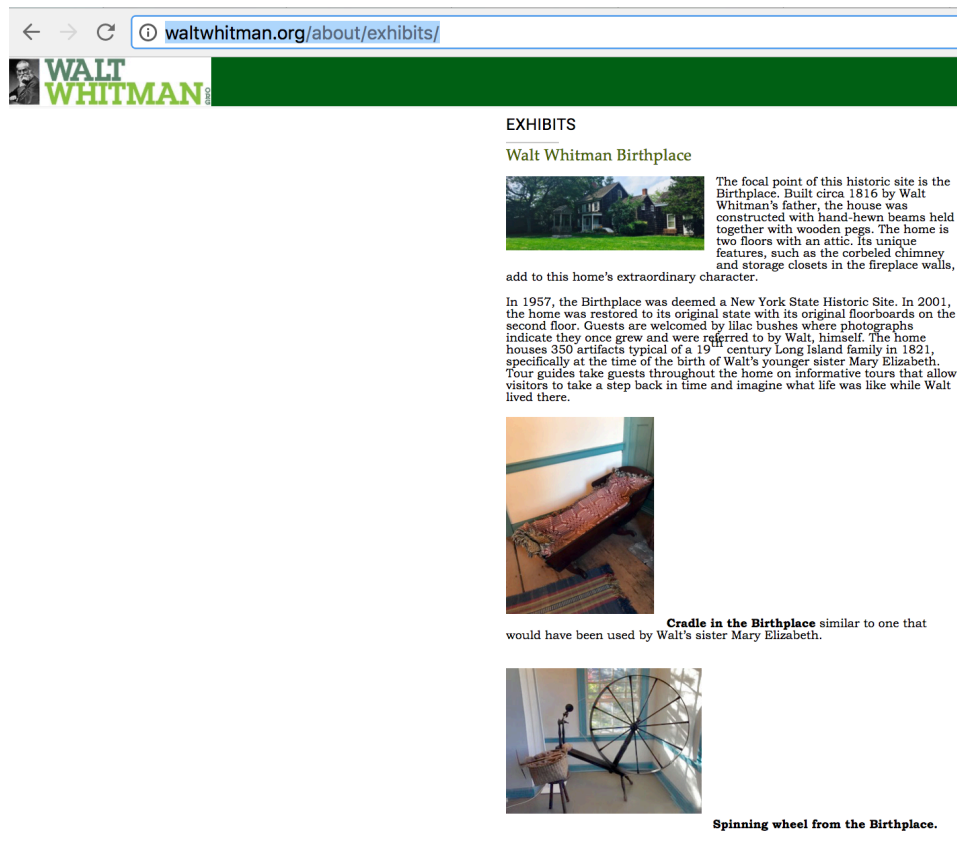


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Discussion One

The Walt Whitman Birthplace Association is currently working on implementing more interactive technology in their exhibits, but they already have other methods in place that draw visitors into the space and help connect them with the objects on display.

In the 2015 NMC Horizon Report, it is stated that there are “three dimensions of interaction: before the visit, which involves the display of as many collection items as possible online; during the visit, which develops solutions to enrich a visitor’s experience; and after the visit, which uses guest-generated data to meet audience expectations and encourage return engagement” (Johnson, Adams Becker, Estrada, & Freeman, 2014, p. 22).

The Association accomplishes its task of reaching people prior to their visit by including images on its [website](#) of artifacts on display in the home and the interpretive center, along with descriptions of how those artifacts relate to Whitman. This allows potential visitors to decide whether they would like to go in person to see more and gives them an idea of what to expect upon arriving at the site.



The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL waltwhitman.org/about/exhibits/. The page features a green header with the "WALT WHITMAN" logo. Below the header, the section is titled "EXHIBITS" and "Walt Whitman Birthplace".

The main text describes the Birthplace as a historic site built circa 1816 by Walt Whitman's father. It highlights the construction of hand-hewn beams held together with wooden pegs, the two floors with an attic, and unique features like a corbeled chimney and storage closets in the fireplace walls. It also mentions that the site was deemed a New York State Historic Site in 1957 and restored to its original state in 2001. The text notes that the home contains 350 artifacts typical of a 19th-century Long Island family in 1821, specifically at the time of the birth of Walt's younger sister Mary Elizabeth. Tour guides take guests throughout the home on informative tours that allow visitors to take a step back in time and imagine what life was like while Walt lived there.

Two images are included:

- An image of the Birthplace house, a two-story wooden structure with a prominent chimney.
- An image of a wooden cradle, described as similar to one that would have been used by Walt's sister Mary Elizabeth.
- An image of a spinning wheel, described as being from the Birthplace.

This is a screenshot of the Birthplace website’s [exhibits page](#).

