



Museum Visit Papers/Testimonials:

For the past four or five years I have asked students in my fall semester rural literature class at Southwest State University to visit the Machinery Museum and write a short paper telling me what they see there and how the museum

exhibits—and the town of Hanley Falls—relate to the material we read in class. I like this assignment, as do the students, and I only wish the Museum were open in February for the spring semester students.

Over the years I've noticed that student papers fall into a pattern:



(1) I was at first dubious about this assignment, but (2) when I got there I found the Museum interesting and surprising, (2A) even though I had often driven right by it many times without much curiosity. (3) I was especially interested in the glider, the bed, the trunk, the Sears catalogues, the arrowheads, the kitchen, the pump organ (often identified as a piano), the cars, the tractors, the building itself, and especially the various forms of out-dated technology. The Museum and the town of Hanley

reminded me of (4a) home, (4b) things my grandparents told me, and/or (4c) things we have read in stories. The exhibits and machines also made me (5) realize how hard people worked in the old days, (6) wake up to the great variety of brand names there once were in this country and are no longer in this country, and (7) only the more introspective ones) think to myself, "one day fifty years from now, I will see a car or a phone in a museum and



think to myself, 'I used to drive a car like that'. . . ." Finally, occasionally (8), "I'll be back."



students are playing me, but their papers seem sincere. Before I returned this fall's papers, I pulled some sentences which exhibit the reactions I just described. I thought I'd share excerpts.

Since I and most of the authors I teach are hard-core realists and not much for sentimentality, fantasy, or science fiction, this is exactly the reaction I hope for. Maybe my

(1) "When I discovered we were to do an assignment on a museum in some small town outside of Marshall, I was not overly excited." "The first thing that came to my mind while walking up to the Minnesota's Machinery Museum . . . was, 'Why the hell am I here—why did Pichaske send me here to look at this old building where junk from before I was born gets collected? . . . I decided to go into the premises and trust that our teacher hasn't lost his mind.'" "I was honestly thinking what could possibly be at this museum that will interest me." "Hanley Falls is a blurb in the middle of scenic nowhere." "When we were first assigned this project, I thought to myself, 'Only in a small-town college class.' I assumed I'd be bored out of my mind."



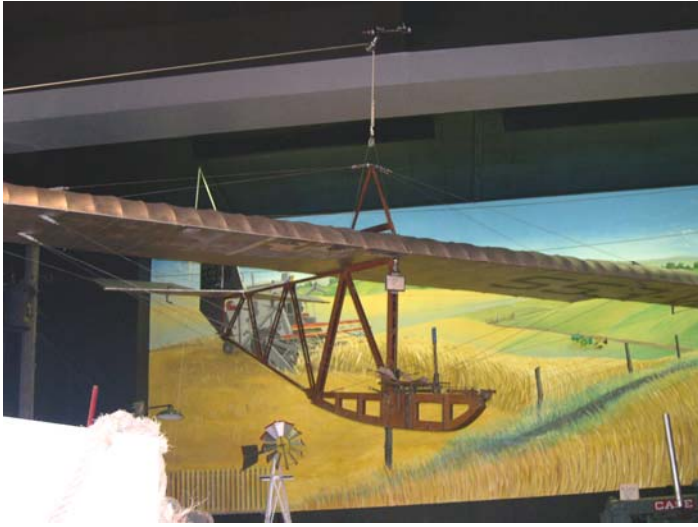
(2) "To my surprise, I was simply amazed by what I saw during my next two hours." "However, when I arrived at the Minnesota Machinery Museum, I soon found out how mistaken I was." "Then I visited the Museum, and I was rather surprised at some of the things I saw." "Overall, I was quite surprised with what I saw at the Machinery Museum. . . . It had much more to offer than I ever could have imagined. I also never expected that a tiny Minnesota town, such as Hanley Falls, could be home to such an interesting place." "I had fun going to the Minnesota Machinery Museum and figured out my first question as to why I was there. FDR summed it up with one quote saying that we need to look back on our past to prepare for the future ahead." "It proves that learning history can be fun and exciting."

(2a) "Every time I drive to Marshall, Minnesota, from my home town I pass by Hanley Falls. I have the same mindset every time: I keep my cruise control set on sixty-two, glance at the large corn operation to the west, and continue driving towards Marshall. Never have I had an interest to stop by the town." "One of the first times I drove home last year, I noticed a big old piece of machinery sitting next to Highway 23 with a sign telling readers to come visit the Machinery Museum. It has simply become another part of the scenery on my drive to and from campus." "I've known it was there, but I never had to motivation to stop in and see any of it." "I would always pass this little town on my way back to school from home. I never thought anything about it until the first day of class my teacher, Dr. Pichaske, would tell us we had to write a paper about the Minnesota Machinery Museum there in town."



(3) "One of the most amazing things I saw during the visit was the bed. This particular bed had ropes going across it, which serves as the springs or support of the bed. It looked extremely uncomfortable." "Just looking at this bed and comparing it to the bed that I sleep in, you can see how the bed itself has been improved as the years have passed; everything becomes more safe, comfortable, and even more reliable." "Being a car guy, I really enjoyed seeing

some of these automobiles which I had not seen in person before." "My favorite was the 1948 Reo Fire Truck, simply because it is amazing to see how we have made fire equipment more accessible for firefighters."



