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# Pioneer Village

At Salem's Naumkeag

**Object IDEA**

Interpretive Planning + Exhibition Development



## INTRODUCTION

*...a new location provides the opportunity to expand the site and topics of historical interpretation while also providing an opportunity to upgrade the site for accessibility and other modern codes. Pioneer Village can become a historic resource for future generations.*

– City of Salem, Massachusetts

### INTERPRETATION AT SALEM'S LIVING HISTORY MUSEUM

#### **More Than Moving a Village – Re-defining an Institution**

In the role of museum planner and visitor advocate, ObjectIDEA worked as part of a consultant team led by Anser Advisory, Oudens Ello Architects, and the City of Salem to investigate how the move of Pioneer Village and the design of a new Indigenous Cultural Site will result in a new resource for the community and a new destination attraction for Salem. In contemplating such a move, the project team also collaborated to expand the mission of the institution to relate the site to the environmental history of the Northshore and illuminate the thriving presence of native people in contemporary Salem.

As residents of Salem, ObjectIDEA is committed to realizing a future for the Village that offers valuable recreational and education opportunities to our community, is irresistible in the tourist market upon which we thrive, and sustainable for the

City that owns and operates the site and stewards its future. As the project moved forward it became increasingly clear that the project is about more than moving or removing buildings; it is about re-inventing the concept of a living history museum, expanding the reach and richness of the resource, and developing a new institution.

ObjectIDEA's practice of museum planning was formed to address the very special considerations that non-profit cultural attractions must address as they build, renovate, or re-invent themselves. Pioneer Village is venturing to do all these things in addition to a physical move. The idea of moving the Village's structures provides a good analogy to the other work that must be done: We must move the mission of the institution to a higher place as well; investigate its structural soundness; re-assemble what belongs and deserves to endure; and outfit the institution with new and exciting capabilities to engage new and existing audiences.

INTRODUCTION

Scope of the Study

There are many influencing decisions that have been considered to ensure a successful end-result and these have been done in this first phase of work. The consultant team, comprising architects, landscape designers, and interpretive

planners have worked with the City of Salem and its advisors to answer some very crucial questions:

- What is the interpretive emphasis of an improved and re-located Pioneer Village? How do we build a bridge between our heritage and our future?



INTERPRETIVE EMPHASIS

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Pioneer Village will undoubtedly continue to tell the story of land and people. The windswept coast of Salem has supported native plants, animals, and people from time immemorial. In a historical narrative, the north shore provided for its indigenous people and it lured people from afar with its resource-rich opportunities to make a living. Here in Salem Native and settler societies collided. They collaborated, conflicted, and coexisted; they did in the 17th century, and they do to this day.

Pioneers Village’s origin-story complicates its history.

Built as a temporary stage set and maintained as a living history museum, Pioneer Village was intended to illuminate the early lifestyles of bygone days, and was (and is) entertaining as much as it is educational. Its thatched-roof structures represent a flashback – a frozen moment – of the event of colonial settlement and the Colonial Revival movement of which it was a product. The Village was erected to

celebrate a triumphant accomplishment of pounding wooden stakes in the ground and claiming seemingly uninhabited land. And in its earliest iteration at Forest River Park, Pioneer Village featured nearby dwellings of the native American people who either stood by and watched or (In a more romantic narrative) rose to the occasion to share their gifts of knowledge, food, and fellowship with their new neighbors.

The interpretive vision for Pioneer Village is more multi-dimensional.

In thinking of the project interpretively, one of the aims of the plan is to develop a lens through which people can contemplate the perspective of the original intent and understand the complexity of the site’s romanticized narrative – to interpret the moment of colonial settlement and the ongoing thriving culture of the native people who were here then and are here now. This is one of the most challenging and sensitive aspects of the project. As mentioned earlier, the project aims to do more than simply move structures; It seeks

to expand a perspective beyond that of the dominant cultural group. It seeks to dispel myths and confront stereotypes. It aims to avoid a classic, singular “collision of cultures” moment in time. And it seeks to avoid shedding light on the story of any one cultural group through the filter of another. Contemporary audiences demand this degree of interpretive rigor.

The Design Team has considered very thoughtfully how to locate the artifact that is the Pioneer Village and situate it alongside a thriving Visitor Center of contemporary design. In a new and dynamic facility such as this, visitors will experience the story of what happened AND the story of what is happening now – a contemporary narrative of the environment, indigenous plants and animals, the long arc of indigenous history, and settler societies including our own – some in a time capsule; all in current context.

Moving the village will place it within yet another historical narrative. And it is one that is closer to our own moment in time.

