

it is not. The historic house and its interpretive practice serve instead as a sanctuary, surrounded by fading wallpaper and antique bedspreads, to tell and hear human stories in the guise of animals which have enlightened, entertained, and educated people across the globe for millennia.

When I visited and began poking around on the grounds looking at the architecture, Operations Manager Susan Lasby stuck her head out the door to welcome me and ask if I wanted to join the storytelling tour. Christine Arinze Samuel was the storyteller during my visit, and she was warm and engaging.

She brought to life the practice of storytelling by using her movement, her voice—which changed with the different characters—and her expressions. She started with two Uncle Remus tales featuring Brer Rabbit and Brer Fox, topological trickster characters which I imagine can be found in literature and oral tales the world over, and then relayed two tales of her own making. Before and after her tale telling, Samuels encouraged the audience—which consisted of adults and children—to write and draw and be creative. Sometimes a prompt like this is all someone needs to start (or restart). To help keep creativity at the center of the museum programming, The Wren’s Nest also offers an academic year Scribes Youth Writers Program, and for the first time this year, a Scribes Summer Camp, both of which are aimed at middle grade students and bring professional writers to the house to work with students on their creative writing.

As a longtime historic house caretaker, museum employee and not-for-profit grant writing consultant, I’m not going to say it didn’t hurt to see The Wren’s Nest struggling. The struggle is not in the content, of course, but in the efforts American house museums must endure just to keep their doors open one day a week. It shouldn’t be this way, but it is. There are hundreds of small historic house museums dedicated to influential people and their histories spread across this country. The Wren’s Nest, like so many of these special places, deserves much more than what we give it. Go next time you visit Atlanta and show that house and its stories some love.

Laura A. Macaluso, PhD

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*Funk Heritage Center.* Reinhardt University, Waleska, Georgia. James Funk, Jr., Museum Co-Founder; Reinhardt University, Co-Founder; Floyd Falany, Collaborator; John Bennett, Collaborator. November 16, 1999–Ongoing.  
<https://funkheritagecenter.org/>

The F. James and Florrie G. Funk Heritage Center markets itself as “Georgia’s Official Frontier and Southeastern Indian Interpretive Center.” Its stated mission is to interpret the history of settlers to Appalachian Georgia together with the history of Southeastern Native Americans to visitors who often know nothing

about the Cherokee other than Trail of Tears.<sup>1</sup> The center has expanded its physical space and intellectual scope significantly since its founding in 1999, giving more prominence to Native history as the museum has sought to recenter Georgia history away from focus on only white settlement. After additions in 2016 and 2018, the Funk Heritage Center may well be the most comprehensive attempt at exhibiting settler and Native history together in the entire state, a noteworthy achievement for such a small museum. Yet, despite The Funk Heritage Center's best intentions, it would benefit from more modern practices being incorporated into exhibiting the present narratives.

The entire museum is a conundrum in which settler history exists in tandem, although not quite in harmony, with Native history. The Funk Heritage Center is associated with and funded by a Methodist institution, Reinhardt University, and distinct Christian overtones are present throughout the entire museum. These themes are at odds with the decolonial intent of the museum, given Christianity's long colonial history in the Americas. This affiliation leads to some odd choices. For



This image shows the Longhouse style architecture of the Grand Lobby with dioramas on the side. (Photo by author)

<sup>1</sup> The Funk Heritage Center, Reinhardt University, <https://www.reinhardt.edu/funkheritage/>

example, the Childre Family Grand Lobby of the Bennett History Museum within the center greets visitors with the architecture of an Iroquoian Longhouse, which attracted the designing architect because of the “high, cathedral-like appearance”—an attempt to justify the use of the geographically anachronistic longhouse in a museum about the Southeast.<sup>2</sup> The surrounding nooks of the lobby feature Native artifacts, snippets about pottery, and explanations of the Southeastern Ceremonial Complex in diorama-like scenes reminiscent of museums of the past that depict Indigenous people as stuck in time.

Despite the use of the outdated diorama style, the content is thorough and generally includes up-to-date research about Native history and culture in the ancestral period.

