

## Materialities of Nostalgia at the Old Homestead

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### ABSTRACT

This paper reflects on processes of memory- and history-making at the Elihu Akin House, a historic site in a New England coastal village. Since the late 18th century, the house has been a place of dwelling and deliberate recollection. Recent archaeological excavations, a 1922 silent movie, and an Akin son's 1778 letter represent multiple media, periods, and perspectives, for which the house serves as a touchstone. These three occasions comprise an archive of nostalgia. Remembrance is repeatedly filtered through and entangled with in-process experiences. The material and emotional are mutually constituted as the house is reinvested with significance. Understanding these processes has implications as the site is developed into a heritage center striving to present not only local and regional history, but also the methods and challenges of heritage management.

Résumé: Cet article est une réflexion sur les processus de mémoire et d'histoire à la maison de Elihu Akin, un site historique dans un village côtier de Nouvelle Angleterre. Depuis la fin du 18ème siècle, la maison a été en endroit d'habitations et de souvenirs. Des fouilles archéologiques récentes, un film muet de 1922, et une lettre de 1778 du fils de Akin représentent de nombreux médias, périodes et perspectives, pour lesquels la maison sert de référence. Ces trois événements sont une archive de nostalgie. Le souvenir est sans cesse filtré et empêtré dans des expériences en cours. Le matériel et l'émotionnel sont mutuellement constitués alors que la maison est réinvestie d'une manière importante. La compréhension de ces processus a des conséquences alors que le site est développé en un centre d'héritage essayant non seulement de présenter l'histoire locale et régionale, mais aussi les méthodes et défis de la gestion de l'héritage.

Resumen: Este trabajo reflexiona sobre el proceso de recuperación de la memoria y la historia en Elihu Akin House, un yacimiento histórico de una ciudad costera de New England. Desde finales del siglo XVIII, la casa ha

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actuado como residencia y recuerdo deliberado. Las recientes excavaciones arqueológicas, una película muda de 1922 y una carta del hijo de Akin de 1778 constituyen distintos medios, periodos y perspectivas, para los que la casa sirve de piedra de toque. Estas tres manifestaciones incluyen un archivo de nostalgia. Los recursos se filtran continuamente y se entremezclan con las experiencias en curso. Lo material y lo emocional se conforman mutuamente a medida que la casa se reviste de significado. Comprender estos procesos tiene implicaciones, ya que el yacimiento se convierte en un centro histórico que se esfuerza por presentar no solo la historia local y regional, sino también los métodos y los retos de la gestión patrimonial.

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**KEYWORDS**

Emotion, Experience, Heritage, Memory, Phenomenology

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## **Introductions**

### **A Dwelling Place**

This paper reflects on processes of memory- and history-making at the Elihu Akin House, a historic home in the New England coastal village of Dartmouth, Massachusetts. The Akin property is owned by the Town of Dartmouth and is leased to the Dartmouth Heritage Preservation Trust. The five-room, two-story, center chimney Akin House was built ca. 1762. The small house is extant, but not whole, and it is currently being stabilized. Archaeological testing was undertaken there for the first time in the summer of 2007 in order better to understand the extent and integrity of sub-surface cultural resources. House histories were simultaneously researched. The author led the archaeology project with a small crew of University of Massachusetts Dartmouth students and volunteers. This work has revealed the Akin House to be a persistent place of “dwelling”—of residence and deliberate recollection. In its present state of decay, the Akin House is also uncanny—both familiar in its recognizable domesticity and unfamiliar in its layered decomposition. It invites nostalgic reflection and exposes certain assumptions about the way things were, are, and came to be.

In order to study processes of memory and engagement at the Akin House, this paper first situates itself within archaeologies of experience. It then considers experiences of nostalgia, an embodied practical emotion with specific contexts and shifting meanings. Nostalgia is relevant to

heritage work at the Akin site and elsewhere. This paper next turns to the Akin House and its histories, citing three key moments in reversed chronological order (invoking the disordered temporal flow of nostalgia and the experience of archaeological excavation). Considered in turn are the 2007 archaeology project, a 1922 silent movie, and an Akin son's 1778 letter. These moments present multiple media, periods, and perspectives, for which the house serves as a touchstone.

Close study of the three selected moments reveals how remembrance is repeatedly filtered through and entangled with in-process experiences. The Akin House and its moments thus comprise an archive of nostalgia. This archive iterates a longing for a lost/imagined time/place. The material and emotional are mutually constituted as the house is continuously reinvested with significance. This paper concludes that such processes of engagement and remembrance have implications as the Akin House is developed into a heritage center, as well as for the broader practice of historical archaeology.

