecting context – such as the exoticism prized by both museums and collectors of the early twentieth century.

This role of curators is extremely relevant to a museum with limited space like the Fleming. As Harry Perkins wrote in the 1936 director report, “One of the hardest duties of any Museum director is to say ‘No.’ It has to be said frequently, or

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26 Documented examples of some of these prejudices include a description of Slavs as the “least civilized of any people,” the Finns as “simple-minded,” the Chinese as uninventive, and the Teutonic people as leaders in controlling the earth (Dann 1991:154).
the store rooms will become swamped with junk” (Perkins 1936). Items that were damaged or otherwise deemed valueless faced rejection or disposal.27

The need to be selective also resulted from the museum’s desire to have control over their permanent displays. This is demonstrated in the negotiations between Josephine Arthur Rohrer and the Fleming directors in the 1940s (Rohrer Donor File: letter 1948, letter 1940). Rohrer donated a number of items in 1937 (elaborated on below) and after wished to donate money – $2,000 in 1940 and $10,000 in 1948 – to secure their permanent display (ibid.). Director Harry Perkins and acting director H.B. Eldred both emphasized the need to have flexible displays in correspondence with university president Guy W. Bailey, and with Rohrer, quoted here:

> It has been our policy in recent years to change the exhibit material from time to time, wherever possible. This policy is necessary in order to get the people of a small community to return again and again to the museum in its midst (letter 1948).

The curator’s role and perspective are important to keep in mind as the donors are described. While collectors may have selected objects as representatives of an idea, curators further refine these choices in order to typify these ideas in the museum setting (Davalos 2004:527). It is crucial to take into consideration that all of these processes occur within cultural, social and collecting ideologies.

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27 This nearly happened to the lamp given by Holcomb (see below), which had been rejected by other museums and only included in the Fleming thanks to repairs (Holcomb Donor File).
Ogden B. Read: Military collecting

Army officer Ogden B. Read is significant as the Fleming’s first major ethnographic donor, and also for being the first of many military collectors who donated to the museum.

Read gave 140 Sioux artifacts in 1881 to the museum that he had assembled during his stationing as an army officer in the Northern Plains during the Indian Wars between 1877 and 1888 (Demallie and Hassrick 1986:13-15). It is during this period, labeled the “Early Reservation Period”, that previously nomadic Northern Plains tribes were forced to settle into specific areas by the United States government (The Fleming Museum 1990). Read was stationed in this area after the Native American victory against General Custer in 1876, when settlers demanded government protection (The Fleming Museum 1991).

Read collected wherever he was stationed: first in Standing Rock Agency on the Great Sioux Reservation in Dakota Territory, and then in Montana Territory (The Fleming Museum 1991; 2013). In their analysis of the collection, Demallie and Hassrick (1986) state that Read collected with the University of Vermont in mind, which he had attended for one year in 1862 (15; The Fleming Museum 1991). There is a variety in the items he collected, which includes clothing, curios and a number of war trophies (Demallie and Hassrick 1986:13).

Read purchased the majority of the items he donated (Demallie and Hassrick 1986:15). The Dakota tribe was not producing market wares at the time of his contact, and so many of the items are utilitarian (Demallie and Hassrick 1986:14).
He also purchased a number of items from the Crow people, who served as army scouts (The Fleming Museum 1991). Whites and Native Americans gifted other objects, and still others were acquired with force, or under military circumstances (Demallie and Hassrick 1986:15). Most notable in this latter category are weapons and other war paraphernalia collected following the United States army’s attack of the Hunkpapa Sioux camp in January of 1881 (The Fleming Museum 1991).

Perkins was especially delighted by the “variety and value” of the donation for the public, but especially for ethnologists (Markoe 2007). The collection is unique in Read’s documentation of the items, which often includes the names of the original owners, dates, locations and the circumstances of acquisition (Demallie and Hassrick 1986:13). Read provides an excellent demonstration of an agent operating within the network of the Actor Network Theory, with the ways in which he gained access to items through contact with other agents. This documentation is also a great source of information on the circumstances and ideologies in which Read collected. Beyond the choices of objects, the descriptions are also demonstrative of military collecting. Collected items reflect an intrigue with adventure, and a fascination with Native Americans as exotic ‘noble savages’. Items like a fixed-stone-head war club, presented by a Native American “who claimed to have killed three soldiers” with it have a certain amount of danger and prestige associated with them (Demallie and Hassrick 1986:134). This is true for most of the

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28 See Appendix B for a reproduction of Read’s object descriptions, included in Demallie and Harrick 1986.
29 Item number 11 in Appendix B
weapons and war paraphernalia collected by Read. The majority of the weapons include some description of a similar history, whether the item was taken from a messenger “shot while attempting to escape,”30 or a club marked where it had been “driven through the skull of a Crow Indian”31. Even beyond weapons, an amount of prestige and cultural superiority was associated with objects like a beaded buffalo robe, which would have been worn by a “wealthy squaw”32. These associations were clearly of importance to Read as in the items he collected, through which he asserted his identity as a military figure.