To the right of the Grand Lobby, open, windowed hallways lead to the Rogers Gallery of Contemporary American Indian Art and the Buffington Gallery’s “Resistance and Resilience: The Cherokee Trail of Tears.” The Buffington Gallery utilizes posters, dioramas, artwork, tactile wall features, and an outdated,



An example of one of the inlets off the Grand Lobby. (Photo by author)

<sup>2</sup> The Funk Heritage Center’s Bennett History Museum, The Childre Family Grand Lobby, The Bennett History Museum, The Funk Heritage Center.





Map of the different Trail of Tears Routes highlighting major events along the way. (Photo by author)

potentially problematic, movie to tell the story of the Trail of Tears and the events leading up to Removal.

Following that, the Rogers Art Gallery emphasizes a sense of returning home through the artwork displayed. The Rogers’ “had a dream to return the spirit of Native Americans to their former lands.”<sup>3</sup> Again, despite the gallery’s attempt to provide a powerful reclamation of Indigenous space and sovereignty, the nostalgia of white collectors oozes throughout the exhibits and space. Still, the two galleries work together well to highlight Native survivance and history in a way that does not focus exclusively on the tragedies of Indian Country. Instead, the viewer is drawn away from dramatic sympathy and directed towards history that educates in a non-Eurocentric way. Both galleries include educational tools designed for different grade levels that draw in viewers of diverse educational backgrounds and ages. While the volunteers and fliers encourage the viewers to end with these two exhibitions, I found it a refreshing start before moving to the Hall of the Ancients.

<sup>3</sup> “Home at Last,” Rogers Gallery of Contemporary American Indian Art, The Funk Heritage Center.

The star of the Funk Heritage Center is the Hall of the Ancients which houses artifacts from the Hickory Log site, also known as the 1995 “Walmart Dig.”<sup>4</sup> Before visitors enter the long hallway to the Hall of Ancients they step into a theater to see an award winning movie, *The Southeastern Indians* (2006). The movie is dated,



View of the entire main Hall of the Ancients when walking in. (Photo by author)

<sup>4</sup> Until the Georgia Department of Natural Resources redesignated the site to Hickory Log, the site was known as the Walmart Dig because the of ancestral artifacts found when construction crews broke ground on the Walmart in Canton, Georgia.



especially in its language, but nonetheless offers a viewer without prior knowledge of Native history informative background and features a mostly Native cast. The hallway includes glass cases full of projectile points and pottery pieces from the Paleoindian period through the Historic period to emphasize the changes in Native culture and archaeological practices throughout time.

The Hall of the Ancients takes the viewer through a short bend full of rivercane and taxidermy deer before opening up to an exhibition that details over 12,000



Photo of the tools collected by Sellars. (Photo by author)

years of Southeastern Native history. This space once again presents a conundrum for museum professionals, Native people, and researchers. Contemporary researchers and Native people prefer the use of the word Ancestor to describe people of the past and generally refer to the prehistoric period as the Ancestral Period when not using specific archaeological or Indigenous chronology. Describing people or places as “Ancient,” as the museum does, locates Native people in a stagnant time and space in which they appear reliant on colonization for progress. Yet despite its name and the Ancient trope present throughout, this space is the most cohesive in the museum because the collaboration between groups outside of the university is obvious. If the rest of the center can incorporate this kind of collaboration the museum would be more in line with modern Native and museum practices.

Leaving the Hall of the Ancients, the visitor passes signs for the Appalachian Settlement outside and for the Sellars Collection of Historic Hand Tools. The Sellars Collection focuses on one man, Joseph Alan Sellars, and his passion for collecting old tools. The entire room is wall-to-wall tools that Sellars collected throughout his life, later donated by his wife to the museum. Celebrating a local donor, this exhibit makes no attempt to connect the collection to the Indigenous focus of the rest of the museum and it is only tangentially related to the Appalachian settlement narrative.

The Funk Heritage Center, in short, is rife with potential with the right funding and direction. The exhibits show promise of decolonial history but too often fall into tropes about Native Americans put forth by white settlers since contact. I stand by saying that the Funk Heritage Center is probably the most comprehensive exhibition of this history in the state of Georgia. Yet to be effective, collaboration with Native nations needs to be more present throughout the entire space so that the museum is exhibiting accurate historical narratives. The Funk Heritage Center is still successful despite the drawbacks discussed here because it presents an underrepresented history in a comprehensive way to people who never would have heard it otherwise. The effort made here to make these complex histories attainable should not be overshadowed by the growth possibilities for the center.

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