Before proceeding, the author must reveal another level of nostalgia at work at the Akin House site: her own. I have dwelt with the site most of my life, when "dwelling" implies a degree of attendance and familiarity (Thomas 1996:73, 89). I grew up in Dartmouth and went to elementary school near the Akin House. I looked at and wondered about the place as I was driven to and from school. So, predating involvement in the Akin House Archaeology Project, I was already entangled in the site and its possibilities. I expect this house will draw us out of and into ourselves for a long time to come.

## **Orientations**

This study circles the notion of nostalgia, but it is fundamentally about experience. Portions are a sensual exploration of locale. As such, I acknowledge the influence of phenomenology. The genealogy of phenomenology runs through the writings of Husserl (1966[1887]), Heidegger (2008[1927]), and Merleau-Ponty (2002[1945]) and, in archaeology, notably Shanks (1992), Tilley (1994), Thomas (1996), and Bender (1995) (Hodges 2008:404–405, 408). Phenomenology attends to subjects, places, and experiences. The ontology also proposes that "participants enact or perform the person they are or wish to be in relationship to others... and construct collective forms of identity" (Hayden 2009:93).

Munn (1992:116) furthers the rapprochement of phenomenology and practice theory when describing human temporality as a

symbolic process continually being produced in everyday practices. People are "in" a sociocultural time of multiple dimensions (sequencing, timing,

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past-present-future relations, etc.) that they are forming... these dimensions are lived or apprehended concretely via the various meaningful connectivities among persons, objects, and space continually being made in and through the everyday world.

Munn suggests the “lived present” is constituted through perceptions of the past, present, and future (Hodges 2008:406), perceptions (I add) created and mediated through bodies, places, and things. Nostalgia is a particular perception of time/place; at the Akin House, one may investigate nostalgia in multiple periods and from multiple perspectives. The following discussion of the Akin site diverges from most phenomenological archaeology in key areas. It considers the familiar, everyday, domestic, and recent, rather than the exotic, exceptional, ritual, and ancient (for critique, see Hamilton et al. 2006). Nostalgia invites a quotidian sensibility.

As an account of earlier nostalgic practices, this study also has the historical ethnographic goal of analytical, rigorous, plausible reconstruction of: (1) past contexts; and (2) mechanisms of persistence over time (i.e., processes of memory) (Reddy 1997:327; *sensu* Comaroff and Comaroff 1992). This approach addresses some of phenomenological archaeology’s recognized flaws: tendency to a self-involved subjectivity, which devalues the past in favor of the present; assumption of a universal subject, as opposed to a particular/socialized/historicized one; an asymmetrical value system, disinterested in the agentive properties of material culture; and an inclination to description, rather than explanation (Hodges 2008:407–408; Hamilton et al. 2006:34–35; Bazelmans et al. 1994:64). As historical ethnography, archaeology pursued through the Akin House draws freely on material culture, landscape, sense, emotion, written records, film, photography, and oral histories. It considers pasts and how they inform presents: how “home” has been defined; how archaeologists and others have construed and created nostalgia; how people have valued heritage; what work a site like the Akin House has done—and might do—for its community. The author acknowledges that this project falls within the histories it studies; not unusual for historical archaeology and one of the discipline’s strengths (see for example Hall 2000; Lawrence 2003; Leone 2005).

### **The Backwards Pull**

“Matters of psychological detail” are not epiphenomenal to social experience (Tarlow 2000:717, 718, 721). The need to understand historical and material contexts of emotions is acute (Tarlow 2000:734). Nostalgia has its own historical trajectory and should be broached as “historically specific and experientially embodied” (Tarlow 2000:713). It was initially proposed

as a physical malady in the 17th century, when the German physician Johannes Hofer coined the term and published a clinical description of its causes, symptoms, and treatment (Rosen 1975:343). He chose the term for its Greek roots: *nostos* meaning “homecoming”; *algos* meaning “pain, grief, distress.” It was “the pain which the sick person feels because he is not in his native land, or fears never to see it again” (Johannes Hofer 1678 in Rosen 1975:341). It was an “acute longing for familiar surroundings”; literally, homesickness (Oxford English Dictionary 2008). At the time, nostalgia had triggers besides physical relocation. Of particular interest to archaeologists is Hofer’s observation that “men oppressed [by nostalgia] are moved by small external objects” (quoted in Austin 2007:85).