"The one thing that made me stop in the first room was the arrowhead made of stone. How at one time this was designed as a defense and attack weapon." "I mean, these arrowheads have been touched, used, and were made from Native Americans, people from the past, who more than likely are already buried six feet under the ground in their sacred burial grounds." "The most amazing thing in the old Hanley Falls High School Gymnasium I thought was the glider."

"The most interesting item in the whole gym was the glider plane that hung from the ceiling in front of the picture I previously mentioned." "The other tractor astonished me with the sheer size of its wheels. My mother and sister are short, but even Dad looked short underneath them." "I couldn't believe the enormous size of the steam engines, and their metal tires." "The most mind-boggling section of the museum, easily, was the 1839 sea chest of the Gautefall family. . . . It gave me a sense of that past that I've been trying to find." "It was interesting because in my own lifetime alone I have seen and

been a part of so much technological change with the cash register, telephone, cameras, radios, and typewriters." "The other item that I thought was really awesome was the cash register It was monstrous compared to what we now have. However, it had all these neat little gadgets that come along with the cash register, like these stamps that had prices on them." "The switchboard and other technologies from the 40s and 50s looked bizarre and otherworldly." "I saw three old telephones. I had always seen these on TV but never knew what they really looked like or felt like."



"To see the actual operator machine and know that someone had to sit there all day and connect each phone call and that there were so few phones was quite a sight." "Probably one of the most awesome items I saw at the museum was an Edison phonograph. It had such a huge speaker. I had never seen something like that before, so I was completely in love with how old it looked." "It is pretty amazing to think that people used to actually listen to records on a huge phonograph." "I opened several of the lockers and inside I found Sears catalogs that ranged from 1962 to 1993. While browsing through these catalogs, I compared our generation to

the middle 1900s, and found that so many old the appliances and other products have changed drastically."

"Then I saw a Coke machine. Even Coke machines have changed drastically." "In my opinion, the most interesting part of the museum was the building itself."

(4a) "I feel like I've been here, but I haven't." "The Tonka collection caught me like a fly in a spider web. When I was a little girl, I had exactly the same set, rusted and all. I remember playing with them in my sandbox every summer as I made roads and fields and drove my Hot Wheels cars and John Deer tractors through."



(4b) "My grandma has an old Singer sewing machine, and it is very special to her. After seeing the sewing machine at the museum, I came to understand that she cherishes it because it is an important souvenir from her childhood." "I have two of them at my own home. My mother was given the plows by her dad, who received them from his father." "My

grandmother I talked to used to have one of the same wash basins at her old farm place." "I saw a butter churn which my grandma stated that she and her mother made their own." "The most interesting thing that I learned was that my great uncle is one of the museum's most active members."



(4c) "This visit came perfectly into play with what we are talking about in class and read about in our book." "The piano reminded me of the first story we read in class, and I tried to imagine gathering with family to sing a song or listen to someone play after dinner." "After an hour of wandering through the museum, the pages from Late Harvest began to come to life." "It reminded me of Garrison Keillor's story 'Home.' " "The

Minnesota Machinery Museum and the town of Hanley Falls provide an excellent context for the material we are learning in class. As Holm would say, we have a prairie eye; we can see beauty and clarity in the vast open plains. . . ." "Hanley is somewhat like Lake Wobegon; the town is dying and falling apart." "I look back to the stories I have read in Late Harvest, and it helps put an image to what life was like in the past and how people survived."



(5) "I felt like I was living back in the 1920's, and working right along side the farmers." "It was nearly impossible for me to imagine being a farmer of this time period. . . Everything was metal and looked to be quite bothersome to operate." "The labor that was required to maintain a farm during that time must have been strenuous." "It is difficult to

grasp how much time was consumed doing chores in the past as compared with how it is today, when we let machines do all the work." "I had no idea how much work threshing and harvesting season consisted of, for both men and the women, especially." "It's insane to think about feeding all those men until the entire crop had been harvested." "Realizing that people actually used these tools and other things to do daily activities boggled my mind." "With the old machines, like the hand-held wooden plows, it requires much more human output to get the correct amount of work done." "As I looked at all the tools and equipment, numerous of them had no engine to power themselves, or wheels to ease the movement through the soil." "I cannot imagine picking and husking corn all by hand, especially with the tools that people used back then." "If anything, it made me realize that I wasn't cut out for farming."



(6) "There were different brand names on each tractor . . . names like Case, Huber, John Deere, McCormick-Deering and many others." "This room was a display of shopping goods that were available at the time; I barely recognized any of the companies while scanning through them."

(7) "An older couple was looking at the tractors as well and taking pictures of one of them as the woman said, 'Take a picture from this angle; this is where we used to ride when we were kids.' I wonder if there will ever be a modern-day bus at a museum in 50 years and I will be the one saying, 'I used to ride one of these when I was a kid.' "

(8) "Hopefully I can go back during August when they have their threshing show and see how the machines actually work." "In a place like



Hanley Falls, family is not necessarily the four other people in your household, but the 300 other people in your community, all striving to better each other's lives." "I loved the museum and have recommended a visit to several people." "It is only twenty minutes from my home town, and I am wondering why I didn't visit this agricultural museum as a child. . . . It would make a fantastic field trip for elementary through high school students."



Let me conclude with the last sentences of Ryan Viergutz's paper:

"The Machinery Museum in Hanley Falls fascinated me, and it'll probably be the most cool thing that happens to me in all of this college semester. It gave me a sense of connection to history that, comparatively, isn't all that long ago. My family thought it was as fascinating as me, and it got us planning to go to more museums if we can find them. I certainly loved this one."