Other military figures

Collecting as a method and symbol of conquest of and contact with other cultures is typical of other military collectors at this time and after. Other military collectors similarly donated weapons and related items to the Fleming over the course of its history.

Another notable donation from a military figure is the Lewis collection, gathered in the late nineteenth century and donated in 1919 (E-book vol. 1). Unlike Read, Robert Lewis collected in Asia, mostly in China while stationed there (ibid.). His donations, including many pieces from fallen monuments, raided tombs and old battles, reflect the time period’s Romanticism and fascination with the exotic (ibid.; ter Keurs 2011:165). Included in the donation are pieces of a porcelain tower in

30 This is from the description of item number 15, a belt, knife, and scabbard, in Appendix B.
31 From the description of a war club, item number 12, in Appendix B.
32 Item number 18 in Appendix B
Nanking, a knife from the battle of Tientsin, and a sword “captured by Mr. Lewis on the march to Peking”. A number of the items include extensive descriptions in the registry, some even attempting explanatory stories from the object’s culture that mostly serve to demonstrate the adventurousness and military success of Lewis, as well as the exoticism of the culture (ibid.). For example, the description of a Buddha head, there is a certain amount of patronizing imperialistic thought echo in the description, that, “The village is still worshiping the headless image”.

In 1937 and 1943, Josephine Arthur Rohrer donated a number of items collected by her father, Commodore Karl Rohrer, in Asia between 1881 and 1882 (Rohrer Donor File: letter 1948). The lot mostly consisted of Japanese and Chinese bronzes, as well as some Japanese carvings, boxes, teapots and swords. In letter correspondence between Rohrer and the museum directors, she writes that the donated objects were bought “long before shoddy things were made for the tourist trade” (Rohrer Donor File: letter 1948). These items are exemplary of the types of objects collected that were thought to authentically represent the craftsmanship of these cultures, which played into the perceived exoticism of each.

Another donation from a military collector came from Mrs. R.H. Holcomb, who in 1940 gave Chinese paintings, cloths, utensils and clothing collected by her

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33 See Appendix C1 for the listing of a piece of the cornice, E-book, vol. 1, item E-886/1919-1.7
34 E-book, vol. 1, item E-896/1919-1.17
35 See Appendix C1 for this entry from E-book, vol. 1, item E-887/1919-1.8
36 E-book, vol. 1, item E-904/1919-1.25
37 E-book, vol. 2, items E-2583 to 2609/1937-46.1 to 1937-46.48, E-3069 to 3084/1943-29, and E-3088 to 3108/1943.33 to 1943.35
husband in the 1930s\textsuperscript{38}. Lieutenant-Commander Random Hall Holcomb attended the University in 1910, graduating from the medical school in 1917 (Holcomb Donor File: letter 1941). Appointed to the Medical Corps of the United States Navy, he was assigned to the Asiatic Station in 1934, patrolling in Shanghai (ibid.). Holcomb was determined that the university should receive a Chinese temple lamp from a Temple of Agriculture in Peking, China, after being told by a Chinese art expert that it was valuable and between 300 and 500 years old (ibid.; E-book vol. 2). The importance of authenticity and ascribed value made such an object valuable to him. The exact nature of his acquisition is not mentioned; however, the need to possess such an item is characteristic of those stationed abroad in the twentieth century.

As can been seen in these donors, items collected by military figures and given to the Fleming were often rooted in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century fascination with exploration, danger, and exotica. Military collectors commonly gathered objects while abroad, which were then donated and accepted to the museum to illustrate the Other.

\textit{Frances and Ebenezer Jolls Ormsbee: Imperialistic collecting}

Military collecting is perhaps most related to imperialistic and colonial collecting, which I have broadly designated to be collecting that occurred during a period of imperialistic or colonial rule or intervention by those in a position of power. The effect of these two contexts is similar enough to be considered together

for this research’s purposes. Like the other groupings utilized here, this categorization is by no means separate or exclusive from the others, and many similar elements can be found between them. For instance, while military collectors often focused on weaponry and similar prestige items, imperial and colonial collectors had a broader scope in their objects, including many quotidian and utilitarian items in their donations.

Having said this, a donor of note in the Fleming’s history whom I classify as an imperialistic collector is Ebenezer Jolls Ormsbee. The former Vermont Governor lived in Samoa with his wife Frances from 1891 to 1893 for his work with the United States State Department, an association that has earned the placement in this category of collecting (Gardner 2008:2). The Ormsbees’ well-documented time in Samoa is materialized in the donated collection of curios and souvenirs given to the museum in the 1920s.