Nostalgia was a well established condition by the mid-18th century (Rosen 1975:343). It was dangerous. Nostalgia arose “chiefly from a passionate longing for their native land which develops slowly without being perceived... little by little his health deteriorates leading to complaints and serious diseases, some affecting the body alone, others the mind as well... there are even cases where death has resulted” (R. A. Vogel 1764 citing *Onomatologia Medica* 1755, in Rosen 1975:343). Persons in military service were believed especially prone to nostalgia, as were those forced into servitude (Rosen 1975:345). The condition was, however, found throughout Europe and among all social classes (Rosen 1975:346) (nostalgia’s potential for discourses of personal identity and power is fascinating but not explored in this paper). Nostalgia was increasingly viewed not as a disease in and of itself, but as an aspect of melancholia (Rosen 1975:349–350).

The 19th century was a transitional period in understandings of nostalgia (Austin 2007:3). Clinical “nostalgia” dropped out of medical texts by the 1870s (Austin 2007:1; Rosen 1975:351, 352), and the term came to carry a colloquial, emotional sense. Beginning in the mid-18th century and gaining cohesion in the 19th, changing social notions of childhood were entwined with the meanings of nostalgia, as were pastoral ideals (Austin 2007:10, 87, 106). The influence of Romantic movements in arts, literature, architecture, and popular culture is clear (though discussing Romanticism in any detail is beyond the scope of this paper). By the early 20th century, nostalgia was commonly understood as a “sentimental longing for or regretful memory of a period of the past, especially one in an individual’s own lifetime; (also) sentimental imagining or evocation of a period of the past” (Oxford English Dictionary 2008). Thus, nostalgias of place gave way to nostalgias of time. It is this modern definition, attenuated but also broadened from early modern conceptions, with which we are most familiar today.

Parallel to vernacular nostalgia, the notion of nostalgia as a psychopathological condition reemerged after the first World War, “manifested by refugees, displaced persons, prisoners of war,” and other traumatized victims of dislocation (Rosen 1975:340). Unlike early modern nostalgia,

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modern clinical nostalgia, while debilitating, was distinct from homesickness (Sedikides, Wildschut, and Baden 2004:202). Influences of Jung and Freud are inherent in later 20th-century clinical perceptions. Psychopathological nostalgia is currently characterized by an adult patient's deep need to achieve an idealized—never realized—childhood state of security and bliss, for which both home and childhood itself are metaphors (Austin 2007:1–2; Peters 1985). This inexorable “backwards pull” interferes with the sufferer's social behaviors and well-being (Peters 1985:136).

In the working definition used here, nostalgia is an embodied emotional reaction to the removal of a person from a situation with which she/he identifies and which she/he imagines (re)experiencing first-hand. Removal might be in time and space, and both the situation and return might be recollected or imagined. Nostalgia can thus be conceived as engagement with the past, entanglement in a present-past (Trigg 2006:56), or longing for an idealized and unattainable “future-past, a past which has only ideological reality” (Stewart 2007:23). It is a personal response to perceived location/dislocation. Material culture can create nostalgic recollection. And—importantly for those in heritage and allied professions—nostalgia is susceptible to manipulation.

### Materiality of Nostalgia

Materiality is one promising approach to archaeologies (or anthropologies) of emotion and augments approaches of phenomenology, practice, and discourse analysis. As Reddy (1997):327 finds,

Emotion talk and emotional gestures are not well characterized by the notion of ‘discourse’ derived from the poststructuralist theories of Foucault or by that of ‘practice’ derived from the theoretical writings of Bourdieu, Giddens, and others. These concepts do not capture the two-way character of emotional utterances and acts, their unique capacity to alter what they ‘refer’ to or what they ‘represent’—a capacity which makes them neither ‘constative’ nor ‘performative’.

This critique is, at least partially, addressed by materiality studies of subjects and objects as mutually, simultaneously constitutive and indivisible (Meskell 2005; Miller 2005).

Definitions of nostalgia from all periods resonate strongly with ideas of materiality. This emotion is truly conceived as “embodied thought,” a corporeal practice recursively linking internal and external worlds (Lutz and White 1986; see also Tarlow 2000, Austin 2007). It had, in the 19th century and later, specific aesthetic qualities (Austin 2007:85). Tarlow (2000:717) explains that emotions are “felt” in both senses of the word. Nostalgia may be especially

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“felt,” especially visceral and material, because: (1) it has persistently been associated with somatic perceptions and senses of bodily displacement; and (2) it is multidimensional and can be activated through places and things.

