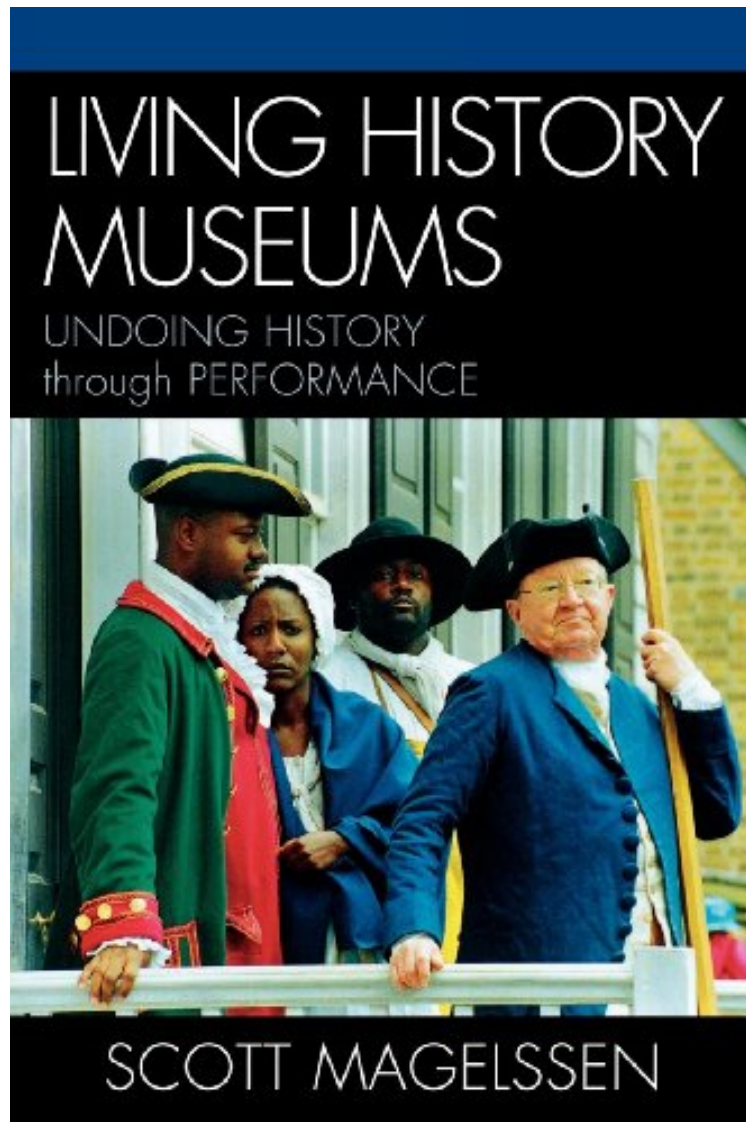


# Living History Museums: Undoing History through Performance

*Scott Magelssen*

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**Scott Magelssen : Living History Museums: Undoing History through Performance** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Living History Museums: Undoing History through Performance:

Living history museums are cultural institutions that merge historical exhibits with live costumed performance. While unique and vitally important, they often compromise historical accuracy and authenticity for the sake of tourism and entertainment value. Many also pursue methods of performance and historiography that are becoming increasingly

outdated. *Living History Museums: Undoing History Through Performance* examines the performance practices used by institutions such as Plimoth Plantation and Colonial Williamsburg, and offers a new genealogy of living history museum performance in the U.S. and Europe. Currently, existing scholarship on living history museums addresses the subject from a museum-studies or anthropology perspective. Author Scott Magelssen, however, approaches the material from a background in theatre history and theory, analyzing living history museums using postmodern methodology. Considering performance as a method for the study of history and exploring emergent non-traditional theatrical practices, the book offers suggestions for performance in an increasingly postmodern landscape. Concluding with an international listing of living history institutions and a complete list of sources, *Living History Museums* is a valuable resource for students and teachers of theatre and performance studies, cultural studies, folklore, popular culture, American studies, and museum studies.

After outlining a new history of these performances in the United States and Europe, Magelssen offers suggestions for their improvement, which he sates is achievable if museums abandon their 'just-the-facts' mentality and embrace alternative modes of performance. (*Museum News*, Vol. 86, No. 4, July/August 2007)...points out the dilemmas of living interpretation, from misleading visitors about time and history to perpetuating outmoded linear views of historical progress. (*Zentralblatt fuuml;r Geologie und Palauml;ontologie*, Vol. 68, No. 8, September 2007)An external researcher rather than a participant in living museums or a particular fan of them, Magelssen (theater arts, Augustana College, Illinois), examines the performance practices, philosophies, and curatorial methods they have used to stage the past through the 20th and into the 21st centuries, and how they see themselves as the very products of these practices. (*Reference and Research Book News*, May 2007)About the AuthorScott Magelssen is associate professor of Theatre at Bowling Green State University. He has published articles on living history museums in many theatre journals, including *Theatre History Studies* and *The Drama* . The author won the 2005 Gerald Kahan Award for the Best Essay in Theatre Studies by a Younger Scholar for his article "Performance Practices of [Living] Open-Air Museums (And a New Look at 'Skansen' in American Living Museum Discourse)," published in *Theatre History Studies* in 2004.