According to analysis by Gardner (2008), the Ormsbees’ identity as “provincial grand bourgeoisie” gave them a particular cultural lens through which they viewed Samoa and collected objects. Contributing to their experience was the Euro-American perception of Samoans – and most other non-Western cultures – at the time, which had strong ties to the popular social evolutionist theory (Ormsbee Donor File). Samoans were questioned for their evolutionary development and were patronized as such (Gardner 2008). They were seen as uncivilized but ultimately harmless, “hospitable savages” (Gardner 2008:40). Euro-Americans often expressed their desire to protect the Samoans and act as their cultural keepers (Gardner
The Ormsbees definitely encountered this view prior to departure, as recorded in the background information prepared for them by friend Lieutenant Wadhams, and carried these ideologies into Samoa, where they lived for two years while Mr. Ormsbee worked for the State Department (Gardner 2008; Ormsbee Donor File).

The Ormsbees’ stay in Samoa was extensively documented by Frances, who wrote detailed daily letters to their adopted daughter Carrie, who remained in the United States for schooling (Gardner 2008:50). Mrs. Ormsbee’s descriptions of social interactions are particularly demonstrative of their ideologies; she felt a sense of superiority over the native Samoans and “half-castes”, people born from an interracial relationship (Gardner 2008:51-3). While Mrs. Ormsbee took pleasure in authenticity and the exoticism of Samoans, she thought they were uncivilized, and Euro-Americans who had relationships with them was akin to accepting “barbarity” (Gardner 2008:51-2). The Ormsbees appreciated the courtesy and physical beauty of the Samoans, but also associated them with laziness, indolence, backwardness, simplemindedness and stunted capabilities (Gardner 2008:53; Ormsbee Donor File). Mrs. Ormsbee attributed the present success of Samoans to white missionaries, but ultimately, “An effort to make them other than as they are, or to advance them on a higher plane would, in my judgment, be unsuccessful” (Ormsbee Donor File39).

39 This quote, and some of the other perspectives cited to the Ormsbee Donor File, is obtained from a draft of an article written by Mrs. Ormsbee on her experiences in Samoa, written circa 1893 for the Columbian Exposition.
The Ormsbees experiences with the Samoan peoples ultimately occurred through their cultural lens. As said by Gardner (2008:69):

The Ormsbees praised those whose actions they found familiar – piety, furnishings, and gender roles – while they denigrated those who deviated from their familiar by publicly drinking to excess, cavorting late at night, eating unfamiliar food, and unsettling accepted gender roles and clothing norms. Racial and cultural differences, then were not the only standards by which the Ormsbees differentiated others; morals, especially amongst their Euro-American peers in Samoa, were of equal importance.

Their collection of objects, donated to the Fleming in the late 1920s and early 1930s, also cannot be separated from these ideologies (Ormsbee Donor File).

Like most other imperial and colonial collectors, the Ormsbees returned to the United States having gathered many curios, which were housed in Mr. Ormsbee’s study in Vermont until they donated the objects (Gardner 2008:115).

These items portrayed the acceptable qualities the Ormsbees saw in Samoa – the exoticism and fine craftsmanship – that was ultimately a sanitized version of their experiences (Gardner 2008:118). Both of these qualities are present in most of the donated objects, with many combs, fishhooks, jewelry, mats and cloths showing the Samoans’ simple but completely foreign way of life (Ormsbee Donor File). The Ormsbees demonstrate the typical ethnocentrism and Romanticism seen in other donors who may be associated with imperialism or colonialism.

The Ormsbees’ donated items can be viewed through the Actor Network Theory to understand how their objects represent their experiences in Samoa. Their assemblage excluded certain objects that would have suggested the heathen nature of the Samoans, and instead focused on uncontentious items that spoke to their
harmlessness, simple way of life and impressive craftsmanship. The selection of these items resulted in the objects given to the Fleming, which created a particular view of the Samoan culture, seen through the lens of imperial collecting.

**Robert Mayo Catlin**

Another donor who may be associated with imperialism is Robert Mayo Catlin. In 1937, Catlin’s donation bolstered the museum’s growing collections with a donation of everyday objects from Africa and Zulu beadwork (Markoe 2006). Catlin was born in Vermont and became a gold mine manager in 1895 near what would become Johannesburg, South Africa, where he lived until 1906, when he retired and returned to the United States (The Fleming Museum 1990, 1996). Donated after his death in 1934, Catlin’s objects include antelope horns, basketry, carved wooden objects, and over 100 pieces of beadwork (ibid.). In a letter from the Catlin family to Lang in 1973, it is stated that, “[...] very few curios [were] collected by him, almost all having been given him by Kaffirs (All native blacks were called ‘Kaffirs’ in those days)” (Catlin Donor File).

There is much more variety to the items donated by Catlin than in those given by the Ormsbees. Catlin’s objects include weapons and snuffboxes, for instance, types of object the Ormsbees typically ignored, likely due to their conservative, Christian-based morals (Ormsbee Donor File). Like the Ormsbees,

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40 See Appendix C4 for a few of these items.
however, Catlin also collected a number of utilitarian items, such as utensils\textsuperscript{42}, mats and pillows, meant to exemplify the exotic way of life of the people collected from (Catlin Donor File).

