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Interactive Technology
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Link to Blog: https://wp.me/p7yR0N-k9

Interactive Timeline

Exhibit

The Museum of the American Revolution provides access on their website to a detailed interactive timeline displaying Revolutionary War information and artifacts (Link: https://www.amrevmuseum.org/timeline/).[1] Visitors can view this timeline at their convenience to learn the history of the Revolutionary War and study artifacts relevant to historical events. This timeline relates to the Three Village Historical Society's SPIES! exhibit, because it provides information on events unfolding throughout the rest of the colonies while Washington's spy ring worked on Long Island. It also serves as an example for how TVHS can expand their online presence and reach visitors outside of standard operating hours.


Interactive Features

The interactive timeline covers events and artifacts relating to the American Revolution from the 1750's to 2009. It depicts events leading up to the revolution, the revolution itself, and events following America's victory. The timeline is extremely visual, providing two different types of prompts for the viewers; events and artifacts. Events are depicted with text, and artifacts are shown with images. Aside from these texts and images, the layout of the timeline is very minimal. This results in a clean presentation for the visitor and was probably a strategic choice on the part of the designers to avoid cluttering the timeline and overwhelming the viewer.
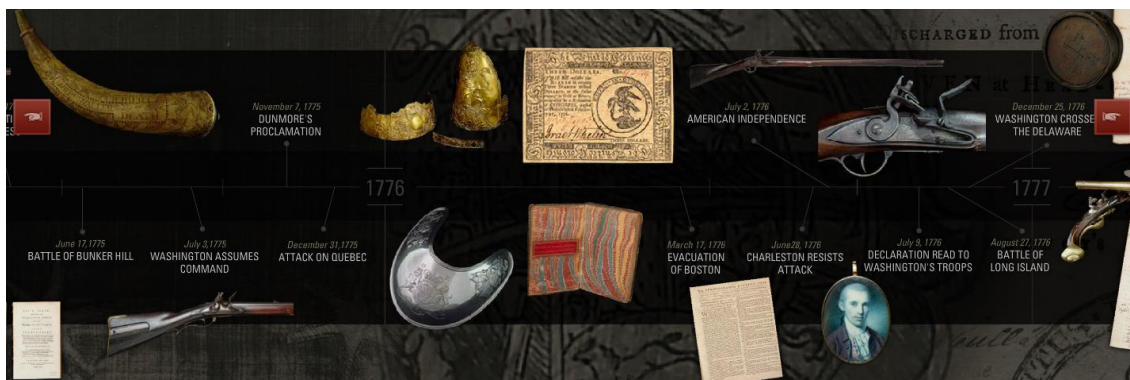

Interactive Timeline from the Museum of the American Revolution

The timeline is interactive because a visitor can click anything on the timeline to receive additional information. Clicking on event prompts will call up an information box detailing specifics about subjects such as the Boston Tea Party or the Battle of Long Island.[2] Scrolling over an artifact image will provide the viewer with the name of the artifact. Clicking on the artifact will bring the viewer to an information box and sometimes include the option to watch a podcast about the item, where the Director of Collections and Interpretation explains and expands on the item. The podcast option was a smart choice of the designers, because it showcases both the museum's expertise and additional items not pictured on the timeline. In addition to the information box and the podcasts, viewers also receive a close up picture of the item, which they can zoom in on and examine in amazing detail. The image provided is clear enough to see smudges on the First Newspaper Printing of the Declaration or study scratches in a Rappahannock Forge Musket.[3] The ability to zoom and receive such a clear representation is a fantastic design feature, because it creates satisfaction for the viewer to be able to see so much detail. It is like they are looking at the object themselves through a magnifying glass. The only thing the timeline does not allow is a 360-degree view of the objects. It's possible that this choice was due to budget or time constraints, but it would have made a nice addition to see the entire item.
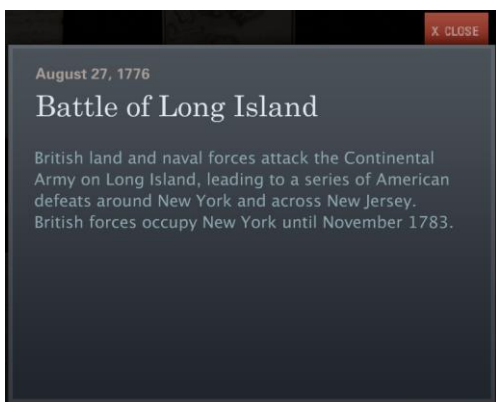
Battle of Long Island Information Box
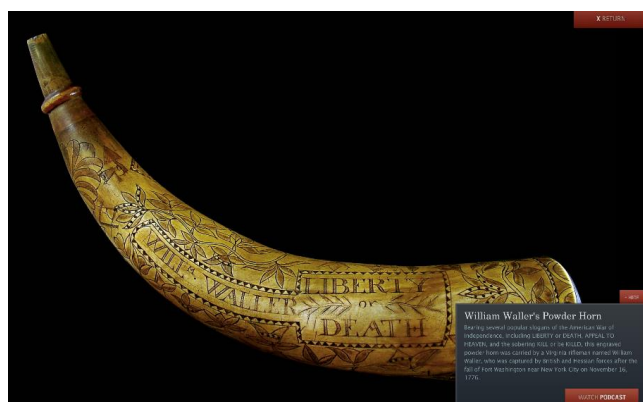
William Waller's Powder Horn Image and Podcast