THE PLAN

One of these narratives is certainly the site’s precedent as a restorative camp. One of the gifts of the newly proposed site is its history of providing a safe-haven and a place for healing and learning. One of its first iterations is as a tuberculosis camp, where isolation and fresh air provided therapy for people afflicted with a misunderstood disease. Later in its life it was a classic scout camp and a place for children attending day camp.

In this new location and iteration, Pioneer Village has an opportunity to draw on the metaphor of healing and nurturing and connecting people to place. The proposed new site was once a place for healing the body and the lungs. It experienced a heyday as a place to nurture camp friendships and outdoor education, and perhaps it is finally poised to be a place for healing the broken ideas and nurturing the relatedness of historic and contemporary peoples by embracing a broader and more interwoven interpretive narrative.

THE PLAN FOR PIONEER VILLAGE AT CAMP NAUMKEAG

Multiplicity of Narrative and Experience

The new site at Naumkeag features a sense of clearing in the project plan: the re-created village (now moved) situated to the northeast and a newly designated place to interpret the historical and contemporary life-ways of the Massachusetts Tribe. These two assets are intentionally located with arrival, centering, and contemplative space between them (see landscape plan). This strategic configuration invites the visitor to explore multiple narratives, not just listen to or simply buy one heroic version.

There are abundant interpretive opportunities in Phase One of the project. Visitors will be able to:

- Explore the landscape, augmented with native plantings, and interpreted through wayside signage,
- Access the waterfront,
- Hear from contemporary Native people about their indigenous

presence and history,

- Immerse themselves in the Living History Museum comprising replicas of early colonial structures. As a guided or self-guided guest, witness how Salem’s first settlers lived with the land and hear of Salem’s first settler encounters with the Massachusetts Tribe, and
- Imagine other moments in the site’s history including the Point’s role in coastal defense, the brief period of tuberculosis encampment, and the years of Camp Naumkeag’s use for youth camping and community programming.

Phase Two will include

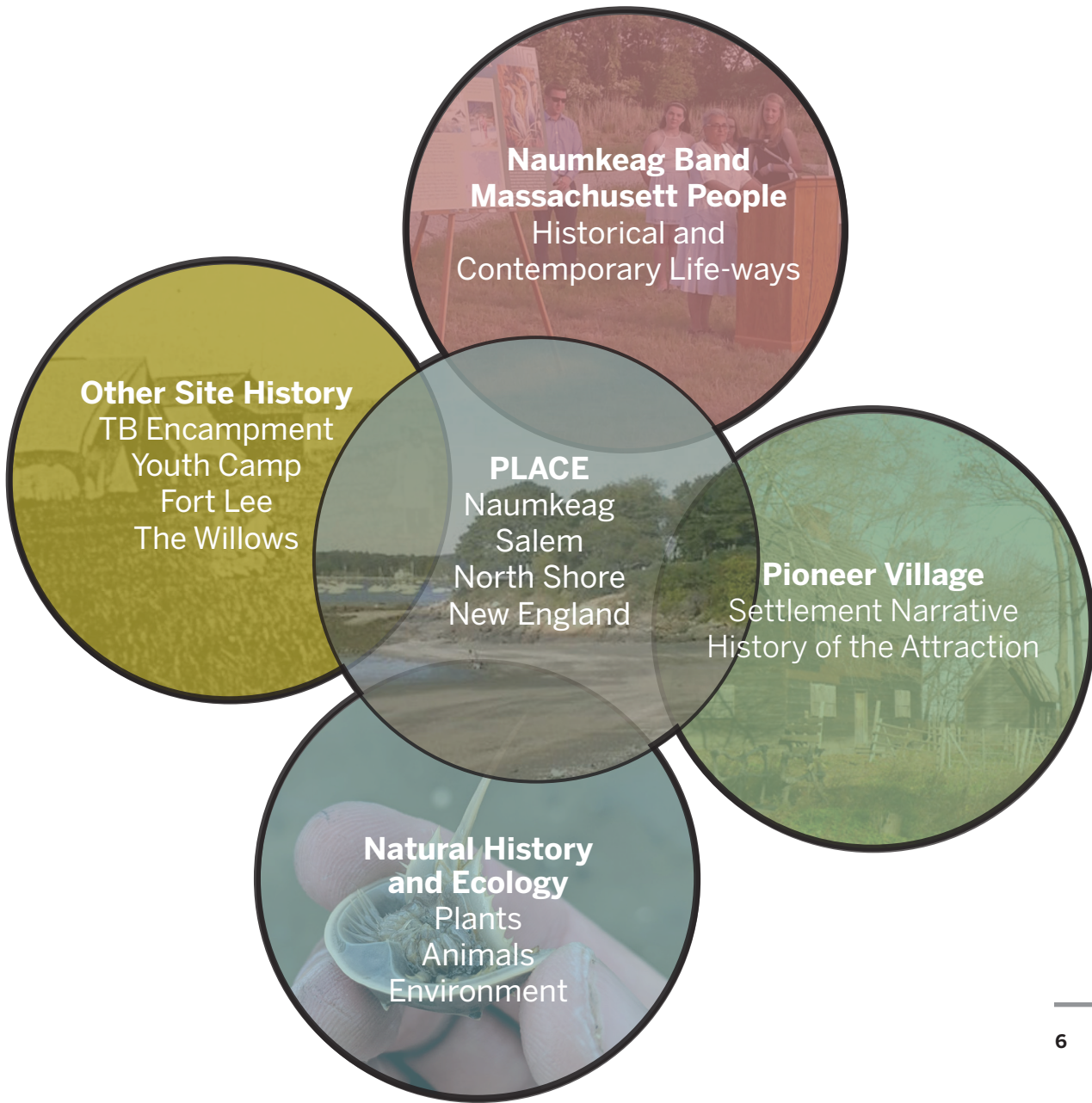
- Broader, and more permanent representation of Naumkeag history and contemporary culture as developed and presented through contemporary Native voice, and
- A Heritage Center (Visitor Center) that provides a place of intersection