\textit{Reverend Lewis Grout: Missionary collecting}

There are a number of donors who gave the Fleming Museum objects that were gathered during mission trips. Perhaps the most prolific of these donors is Reverend Lewis Grout. Grout was born in Newfane, VT in 1815 and especially had ties to West Brattleboro, where he had a home and died in 1905 (Grout 1905:ii; Grout Donor File). He graduated from Yale in 1842 and after studied theology at the Yale Divinity School (Grout 1905:7). Immediately following his marriage in 1849, he went to live with his wife in South Africa as a missionary for the American Board Mission (Grout 1905:iii; Grout Donor File). All of his donated objects to the Fleming, given in his will, come from the geographical areas of his mission trip and were collected between 1848 and 1860.

Grout’s station was one of many established by missionaries during the nineteenth century, meant to civilize and convert Africans to Christianity (The Fleming Museum 1990). At this time, the general view of non-Western peoples by Europeans and Americans was paternalistic and pitying at best; in his autobiography, Grout writes that Africa was, “a land on which civilization had never dawne” (Grout 1905:15). He describes Africans as possessing “[…] some peculiar,

\textsuperscript{42} See Appendix C5 for entry of a wooden spoon, E-book, vol. 2, item E-1822/1937-52.43.
most admirable, God-given traits and endowments” but, without faith, were a “sensual and superstitious people” (Grout 1905:22-3).

With the backdrop of a landscape regarded as Eden-like\(^4\), missionaries of this time saw the potential to transform Africans into civilized people (The Fleming Museum 1990). Grout saw “heathenism” as the direct opponent of Christianity, his reasoning for why he met initial protests from some locals, especially from leaders and medicine men who he portrays in his writings as jealous and power-hungry (Grout 1905:17-8). Grout’s ideologies about Africans are apparent in his description of the mission’s success: “[...] little by little, superstition and prejudice gave way to intelligence, reason, and a Christian faith” (Grout 1905:18).

Missionary collectors often reflected this ideology in the items they collected (Cannizzo 1998). Items like spiritual objects were collected as trophies of mission success, while smoking paraphernalia was collected to discourage converts from this behavior, which was deemed to be in opposition to proper Christian behavior (Cannizzo 1998:158,163). These can be seen in Grout’s own collection, which includes a number of pipes and snuffboxes\(^4\), ceremonial ware and ornamentation (Perkins’ Register; E-book vol. 1).

\(^4\) Grout’s own account aligns with the nineteenth century view of untouched land as an Eden, describing the landscape as beautiful and fertile, with “majestic rivers” and grassy fields (Grout 1905:14,22)

\(^4\) See Appendix C3 for item E-1132/1905-1.26 from E-book, vol. 1
These items could also have been collected because of Grout’s interest in the Zulu culture\textsuperscript{45}. Grout learned the Zulu language within a matter of months after arriving, and published several articles and books on the subject and on Zulu history, origin and character over the course of his life (Grout 1905:26; Grout Donor File). Utilitarian items – like baskets, mats, and wooden utensils\textsuperscript{46} – were included in his donated items, which could be an indication of his interest in the culture (Grout Donor File). There is definitely an element of exotica that could play into this interest, as Grout’s account of his travels certainly makes mention of dangerous foreign situations, including traveling alone on horseback and being attacked by an alligator (Grout 1905:12).

Grout’s long-term residency in Africa highlights an important connection within the Actor Network Theory: the interaction between the collector and the producer. Considering the nature of this contact between a collector and the people collected from can be key to understanding a collection; items are collected in, “politically complex, multicultural situations” and these meanings are imbedded in the objects (Venbrux 2001:65). Venbrux’s research (2001) of Baldwin Spencer’s collection of Tiwi artifacts demonstrate that the Tiwi’s anticipation of his visit, the colonist’s desire for authenticity, and Tiwi’s desire for exchanged goods all affected the formation of his collection. Such relationships are a factor determining the

\textsuperscript{45} It is worth noting that ‘Zulu’ was an indiscriminate term used by white missionaries to refer to local peoples in southeast Africa beginning in the nineteenth century. The term, meant to emphasize the military prowess of the people, was used as a replacement of the derogatory ‘Kaffir’ (Zulu).

\textsuperscript{46} See Appendix C3 for a wooden pail, E-book, vol. 1, item E-1130/1905-1.10
processes that occur between actors in the network. Staying in Africa for 12 years must have granted Grout access to different objects than would have been afforded a temporary visitor. Grout’s position as a missionary, especially one during a time of colonization, also influenced the type of objects he collected, as this gave him authority and clout.

*Other missionary donors*

Some of these characteristics can be seen in the items donated by other missionaries to the Fleming. Ray and Ruth Smalley gave items to the Fleming in 1931 that were procured during their mission trip in the Belgian Congo, 1925 to 1929 (E-book vol. 1; Smalley Donor File: letter 1971). The Smalleys worked as missionaries to “teach [the native people] Christianity and our ways”, spreading the “good news of Jesus Christ”, but also with the intent to improve agriculture and home life, as these were the educational backgrounds of Ray and Ruth, respectively (Smalley Donor File: letter 1972).