As described above, nostalgia was initially understood as the manifestation of a “disordered imagination” (Rosen 1975:342). Healthy individuals we believed to have an orderly inner world, in which the mind was situated in the same place as the body and moved in concert, forward through time. Those with nostalgia suffered chronic disjunction, triggered by material circumstances. Physical and mental situations were at odds and the mind persistently dwelled in another place and time. The materiality of nostalgia usefully complicates certain phenomenological propositions, such as Merleau-Ponty’s notion that a perceiving subject is located at a particular place and time (Matthews 2006:47); or Thomas’s description of the transformation of “space” into “place” as a sequential ordering of experience into “narratives or pathways” (De Cunzo and Ernstein 2006:266; Thomas 1996:52–54, 86). To broach nostalgia, one must negotiate experiences not only of place and presence, but also of displacement and absence. A “fragmentation” of experience (specifically, experience of the past) is revealed as more than a “(post)modern condition” (Shanks 1995:21). Since at least the 17th century, nostalgia has been a “non-modernist notion [experience] of time where entities and events quite distant in a linear temporality are proximate through their simultaneous entanglement and percolation” (Witmore 2006:269).

Change and decay are inherent in our material worlds and ourselves, at least in the Western philosophical tradition (explored by Trigg 2006). Decay may be perceived as a materialization of time. Thus, all things are potentially constitutive of and susceptible to nostalgic discourse as emotional/sensual/practical. Materialities of nostalgia are considered through three “moments” at the Akin House, revealing situated processes of decay, accretion, transformation, and memory.

### **2007: Akin House Archaeology Project**

Two intertwined modes of nostalgic remembering manifested during and after the 2007 Akin House Archaeology Project: feelings generated through and about the property; and feelings generated about the dig itself.

#### **“Our Akin’ House”**

The Dartmouth Heritage Preservation Trust is in the process of stabilizing—but not renovating—the Akin House structure. It is becoming an

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arrested ruin, fragmentary, perpetually falling down. Eventually, it will be the centerpiece of an educational heritage center, an immersive lesson in construction techniques and changing local lifeways. The yard is unremarkable and the house is a modest shingled structure. The house was re-shingled and re-roofed in 2003 and is still barely weathered (Figures 1, 2). Architecturally, however, the small structure is out of place in its neighborhood of 19th-century settlement and post-World War II development; a bit out of its time.



**Figure 1.** Elihu Akin House, 2007 (photograph by the author)



**Figure 2.** Elihu Akin House, ca. 1905 (photograph by Henry B. Worth, courtesy of the New Bedford Whaling Museum)



**Figure 3.** Interior view, kitchen wall, Elihu Akin House, 2008 (photograph by the author)

The house interior is a different experience, a sensory assault. The dank smell of a dirt-floored cellar and rotting floorboards mingles with the sweetness of new shingles and sistered beams. The space is dim; windows are small; the massive stone chimney hulks; ceilings are low; whole portions of the floor are missing. Once inside, the bones of the house are exposed (Figure 3). Networks of defunct heating, lighting, and communication technologies hang severed and broken. One is enclosed by lathes and horsehair plaster, layers of peeling paint and wallpaper, ghost outlines of fallen cabinetry and absent furnishings.

Although the Akin House, as a site of archaeology and public heritage, is decidedly apart from daily life, the above description makes clear that it was obviously part of daily lives in the past. There is a stubbornness about these processes of persistence; “Occasionally the demolition or gradual decay of a house fails to annihilate the past the imbues it. Dormant memory reappears in horror fiction in the guise of an ineffable presence that is identifiable with a particular place... there is an uncertainty as to how a collection of memories can occupy the same place simultaneously”

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(Trigg 2006:62). In its decrepitude, the Akin House is “uncanny” (sensu Freud 2004[1919]); something familiar grown strange. Historical archaeology as a discipline has been defined by its “strangely familiar” subject matter (Tarlow 1999), making questions of nostalgia important at the Akin House and beyond.

To understand the field crew’s material engagement with the Akin House as also emotional, one should question: with what about it did they empathize (Tarlow 2000:724)? This house is commonly understood as in distress, forgotten (by others), and in many ways lost. Its physical qualities, described above, reinforce this impression. It is literally a sick home, “Our Akin’ [aching] House” (the t-shirt slogan chosen by local preservationists). Archaeology project participants probably had no reciprocal homesickness, but they were actively encouraged to “remember” the property. Students walked through the house and yard, read about the property’s history, considered the individuals who lived there, imagined how residents’ actions related to the material record we recovered (for some of their Dig Diary entries, see the project blog at <http://akinhouse.blogspot.com>). Excavators collected objects and recollected their uses and the people who used them. For five weeks, they were encouraged to feel a stewardship (ownership) of the house and responsibility to it. Students were, in effect, required to engage with a present past, remain fixed in place but cast their minds back in time; a sort of nostalgia (Figure 4).

