

Caitlin Clements

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The Trials, and Triumphs, of the Celebrity Birthplace Museum: A Case Study

Mere weeks before Christmas 2010, the Jimmy Stewart Museum, an institution located in the heart of the actor's hometown of Indiana, Pennsylvania, had a near-ubiquitous in all of the large national news outlets. While the age-old saying may assert that "no press is bad press," this particular press did not have good news to share on the subject of the Museum. The articles were differentiated by their creative titles, which ranged from "Jimmy Stewart Museum Needs a George Bailey Miracle," to "Where's Clarence When You Need Him?" but they all essentially told the same story. In recent years, the museum had been facing a not-so-wonderful life, and its fate was now highly uncertain due to financial woes and ever-decreasing number of annual visitors.¹ Checking in two years later, the museum is still operating, but its survival is far from guaranteed. Are the Jimmy Stewart Museum's difficulties unique to its own location or subject matter? Or is this a plight that is shared by similar celebrity birthplaces across the country?

Nestled in various corners of rural America sits a trio of tiny towns which gave birth to some of Hollywood's biggest stars. Though these towns vary in many respects, they all share the commonality that they have forged their identities around their efforts at paying homage to their hometown Hollywood heroes. In addition to Indiana, Pennsylvania's Jimmy Stewart Museum, there are similar institutions honoring two additional stars from Hollywood's classic canon in Winterset, Iowa and Fairmount, Indiana, the hometowns of James Dean and John Wayne

¹Steve Delahoyde, "Where's Clarence When You Need Him?" *MediaBistro* 22 Dec. 2010, <http://www.mediabistro.com/unbeige/wheres-clarence-when-you-need-him-jimmy-stewart-museum-faces-tough-times_b10725>.

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respectively. These museums were selected for investigation because of the similarity of their subject matter in comparison with Jimmy Stewart, given that they all performed in Hollywood within the same general era, and could theoretically hold similar appeal to today's prospective visitors.

Investigations into these three institutions were conducted primarily through interviews with their respective directors. These individuals were contacted via email, and each of them graciously agreed to respond to a prepared set of questions. The questions provided were generally similar for each museum, with a few slight variations as applicable. The backgrounds of the three men behind the museums does a great deal to shed some light on the history of each museum.

Out of the three institutions in question, the John Wayne Birthplace Museum has the longest history, having been founded in 1984 in the town where Wayne, born Marion Morrison, lived until the age of 3. The site is unique in that it is actually located in the home where Wayne was born. The current director, Brian Downes, has only been with the museum for four years, but his position represents the culmination of a lifelong admiration of Wayne. Downes previously worked at the Chicago Tribune for 35 years. His time spent as a reporter afforded him the chance to meet and interview John Wayne on a number of occasions. These experiences were the catalyst which would cause Downes to move from Chicago to Winterset to make a career out of honoring his longtime hero.

The James Dean Gallery was founded a few years after the John Wayne Birthplace, and it similarly represents a passion project for its founder, who remains the Gallery's current director to this day. While it is situated in Dean's hometown, this Gallery is not physically located within a structure that is directly related to Dean or his family. Instead, this Gallery is housed in

a historic Victorian home which also serves as home to its founder, David Loehr. Loehr had never given James Dean much thought until the day when a friend insisted he read a new biography called *James Dean: The Mutant King*. Loehr eagerly devoured the book, and was instantly intrigued by Dean and the story of his tumultuous life.

Loehr grew up in Massachusetts, then attended Parsons in New York City. While living in New York, Loehr continued his enquiry into James Dean's life, and also began collecting memorabilia pertaining to the celebrated actor. He even demonstrated the early inclination to make a career out of Dean's life story, long before he lived and worked in the actor's hometown. Beginning in 1982, Loehr began a small operation that offered walking tours around Dean's favorite New York City hangouts. By 1988, Loehr felt the need to get even closer to the actor's roots, an inclination which led him to Fairmount, where he has now operated the James Dean Gallery, his self-proclaimed "passion project," for over 23 years.