As with Grout, the long-term exposure to the local culture gave the Smalleys the access to purchase items and have the potential to gain an understanding of the local practices, which is evidenced in the lengthy descriptions of the objects they donated which often included information of how the items were used (E-book vol. 1). For instance, an object labeled a toothbrush is described: “The end is frayed by
chewing, forming a fibrous brush. [...] Very often worn about the neck on a string.”

Among the objects are several idols, which the locals were “quite willing” to sell after they accepted Christianity, according to the Smalleys (ibid.). While some of the idols are simply listed, others also contain descriptions of how they were used: “Idol, used for divining. Held on each side by the two participants while questions are asked and answered.” Other religious materials collected by the Smalleys include containers for “witch medicine”, which were understood to be: “Horns and tips of gourds worn on the body or in the hair as a cure or a preventative of disease or disaster.”

The Smalleys wrote fondly of their “African friends” in letters to the directors of the Fleming, who inquired about the Smalleys’ time in Africa to prepare for an exhibition of African art in the 1970s (Smalley Donor File: letter 1971). The Smalleys responded, speaking how, despite the Smalleys’ intent to teach the Africans, “as I look back I begin to appreciate their cleverness and their admirable qualities” (ibid.). Though the Smalleys were missionaries and donated to the museum at a much later date than Grout, some of the patronizing and romanticized views are still applicable in their collecting and perspective.

Other missionaries also donated to the Fleming over the course of its history, displaying similar objects and collecting habits. Reverend H. R. Antes and Reverend Louis Arthur are two other religious donors who donated to the museum; however

47 E-book, vol. 1, item E-30/1931-7.62
49 E-book, vol. 1, item E-28/1931-7.15
the items from these two reverends are better analyzed within the context of their travel, and have been included in the section that follows.

**Collections formed from travel**

Many donations to the Fleming are the result of travels by Vermont residents or people otherwise tied to the area. This was especially true in the first few decades of the museum, which relied on locals for both donated materials and financial support (Markoe 2006). Some of the most prominent donors of ethnographic materials are those who collected while traveling. Collecting ideologies were often more personally guided, but also all occurred within a traveling context. Souvenirs, a common means of commemorating travels, can be seen scattered throughout the previous categories as well, but are even more prominent among travel collectors. Collected objects typically enforced these traveler’s cultural and social identities and marked them as cultured or worldly.

*Henry Schnakenberg*

Beginning in the 1930s and lasting through his death in 1970, artist Henry Schnakenberg donated a number of objects to the Fleming museum (Markoe 2006). His bequest alone was valued at over $133,000 (Schnakenberg Donor File). The majority of the items were paintings, drawings, and books, but a number of ethnographic objects also showed his varied interests in Native American, pre-Columbian, African, Asian and Egyptian art, which were often collected during his
travels\(^{50}\) (Markoe 2006). A number of the ethnographic objects are noted to have been purchased from galleries, mostly in New York in the 1940s and 1950s (E-book vol. 2; Schnakenberg Donor File).

Schnakenberg seems to have been guided by personal interest in his collecting. Fleming curator Jansen stated in a 1972 newspaper interview that Schnakenberg's donated items were not meant to educate but, “[…] to share what he enjoyed and felt important in life. The collection is distinguished by its personal quality” (Schnakenberg Donor File). Schnakenberg was noted by Henry F. Perkins in the 1939 director report to be a thought-out, thorough collector who aimed to make a complete series, as was seen in a donation of fossils in that same year (Perkins 1939:5). His donor file reveals extensive communication with the museum, especially in inquiring if the curator of the time would like some items he had collected (Schnakenberg Donor File).\(^{51}\)

\textit{O.W. Barrett}

O.W. Barrett donated a number of ethnographic objects in the early twentieth century. Born in Clarendon, VT in 1896, Barrett’s career took him across the globe, and his donated objects showcase this (Barrett Donor File). He worked in Jamaica before his graduation from UVM in 1896, and shortly after was a curator at a

\(^{50}\) A few of his known travels include trips to Greece, Portugal and Italy (Schnakenberg Donor File: letters written to museum in 1950s).

\(^{51}\) A letter from an undecipherable date in the 1940s, for instance, asks Harry Perkins if he would like some brasses from the Philippine Islands, stone pestles from Hawaii, and bowls from New Zealand.
museum in Mexico, traveling as the agent for the Mexican exhibit for the Paris Exposition of 1900 (ibid.). Following four years’ work as a botanist and entomologist in Puerto Rico, he worked for agriculture departments in Mozambique, Trinidad and Tobago, the Philippines and Nicaragua (ibid.). Barrett traveled through ‘Zululand’ while working as the Director of Agriculture for Mozambique between 1908 and 1910 (The Fleming Museum 1990). He is known for having traveled outside of these countries, too, to India, China, Malaya, Indonesia, Siam, Ceylon, Madagascar, Lourenco Marques, Corsica, West Indies, and other locations in Europe, South and Central America (Barrett Donor File).