A key element of modern clinical nostalgia, also inherent in colloquial understandings, is the longing for an intensely personal, ideal, and generative place. This longing was once presumed to reside in ideas of home and



**Figure 4.** Akin House Archaeology Project field crew, 2007 (photograph by the author)

homeland. It now incorporates idealized notions of a home-like place or time that one did not personally experience, but wishes one could. Drawn by its historical and physical condition, preservationists, archaeologists, volunteers, the local media, and casual visitors have collectively made the Akin House an icon. It is at once a specific home of a specific time and an archetypal home of many times. It is a generative site of knowledge.

Field crew have experienced the Akin site as a strangely familiar place, a place of many times, of dwelling, of change, and of loss: key materialities of the emotion of nostalgia. At this place, it is difficult to draw a line between our Akin House and those that came before.

### **Slideshows and Mirrors**

Photographs are a fascinating way to record space and time. When we are in them, they might strike us as captured, frozen pieces of experience, of and yet outside of ourselves. They are not the moments we live, but they do qualify our engagement with those past moments, helping us make chronology and meaning. There is much written and more emerging about the mediative and generative qualities of photographs, including their implications as archaeological archives (for example, Cochrane and Russell 2008; *Archaeography* 2008; Witmore 2007; Shanks 1997). After the dig, photographs played a role in creating nostalgia about the Akin House and its excavation.

A slideshow of project photographs was shown during the public Results Day at the end of the Akin House Archaeology Project's 2007 season. Students, volunteers, friends, and families appreciated the candid "crew shots" taken by the principal investigator. Reactions to shots taken by one student, an avid and talented photographer, were more intense. Viewers were riveted. The student's black and white photographs of the site, the excavations, the crew, were grainy, textured, and beautiful (Figure 5). They showed us, and the space in which we moved, in a new way.

These photographs changed the way dig participants remembered the site: othering; objectifying; and mystifying our brief time there. Images of peeling wallpaper, crumbling plaster, degenerating corner cupboards, all placed us within a highly aestheticized (even romanticized) historic space (Trigg 2006). The photos showed experiences perhaps more meaningful, in recollection through artificial fragments, that they were at the time. These images acted as Foucault's (Foucault and Miskowiec 1986[1967]:24) "mirror," presenting "a placeless place... an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface... a sort of shadow that gives my own visibility to myself... From the standpoint of the mirror I discover my absence from the place where I am."

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**Figure 5.** Akin House Archaeology Project crew shot, 2007 (photograph courtesy Chelsea Mackler)

When field crew viewed the slideshow, we had already established that the house was “our” space; our “Akin House” (as described above). Through the photographs, we rediscovered our absence from it. There was nostalgia: the intensified recollection of a real/imagined situation/time of belonging from which one has become dislocated. Thankfully for us, “moroseness, insomnia, anorexia, and asthenia” are no longer inherent in a nostalgic experience (Rosen 1975:343). We probably do not have an enlarged “organ of Adhesiveness,” nor, crucially, must we be “in thrall to an idea of the past” (Austin 2007:24, 51). Yet it was, at least partially, feelings of nostalgia that arrested so many of the former field crew in front of the projector, remembering.

### 1922: The “Old Homestead”

A notable film of the silent movie era was the 1922 *Down to the Sea in Ships*. The two most often mentioned aspects of the film are: that it incorporates documentary footage of a whaling voyage, including the hunt and butchery at sea; and that it was Clara Bow’s public debut. The film was shot on location in Dartmouth and neighboring New Bedford, Massachusetts, and at sea. *Down to the Sea in Ships* was a romantic, formulaic film, steeped in colloquial nostalgia. It was, in part, a product of the Colonial Revival; an inherently nostalgic discourse that celebrated the (supposed) purity and simplicity of America’s early days. The film is implicated in the period’s rigorously edited, Anglo-centric, chauvinistic forms of national consciousness. These techniques are part of romantic, nostalgic nationalisms in other contexts (see for example Hall and Bombardella 2007; Shanks 1995:22–25).