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for the natural and cultural histories associated with the site and Salem in broader terms.

Remoteness was why the site was chosen to house and isolate people with communicable diseases, and remoteness (and proximity to nature) was why the property made an appealing day camp location. The seasonal structures provided a sense of primitive camping – another dimension of “getting away from it all.” Since the heyday of organized overnight camping in the 70s, the city of Salem has closed in on the Camp Naumkeag location and it now lies on a well-worn path and is adjacent to one of the largest recreational destinations in the city.

The history of the site as a camp (both for the infirm and for youth) would primarily be interpreted through wayside signage replete with photographs and testimonials from history and the community.



## THE PLAN

### Interpreting the History of Pioneer Village

The story of Pioneer Village as an attraction is laden with history and nostalgia. The most fitting interpretive framework for the Village is to reveal this multidimensionality – its roles as a theatrical set, living history museum, seaside attraction, symbol, movie set, educational venue, etc. – and to be honest with the public about its stories and controversies that have evolved over time.

The vision for a new and improved Village at Naumkeag includes improved support infrastructure, more robust programming, additional staffing, and complimentary interpretive resources including a Visitor Center. The goal of the project in totality is to create a Cultural Precinct where the village (adjacent to Fort Lee) and a Massachusetts cultural site all work together to interpret the intersection of people and the environment in Salem.

The Village structures are planned to be moved and re-erected in their historic relative configuration (as the structures related to each other at Forest River Park)

and with accuracy toward their adjacency to the ocean. Some aspects of the original clearing can be restored at Naumkeag to expand the gardening program and implement an animal husbandry program. These kinds of programs were not possible under the heavily forested conditions at Forest River.

### Phase One: Interpretation at Naumkeag (see site plan, right)

**1. Trailhead Signage** greets visitors arriving from Winter Island and provides way-finding and orientation to the attraction (hours, mission, fees, and features, etc.)

**2. Site History Exhibition** provides an overview of the occupation and uses of Naumkeag. Using photos and text this outdoor exhibition speaks to Native peoples' deep history, European settlement, and the heydays of the TB and youth camping operations. It is located at the ticket threshold.

**3. Village Interpretation** is achieved through a series of wayside graphic panels.



## THE PLAN

### Phase Two: Interpretation at Naumkeag (see site plan, right)

**1. Trailhead Signage** greets visitors arriving from Winter Island and provides way-finding and orientation to the attraction (hours, mission, fees, and features, etc.)

**2. Visitor Center Exhibitions** provide an overview of the occupation and uses of Naumkeag. Using photos, text, and objects this indoor exhibition speaks to Native peoples' deep history on the north shore, European settlement, and the heydays of the tuberculosis and youth camping operations. The Visitor Center includes both permanent and changing exhibitions and community gathering space.

**3. Village Interpretation** is achieved through a series of understated wayside graphic panels. These panels address historic native and settler use of the Salem coastal environment including food sources, gardening and domestic animal husbandry, weather, trade operations, governance, and 9 (for the Massachusetts Tribe) dispossession of land and home.

### 4. The Locus of Indigenous Representation

is the site for future interpretation of historic and contemporary Native People. It is with intent that the site for this is not located in the village proper so that programming is not limited to locations withing the context of the historically themed attraction and the nomadic population was forever on the move. Interpretive messages and techniques will be identified in collaboration with representatives of the Masschusettt Tribe.

**5. A Restored Native Landscape** is interpreted with a series of wayside graphic markers that share indigenous knowledge of local flora and fauna.