In 1928, he gave a notable number of African artifacts, later joined by other objects from his travels (E-book, vol. 1 and 2). Despite his background in natural history and the sciences, his donated items are largely ethnographic. The objects come from every location of his travels and are varied in scope, ranging from utilitarian baskets from Santo Domingo52 to a Zulu princess costume of beads53, to a Japanese spoon54. There is limited description of the item’s use or cultural context – most are recorded without much more information than as they are listed here. While many commonplace objects were donated, there is also an interest in the dangerous, as evident in the collection’s shields, axes, and daggers from various locations (Barrett Donor File).

53 E-book, vol. 1, item E-141/1928.1.39
54 See Appendix C4 for the entry of E-book, vol. 2, item E-2906/1928-1.76
Elihu B. Taft

Another nineteenth century traveler who donated to the Fleming was Elihu B. Taft. A file in the University's Special Collections contains correspondence, notes, speeches, essays, publications and family information, all of which are useful in deducing the rationale behind Taft’s assembled items. Taft’s donor file at the Fleming has selective information, mostly a list of his items and research on one historical item, a clock. Using the personal journals and essays written by Taft in his file at the Special Collections provided the background information that allowed for his experiences abroad to be pieced together.

Born in Williston, Vermont in 1847, Taft attended the University of Vermont, studying a classical course and graduating in 1871 with a Master of Arts (Taft Donor File). He afterwards studied law in Burlington, where he lived with his wife, and died in 1929 (Taft 1797-1938). Taft was appointed as the U.S. Deputy Collector of Internal Revenue in 1874 and an attorney in the U.S. District and Circuit Courts in 1879 (ibid.). He was active at the local and state level as a Republican, becoming senator for Chittenden County in 1888 (ibid.).

Taft was an extensive traveler, taking trips across the world. An 1879 newspaper article describes one trip of 50,000 miles, which included visiting ruins in Italy, museums across Europe, and the cities of India, the latter of which was where he, “spent 25 days studying the habits of the natives and their home life,” ultimately finding, “the people to be both mentally and physically a weak race, for the most part, and lacking in bravery” (Taft 1797-1938). In 1887, he traveled to the
south and southwest, stopping in New Orleans, Arizona, Mexico, and the Grand Canyon (Taft Donor File). He wrote an essay on his travels in Mexico in the 1880s, in which he describes the process of bargaining with locals to purchase crafts (Taft 1797-1938). In 1889, he set off to see the “most important cities of the eastern hemisphere”: Paris – where he attended the Great Exhibition of 1900 – Rome, Bombay, Athens, Calcutta, Benares, Cairo, Jerusalem, Constantinople, Vienna, and Cologne, with additional stops in Denmark, Russia, Sweden, Norway, Scotland, England, Ireland and Holland (ibid.).

He also had attended the 1894 Columbia Exposition in Chicago (Taft 1797-1938). It is difficult to determine if Taft used this opportunity to purchase cultural wares, but it is certainly worth noting for its ideological influence. In a speech written by Taft in the February of 1894, he describes the exposition as, “the grandest conceptions of human intellect” (ibid.). His overview of the event, which only sought to highlight the best of the exhibition due to its size, mentions a newfound admiration for Japanese embroidery and carvings, and somewhat derogatory approval of Native Americans as ‘noble savages’ (ibid.). He was vastly impressed by the scale of the Exposition, and the Midway, where there was “the whole world on exhibition, or a large part of it and you can buy almost everything you would find on a journey around the globe” (ibid.).

His donation came to the museum in 1932, three years after his death in Burlington (Taft Donor File). The extent of his travels is evident in the eclectic
objects he donated, ranging from a boot nail from Turkey\textsuperscript{55}, to Zulu musical instruments\textsuperscript{56}, to an Egyptian amulet\textsuperscript{57} to carved gourds from Nicaragua\textsuperscript{58}. The majority of his donated items, however, are Native American pottery from Arizona and California, likely gathered on his 1887 trip to the southwest. The American west, particularly the southwest, was created as a tourist destination around the time of the construction of the railroad in 1896 (Luke 2002:84; Wade 1985:167). The expansion of the railroad into New Mexico and the West coast brought independent, rural Native American communities into contact with the industrializing American society (Wade 1985:168-9). Travel to the southwest was marked as exotic and romantic, with Native Americans as the key symbol of noble and simple preindustrial society (Luke 2002:85).

The spread of Victorian tourism into these areas urged Native Americans to commoditize their culture for legitimization and survival (Wade 1985:167,9). With the demand came businesses like the Fred Harvey Company, which bought goods from Native Americans in bulk to be sold to tourists (Luke 2002:88). These and other companies created a demand for the re-imagined crafts of Native Americans; the, “personal property and household implements [...] became commodified as ‘curios’ or souvenirs” (Luke 2002:87). Even museums commonly sent representatives to purchase goods rather than to excavations, the latter of which

\textsuperscript{55} E-book, vol. 1, item E-419/1932-28.5
\textsuperscript{56} E-book, vol. 1, item E-1172/1932-28.8
\textsuperscript{57} E-book, vol. 1, item E-417/1932-28.3
occurred more by the turn of the century (Wade 1985:170). Native American crafts responded to tourist needs, making adjustments in characteristics like size for easier transportation (ibid.). This collecting surge lasted until the mid-1960s (Luke 2002:84).