As far as functionality, the timeline is very easy to use. It starts at the beginning and provides the years on a navigation bar along the bottom of the page, allowing the viewer to easily skip forward or backtrack. On the timeline itself are arrows on each side to move forward and backward along the timeline. Clicking on an arrow brings the viewer to another section of the timeline. It would have been a little more functional if the visitor was able to control how far the arrow brought them, or if they were able to drag the timeline where they wanted, because the arrows sometimes overshoot the item you want to see. Being able to control the scrolling would allow for more precise navigation along the timeline. There is a similar issue with the zoom feature on the images pages. The scrolling technology is too sensitive, only

stopping when the pointer is in the exact center of the screen. It makes it frustrating to study the item, because if the pointer moves the slightest bit the image does as well. That could be adjusted for a smoother user experience.

Example of Interactivity

This timeline is a great example of interactivity for the Three Village Historical Society. One of their major problems is that the SPIES! exhibit is only open on Sundays from 1-4pm. Private tours can be scheduled, but rely on the availability of a docent. Providing an interactive timeline on the TVHS website would remove both of those barriers to the public and allow greater exposure for the exhibit. According to the 2015 NMC Horizon Report, many museums are increasing their relevance and reputations through methods similar to this interactive timeline, which is helping them "develop long-term relationships with visitors that extend beyond the walls of the museum."[4] TVHS lacks an online presence, and introducing an interactive timeline would be a good start for advancing their available technology. There are also items that are part of the collection not on display at the museum. This is due to space constraints within the exhibit. The interactive timeline would provide an area where those items could be displayed and additional information on the topic can be given.

This interactive timeline provided by the Museum of the American Revolution is a particularly good example to emulate because it meets a number of standards shown to be effective towards visitors. A study by Alt and Shaw determined characteristics of ideal exhibitions.[5] The timeline meets quite a few of those characteristics:

- Gets the message across quickly
- Information is clearly presented
- Gives just enough information
- It's clear what you're supposed to do and how to begin
- It makes the subject come to life

Additionally, a focus group at the Brookfield Zoo determined that exhibits should be memorable and provide a personal experience in which a visitor is "gently guided to make discoveries."[6] The nature of an interactive timeline makes it easy for visitors to sift through information and learn at their own pace. Based on the findings of both of these studies, interactive timelines are ideal exhibits to implement on a museum website.

Potential Audiences

One potential audience that could be reached with the implementation of an interactive timeline is the student population. The TVHS is very proactive in working with the surrounding school districts and a greater online presence would benefit students in the classroom and at home. Teachers can use the interactive timeline in the classroom, or to compliment a field trip to the museum. This timeline would be a valuable educational tool and a resource for students.

Another audience would be geographically distant visitors. Long Island is not always the easiest place to travel to, so having online access to information about the Culper Spy Ring would be very useful for people interested in learning about Long Island's impact on the Revolutionary War. The history provided in the SPIES! exhibit is very specific to Long Island, and it would be nice for the museum to be able to share that information with a larger geographic population. "Museum leaders are developing new opportunities for online visitors to engage with their organizations when geography is a primary obstacle."[7] An interactive timeline is the perfect way for the Three Village Historical Society to do the same and overcome their accessibility issues.

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[1] "Timeline," *Museum of the American Revolution*, accessed April 3, 2018,
    https://www.amrevmuseum.org/timeline/

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] NMC Horizon Report, "Expanding the concept of visitors," 2015 Ed, accessed April 3, 2018,
    https://bbprod.stjohns.edu/bbcswebdav/pid-1478466-dt-content-rid-
    9462124_1/courses/LIS-258-0-15411-
    201810/NMC_HorizonReport2015MuseumEdition.pdf

[5] Serrell, Beverly. (2015). "Who is the audience (and what do they want)?" In Exhibit labels: An
    interpretive approach

[6] Ibid.

[7] NMC Horizon Report, "Expanding the concept of visitors," 2015 Ed, accessed April 3, 2018,
    https://bbprod.stjohns.edu/bbcswebdav/pid-1478466-dt-content-rid-
    9462124_1/courses/LIS-258-0-15411-
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    201810/NMC_HorizonReport2015MuseumEdition.pdf

Serrell, Beverly. (2015). "Who is the audience (and what do they want)?" In Exhibit labels: An

    interpretive approach, 49-68. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.

"Timeline." *Museum of the American Revolution.* Accessed April 3, 2018.

    https://www.amrevmuseum.org/timeline/.