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An early sequence in the movie sets the stage: a young man returns to the home of his youth, with joy. He regards the house for a moment, appreciating its simple form and pleasant plantings from afar. Then he approaches and enters (Figure 6). While walking down the back steps to the rear yard, he catches sight of an object on the ground: a spoon (Figure 7). He picks it up, wanders into the backyard, and meets a neighbor girl, his childhood sweetheart. He shows her the spoon and it



**Figure 6.** Frame from *Down to the Sea in Ships* showing the main character returning “home” to the Akin House (Whaling Film Corp. 2002 [1922])



**Figure 7.** Frame from *Down to the Sea in Ships* showing the main character on the rear porch of the Akin House as he catches sight of a spoon on the ground (Whaling Film Corp. 2002 [1922])

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triggers in them a wave of nostalgic recollection. They imagine themselves in this place as happy children, playing. Viewers experience this recollection as a flashback; a relocation and shift in time, though not locale.

Material circumstances support this fabricated nostalgia, within which normative Victorian ideals of childhood, masculinity and femininity, and the rural are in evidence. The film presents an iconic man, an archetypical young hero. We find him in that equally iconic place, a small house actually labeled in the film as the “Old Homestead.” Although the “picturesque cottage” did not become the same overdetermined object of desire in the United States as it did in Britain (Austin 2007:106, 126–127), the ideal of the settler home or old homestead is a parallel phenomenon. The man and women are simultaneously actors, the house simultaneously a set, all icons in their own ways.

The part of the “Old Homestead” was played by the Akin House. It was chosen for a reason, for its physical qualities and affordances. A pamphlet handed out at the film’s New Bedford premier explains that:

*The Old Homestead*—The house is more than two hundred years old, and the sway in the roof has been there for a century. During production an elderly lady told Mr. Clifton [the director] of having played in that house when she was seven years old and in turn of hearing her grandmother tell of using that same house for a play-ground at the age of seven (World Premier “Down To The Sea In Ships” 1922).

In this gloss, the physical qualities of the house—its roof sag (a signature feature to this day), the palpable age of the place—are salient. People experienced the house and thought of their childhoods, or other people’s childhoods, even of fictional characters’ childhoods. The Akin House struck the movie’s director as essentially of the past, evocative, with transportive qualities (transportive in all senses, to relocate and to move to strong emotion or enrapture). It defined the past for moviegoers.

*Down to the Sea in Ships* reveals material, performative, and phenomenological qualities of nostalgia (see Austin 2007:21–22). In the scenes described, the hero was not obviously oppressed, but he was moved by the house and by a “small external object,” as Hofer first noted among nostalgics in the 17th century (quoted in Austin 2007:85). For contemporary viewers, the nostalgic possibilities afforded by the peculiar materiality of the Akin House, as it appears in this film, are almost endlessly compounded. The place invites an imagining of the early 1800s, when the film is set; or of the 1920s, when the film was created; of one’s own childhood and experiences of homecoming; etc. For those with sufficient knowledge of the film, the same possibilities exist when today they visit the Akin House, a.k.a. the “Old Homestead.”

## 1778: Getting Home

In late 18th-century medical literature, the British practice of impressment was cited as especially “repugnant” and “inhuman,” causing the death of “many thousands” who suffered acute nostalgia (Rosen 1975:345). “Cramped quarters, poor scanty food, indescribable sanitary conditions... severe and rigid discipline were all the impressed men could expect. Thus, it is not surprising to find men in such circumstances falling into a profound despair... and suffering... all the other symptoms of nostalgia” (Rosen 1975:346).

In June of 1776, Elihu Akin’s son Jonathan was captured by the British on a ship sailing from New Bedford. Jonathan escaped from prison and made his way to France, where he was imprisoned again. He wrote to Benjamin Franklin, then serving as the United States of America’s ambassador to France (The American Commissioners 1779):

Jonathan Akin to Benjamin Franklin, 10 November 1778. I make Bold to Rite these Lines to Let you know my Condition about Eighteen months ago I was taken in a Ship from Bedford in Dartmouth Bound to Bourdaux By an English frigit and Carred into porchmouth where I was put in prison... I made my Escape to London... I Shiped my Self mate of a marchnt Ship to go to the Braziels and on the Twentieth of October We was taken By a french Ship... I told the gentlemen of this place how that *I Belonged to amaricar and I was obliiged to Be in the English Servis and Now thank god I am Clear of it and I Beg the Liberty of going home* I have Nothing to Show that *I Belong to amaricar...* I Dare Say you know Benjamin Akin one of the Congress for Boston I am Nephew to him Elihu Akin Living in Dartmouth is my Father—I Beg the favour of you to *Let them know here that I Belong to Amaricar So that I may git home...* I Beg that you would assist me for I am in a bad Condition (emphasis added).

Both Benjamin Franklin and John Adams worked to secure Jonathan’s release, which was obtained in 1779 (The American Commissioners 1779).