Other travelers

Other early twentieth donors also gave Native American items collected during travel to the southwest. In 1910, Mrs. Frederick Griffith donated Zuni and Navajo pottery. Her mother, wife of Brigadier General George K. Hunter, had purchased these items at a Zuni reservation near where Hunter had been stationed, in Fort Wingate, New Mexico from 1906 to 1908 (Griffith Donor File: letter 1979). The pottery mostly consists of vases, bowls and a few plaques. Reverend H.R. Antes’ objects are similarly mostly Navajo pottery, dishware and jewelry, collected in Jewett, New Mexico, and Holyoke, Utah and donated in 1910 (E-book vol. 2).

Additional travelers who donated to the Fleming often gave eclectic mixes similar to Taft and Barrett. Many donated items could be considered souvenirs, in that they are unified by an individual collector and are often personal in that they give materiality to an experience (Pearce 1993:72). Souvenirs were particularly common for travelers to acquire in the nineteenth century during the Romantic movement, as they showed how life should be (Pearce 1993:73).

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One such collector was Reverend L. Arthur, who donated a mix of objects from various locations throughout the world between 1921 and 1947 (Arthur Donor File). His objects, though some are of unknown origin, are Japanese, Chinese, East Indian, African, Spanish, Roman, Dutch, Egyptian, Australian, Native American, Solomon Islander and Oceanic (E-book, vol. 2). The objects are as varied as their origins, from board games to knives to jewelry, some of which are noted to be tourist materials. A number of the items were purchased, while others were given to Arthur by reverends and missionaries while traveling (ibid.). The few dates that are associated with the collecting of the objects span from 1872 to 1921. The registry includes some stories concerning the objects, but is mostly wrought with very dense physical descriptions\(^{61}\). Arthur's objects are illustrative of travel collectors' in the late 19\(^{th}\) century, who assembled eclectic and ‘exotic’ objects for a personal collection.

**VII. Conclusion**

Through the research and analysis of these donors and the processes affecting their collecting and donation to the Fleming, the key trends in the formation of the museum’s ethnographic collection have been examined.

The Actor Network Theory has been essential in the understanding of these donors and objects as situated within a cultural system that determines the

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\(^{61}\) See Appendix C7 for the entries of items E-1947/1940-32.43 to E-1949/1940-32.46, from E-book, vol. 2
interactions between these entities. An individual agent’s decisions regarding an object occur within the limitations of, and in turn create, this network. The operation of a network can be seen through tracing the donor’s experience with selecting, acquiring – through purchase or misappropriation – and donating the objects that were then accepted by the Fleming’s curators.

Reading a collection as a reflection of the ideological, political and social circumstances of the collector is necessary for the contextualization of an object within the Fleming’s collection. Research on the history of collections such as this is important to consider in the display of objects. A donor’s background, especially within a cultural context, is key to understanding a collection and how it should be exhibited.

Moreover, this type of research has been demonstrated to be important to today’s museums. Museums are extremely important to the field of anthropology: people learn more about anthropology through museums than any other means (Hudson 2004:89). Museums are the way people come into contact with anthropology, and so they should reflect the field.

Even beyond anthropological museums or ethnographic collections, anthropology can be used in museums displays to make the unknown familiar and defamiliarize the common (Bouquet 2004:193-6). Museums are powerful authorities, and while, “Museum exhibits may not change public policies [...] they can change other larger values and practices that will transform policy” (Luke 2002:xiv).
VIII. Appendices

Appendix A: Perkins' Register

A1: Page 7 of Perkins' Register, showing items 138-169
A2: Page 200 of Perkins' Register, showing items 8063-92, including purchases from the Columbian Exposition in 1893.
A3: Page 24 of Perkins' Register, showing items 11272-11302, including those bought from the Cairo Museum in 1910.
Appendix B: Read Collection

List and Description of Articles in Indian Collection Belonging to Capt. O. B. Read, Eleventh Infantry, U.S.A.

- No. 1 Lance
  Captured from Uncapapa Indian near Poplar River, M.T., Feb'y 11th, 1881, by Scout Bear Soldier and presented by him to Capt. Read.

- No. 2 Bow, Quiver and 15 Arrows
  Purchased from captive Uncapapa at Camp Poplar, M.T., Feb'y 11, 1881.

- No. 3 Sinew Back Bow
  Purchased from Yanktonais Indian at Camp Poplar River, M.T., 1881.

- No. 4 Unfinished Bow and Arrows
  Taken from lodge while burning Uncapapa villages after engagement of Jan'y 2nd, 1881, near Poplar River, M.T.