The Association also has a rich social media presence, which serves a twofold purpose: reaching interested parties both before and after their visit to the site. On this page, the social media manager shares event information, photographs of the grounds in different seasons alongside excerpts of poems by Whitman, and other relevant literary posts.

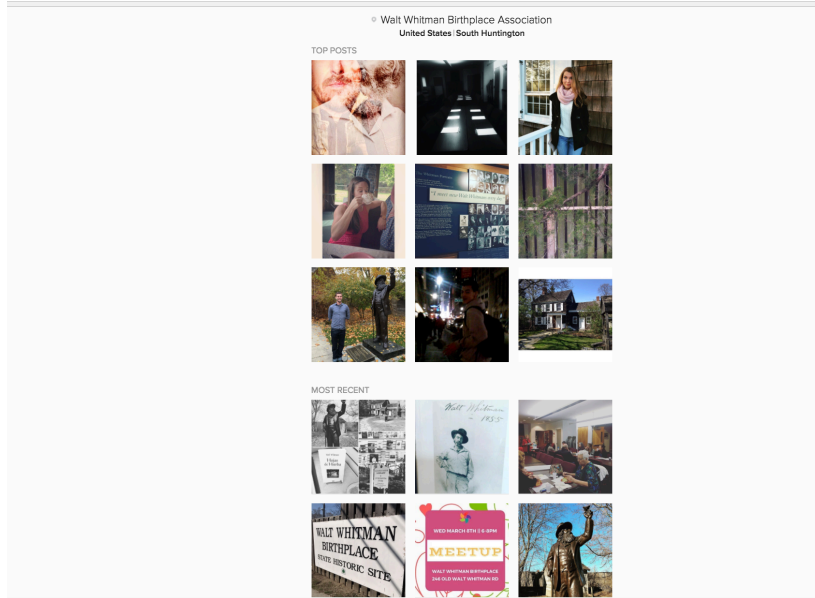
The events are another great example of connecting users to the content of the site. There are tea parties, where guests can participate in a tradition that dates back to the 1800s and then take a guided tour of the house. There are also living history tours, in which a person who looks like Walt reincarnated takes visitors through a tour of the house and grounds. Poetry nights also take place in the interpretive center, where guests are invited to share their pieces; there are also student poetry contests, which encourage enthusiasm for literature from a young age and help draw younger audiences to the site.



This is a screenshot taken of the WWBA [Facebook page](#).

In addition to posting on social media themselves, the Association has a location tag on Instagram, which allows visitors to share photos that they have taken at the site. This allows users to share their own personal experiences, so that potential visitors can experience the site through the eyes of other visitors and not just those who run the site. This is similar to the idea of folksonomies, especially because those who post photographs online often add their own hashtags as well.

<https://www.instagram.com/explore/locations/4447205/walt-whitman-birthplace-association/>



A screenshot of the Walt Whitman Birthplace Association location tag on Instagram.

In order to connect visitors to objects while on site and enrich the experience, the Birthplace employs several useful strategies. The first thing that visitors do when beginning a tour is read through a timeline of Walt's entire life. Interestingly, the timeline starts at his death; visitors work backwards to his birth and as they do, they get closer to the door that will lead them outside to the house of the poet's birth. Placed above this timeline are photographs of Walt, demonstrating that he is the most photographed poet. These images help give a face to the persona visitors are reading about, making him more tangible in their minds.

Walt Whitman is one of the most photographed poets of all time as seen here in over 130 portraits.



of Walt Whitman's life.

The Interpretive Center displays the entirety

This is a screenshot of the Birthplace website's [exhibits page](#).

Similarly, there is a statue of Whitman in what can be considered the front yard of the house. This life-sized replica brings the poet's persona to life and allows visitors to imagine what it would be like to wander the grounds with Walt himself. Oftentimes, one can feel disconnected from someone of the 19th century because many aspects of life were so different at that time and almost alien compared to what we are familiar with today. Having this statue serves as a reminder that Walt was as much a person as visitors to the site today and may help them relate more easily to what they are learning about him.



Photo credit: Kat Baumgartner

Finally, there are tour guides providing walks through the house and they are able to answer many of the questions asked by visitors to the site. There is also a map on display in the interpretive center, which shows what Long Island looked like during the time Walt and his family lived in the house. It was a vastly different place in the 19th century, consisting more of farmlands than shops and houses, but this can be easy to forget for people who grew up surrounded by the malls and rows of houses that are there currently. The map helps place visitors in another time period, connecting them more to the life of the Whitmans.

References

Johnson, L., Adams Becker, S., Estrada, V., Freeman, A. (2014, November 30). The NMC Horizon Report: 2015 Museum Edition. Retrieved March 20, 2017, from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED559371>