Here we find not just the language, but the physical and political circumstances comprising early modern nostalgia: a low “condition”; disorder; coercion; confinement; threatened identity; and dislocation from homeland. The letter resonates with the present Akin House because that place was a part of the “home” from which Jonathan was bodily removed and to which he longed to return.

If Jonathan had a particular house in mind when writing his letter, it was probably not our Akin House. He was first imprisoned in about June of 1776; his family did not move to the Akin House until November of 1778, after the British navy raided Padanaram Village. The British wrought legendary destruction on Padanaram’s homes, wharves, ships, and supplies

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(Pease 1918:17–27). Several Akin family members lived in the village at the time. While James Akin’s house (still standing at 359 Elm Street) was only set on fire, his brother Elihu’s house was destroyed (Souza et al. 1983; Pease 1918:22–26). Elihu, financially devastated, then moved his family to the small property we now know as “the Akin House.” It was this “home” to which Jonathan returned in 1779.

Jonathan must have known the present Akin House, which had long been part of the family’s land holdings; and, as he makes clear, the home to which he was trying to get was not just a house. It was America, Dartmouth, the place of his family’s dwelling and his belonging. Bound with ideas of house and home, here, are ideals of homeland. Calling America one’s country was, at that time and in those fraught circumstances, a strong political declaration. Jonathan Akin’s nostalgic suffering was a mechanism supporting emergent, collective identities of homeland and country, values of freedom and belonging. Nostalgia encompasses multiple scales of reference, many types of referents. Our Akin House was not exactly Jonathan’s dwelling, but it was an integral part of his family’s place, his homeland. It was the locus/ideal from which he was dislocated and to which he longed to return, and a new national ideal was at stake in that homecoming. The extant Akin house demands that we recollect Jonathan’s story and how he conceived it.

## Uses of Nostalgia

### Performative Remembering

Archaeologists are used to thinking of nostalgia as an impediment to demystifying the past and attendant historical narratives. They are not the only ones. Austin (2007:197) finds that nostalgia, as a subject of inquiry, “appears to operate on the margins of all the disciplines it touches, violating the standards of each.” Stewart (2007:ix) begins her critical meditation on longing by labeling nostalgia a “social disease.” Smith (2006:38, 41) cites those who see nostalgia as “intrinsically conservative... synonymous with a plea for social continuity” and “heritage as a symptom of a backward looking country, in which a nostalgic yearning for better times had stifled cultural innovation and development, and was itself an expression... of overall cultural decline.” They are justifiably suspicious. In the modern period, nostalgia, at heritage sites and elsewhere, became a “normative and aesthetic form of remembering” that encompasses fabrication, inauthenticity, and false memory (Austin 2007:24–25, 86, 197; Smith 2006:38). Wistfulness for times gone by, as much as obviously false or distorted histories, can flatten out interpretation and sublimate complexities, troubles, or whole peoples.

And yet, there is no doubt that some of the public's—and archaeologists'—fascination with the past stems from a nostalgic impulse (see for example Meredith 1990; Smith 2006; Tarlow 1999). In the historical archaeology of domestic sites, we arguably pursue a *nostos* and are embroiled in an *algos* of inevitable loss, destruction, and decay. If the present and past are *always* displaced and dislocated with respect to each other (Tarlow 2000:731); if the archaeological record is always fragmentary; if “archaeological time is the entanglement, the intermingling, the *chiasm* of pasts and presents” (Witmore 2006:279); if “material culture shoulders the larger responsibility of our personal and collective memory” because it actively produces memory (Buchli and Lucas 2001:80); if archaeology is a performative practice of remembering (Austin 2007:85); are archaeologists not already, in some sense, perpetually nostalgic?

Nostalgia has multiple potentials: to be poetic and political; constructive and destructive; of the past, present, and the future (Stewart 2007; Trigg 2006; Boym 2001). There are dangers to nostalgia, and it may not be an appropriate interpretive technique in all contexts. Where relevant, however, nostalgia could be utilized in mindful narratives that engage the present past and overcome the public's sense of detachment from it (reported by Smith 2008). It might be deployed to combat the indifference of certain publics towards the recent, supposedly well-documented past (reported by Tarlow 1999; see also Trigg 2006:57–63). As in the Akin House case study, it might assist archaeologists in developing a historical, contextual understanding of certain places and things.