- No. 5 Medicine Sticks
  Captured in action of Jan'y 2nd, 1881, byLt. Avis, 5th Inf'y.

- No. 6 Springfield Carbine
  Captured in action near Poplar River, M.T., Jan'y 2nd, 1881. Believed to be one of the carbines lost in the Custer Massacre.

- No. 7 Gun Cover
  Presented to Capt. Read by Bear Soldier, Yanktonais, at Camp Poplar River, Jan'y, 1881.

- No. 8 Tomahawk
  Purchased from Crow Indian at Terry's Landing, M.T., 1879.

- No. 9 Tomahawk
  Purchased from Yanktonais Indian at Poplar River, M.T., Dec., 1880.

- No. 10 War Club
  Purchased from Black Eagle, 2nd Chief under Crow King, who surrendered 325 hostile Indians at Ft. Boford, D.T., Feb'y 6th, 1881.

- No. 11 War Club
  Presented to Mrs. Capt. Read at Camp Poplar, M.T., Feb'y 1st, 1881, by an Uncapapa Indian who claimed he had killed three soldiers with this club.

- No. 12 War Club
  Purchased from Yanktonais Indian at Camp Poplar River, M.T., 1881. Red paint on one point indicates the point to which he had driven it through the skull of a Crow Indian.

- No. 13 War Club
  Manufactured by a Yanktonais Indian named “War Club,” or “Break Sticks,” the only one in the tribe skilled in work of this kind — presented by Joe Culbertson, who was a white scout employed by the Government.

- No. 14 War Club

- No. 15 Belt, Knife and Scabbard, and reloaded cartridges
  Taken from “Umpato Wakan,” a messenger from Sitting Bull's Camp — arrested by Capt. Read at Poplar Creek Agency, May 3rd, 1881, and afterwards shot while attempting to escape.

- No. 16 Five Knives and Scabbards
  Taken from hostile Indians captured near Poplar River, Feb'y 9th, 1881.

- No. 17 Knife Scabbard — beaded
  Yanktonais manufacture.

- No. 18 Buffalo Robe — beaded
  Crow manufacture — purchased at Terry’s Landing, M.T., Dec., 1878. The outer dress of a wealthy squaw.

Read’s object descriptions, as included in Demallie and Hassick 1986.
Appendix C: Ethnographic Accession Records

C1: Page from Ethnographic Accession Record, vol. 1, showing items E-886-8, donated by Lewis in 1919.
E-1130  
1905.1.10

WOODEN PAIL, with parallel flutings carved with a spear. Warped and cracked. Dark wood. From Zululand; a gift of Rev. Lewis Grout. 8/190

Height: 8.4 cm.
Diam.: 12.5 cm.

E-1131  
1905.1.14

ZULU HORN PIPE, consisting of horn, bamboo stem, knot for bowl. Gift of Rev. Lewis Grout. on stand

E-1132  
1905.1.26

ZULU SNUFF BOX, made from a gourd.

Orange, decorated with black triangles.
Length: 13.5 cm. 8/19

C2: Page from Ethnographic Accession Record, vol. 1, showing items E-1130-2, donated by Grout in 1905.
E-1929
Gift
37-52.215

E-1930
Gift
37-52.2451a
Battle axe - "African. Long, thin bayonet shaped blade with long spike coming from its side which is inserted into a natural wood knot at the end of the wooden handle. Length of handle: 59 cms. Length of blade: 30.5 cms.

E-1951
Gift
37-52.216a

E-2904
Bowl of rare black clay pottery from Rhodesia. Small and shallow. Diameter: 9 cm. Height: 2.5 cm.
17690

E-2905
bowl carved from ebony at Mission School near grave of Mrs. Livingstone on the Zambesi. Round, on base. Cover, with knob. Decorated with fine carved lines. Height 13.5 cm. Diameter 9.3 cm.

E-2906

C4: Page from Ethnographic Accession Record, vol. 2, showing items E-2904-6, donated by Barrett in 1928.
E-1816
Apache Indian Pitcher: of variegated brown pottery, glazed. From New Mexico.
Diam: 9.5 cm.
Height: 15 cm.
17186

E-1817
Navajo Shallow Bowl, terra cotta color. From Holyoke, Utah. Gift of Rev. H. R. Antes (?).
Diam: 9 cm.
Height: 4.5 cm.
9521

E-1818
Navajo Shallow Bowl, terra cotta color. From Holyoke, Utah. Gift of Rev. H. R. Antes (?).
Diam: 10 cm.
Height: 4 cm.
9525

E-1947  Request  40-32.43
Musical Instrument - Oriental. Two strings stretched across sounding box made of half a coconut shell and up a long neck to tuning pins. The backside of sounding box is carved and gilt with a fish design. Neck is of a black wood. Tuning pins are of light wood. Bridge is missing. Length: 72 cms.

E-1948  Request  40-32.47

E-1949  Gift  40-32.46

C7: Page from Ethnographic Accession Record, vol. 2, showing items E-1947-9, donated by Arthur in 1940.
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