A “familiar aesthetic of the picturesque, with its emphasis on sensation and tactile qualities” has been part of American experiences of the past, specifically of old homes, since the 19th century and the advent of Romanticism (Austin 2007:126; on Romanticism see for example Honour 1979). The Akin House, dilapidated as it now is, presents no genteel dereliction to further utopist ideals of an picturesque time gone by (Austin 2007:136–137; Shanks 1992:114, 132). Yet, the Akin House Archaeology Project and Dartmouth Heritage Preservation Trust *are* benefiting from nostalgia by successfully using the house as “picturesque cottages” have been used before, and as the house itself was used in the 1922 film: “as an icon of public memory and an arena of performative remembering” (Austin 2007:126). Future site interpretation might go further, with open ended tour narratives and signage that invite visitors to contemplate their past experiences of viewing the Akin House, their childhoods in Dartmouth or elsewhere, or experiences of earlier house occupants.

The idea of nostalgia is an important part of public archaeologies. It may motivate those we serve, it can drive preservation, and it has the potential perpetually to renew the perceived relevance of places like the Akin House. Exposing the mechanisms of nostalgia (in present and past

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contexts) might also afford a space to denaturalize established histories, such as the nationalist legacies of the Revolutionary or Colonial Revival periods, or even the authoritative unity of archaeological narrative. Nostalgia has implications for what Shackel (2008) has recently called “memory studies in archaeology.” Nostalgia can help us to understand “why some groups tend to remember a particular past, while others forget or ignore a past,” as well as the material processes of collective and individual memory-making (Shackel 2008:10).

These are some uses of nostalgia. The proposal to deploy nostalgia in heritage practice recalls Shanks’ (1995) invitation to a “romantic” (critical, embodied, non-objectivist) archaeology. The indefinite quality of nostalgia is, in part, its strength. But nostalgia—like romanticism or phenomenology itself—always threatens to lose “particularity, otherness and difference” in open-ended, essentializing interpretations (Shanks 1995:22). In an effort to reinvest a heritage site with relevance, one risks creating “‘imagined’ nostalgia, nostalgia for things that never were” (Appadurai 1996:77). There are other dangers, including “the eclipse of ‘rational’ knowledge by sentiment, sensation and melodrama” (Shanks 1995:22).

There are also solutions. Shanks (1992, 1995; see also Bazelmans et al. 1994) suggests the archaeological production of knowledge, as it creates authenticity, is itself a counterbalance. Methods of historical ethnography, which synthesize multiple perspectives of/on the past from a range of media, are another. Materiality studies can attend to particular, contextualized entanglements of things and people. Centers and professionals who represent the past must always strive to understand their agendas and assumptions (see for example Little and Shackel 2007; Edgeworth 2006; Russell 2006). Projects should consider nostalgia and heritage as allied processes of remembrance. The challenge is to find a path forward in which mentalité and emotion are accepted parts of a critical, multi-mediated archaeology.

### Nostalgic Heterotopias

In the archive of nostalgic practice presented here, the Akin House appears in text, film, mind, and material as a “heterotopia”—an “other space,” in the Foucauldian sense. It is a familiar/unfamiliar place “in which we live, which draws us out of ourselves, in which the erosion of our lives, our time and our history occurs, [a] space that claws and gnaws at us” (Foucault and Miskowiec 1986[1967]:23). Heritage sites are susceptible to being heterotopias not only of crisis, deviation, and a retarding nostalgia (Smith 2006, 38), but also of a mindful and potentially *constructive* nostalgia. They are simultaneously mythic and real, particular and iconic, showing us where and, crucially, when we are and are not. They are “capable of juxta-

posing in a single real place several spaces, several sites,” several times (Foucault and Miskowiec 1986[1967]:25).

### **Acknowledgments**

I was privileged to participate in the 2008 World Archaeological Congress Session *Experience, Modes of Engagement, Archaeology*, and I give a heartfelt thanks to session organizers Krysta Ryzewski, Matt Ratto, and Michelle Charest. I was inspired and motivated by the assembly; presenters and audience members, thank you! Extra gratitude goes to Dr. Ryzewski for shepherding the transformation of that paper into this article. I also thank two anonymous reviews for their thoughtful feedback on the draft of this article. I am particularly glad of the push for an overt acknowledgment of phenomenology. The 2007 Akin House Archaeology Project was supported by the Dartmouth Heritage Preservation Trust, site stewards, as well as the Town of Dartmouth, property owners. The Greene Farm Archaeology Project donated equipment for our 2007 field season. The University of Massachusetts Dartmouth has facilitated Akin House archaeology through a Chancellor’s Public Service grant. The 2007 field crew—including students in the course Soc/Ant 180 and a cadre of volunteers—were wonderful, generous, and invested. I am fortunate that the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University, supported my WAC attendance and allows me yearly archaeological leaves. Many people have made this paper possible, and any errors of fact or interpretation are my own.

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