Unlike the two aforementioned individuals, who fell into their museum careers based on a prior interest in the specific subject matter, the current director of the Jimmy Stewart Museum came to his position under the exact opposite circumstances. Timothy Harley never had a particular affinity for Stewart. He came to his current career based on an educational background in art history, a series of jobs at house museums in the state of New York, and an eventual desire to move back to his home state of Pennsylvania however possible. Thus, while Harley is certainly well-versed in the history of the museum's history, he has only been employed there for the past seven years, and was not a part of its initial founding.

The Jimmy Stewart Museum is the newest institution of the trio being studied, and it was founded in 1995, just two years before Stewart's death in 1997. This makes the museum unique in that it was founded while its subject was still living, and Stewart's insight and approval was

sought when creating the initial plan. Stewart, ever humble, was initially uneasy about the idea of an entire museum in his honor. The tipping point that convinced him was the knowledge of his hometown's financial difficulties, and the fact that the downtown area had been failing since the late 1980's. When faced with the reality that such a museum could potentially enhance tourism, thus boosting the town's economy, Stewart finally consented. He was adamant, though, that it "couldn't be a Taj Mahal" said museum director Tim Harley. Stewart also stated that the museum would need to make use of an "existing structure" in Indiana, thus resulting in the museum's ultimate location in the upper level of the town's public library. Even after Stewart's passing, his children have continued to support the museum with gifts of memorabilia, as well as with an annual financial contribution.

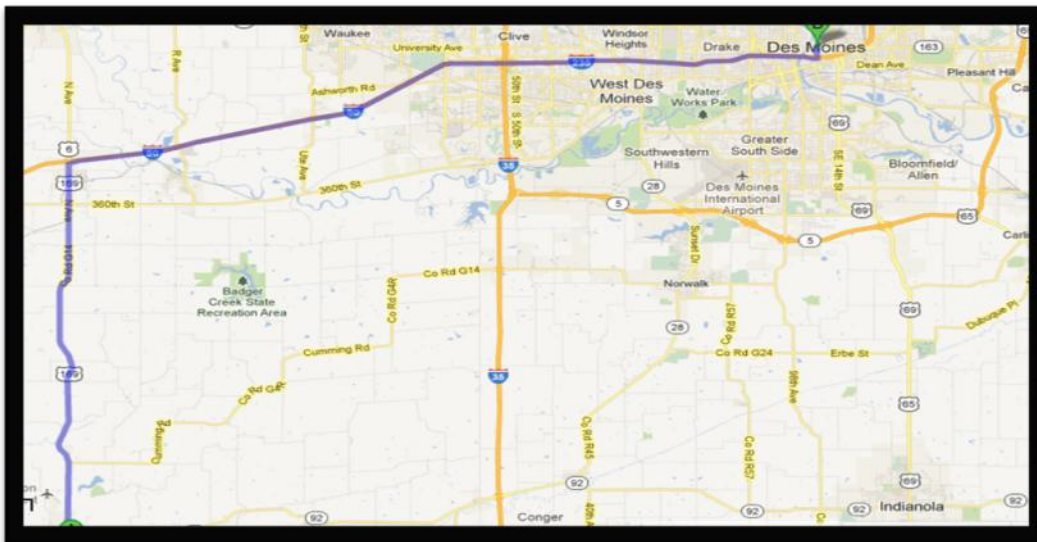
Even though the other two institutions did not receive direct input or approval from the subjects they pay homage to, these museums still receive support from surviving family members. The John Wayne Birthplace Museum continues to include one of Wayne's daughters as a board member, and the actor's family even paid for a large John Wayne statue to be erected in front of the birthplace. This statue, according to museum director Brian Downes, regularly attracts after-hours visitors who wish to take photographs, a process which the museum has facilitated by illuminating the statue 24 hours a day. As for the James Dean Gallery, founder David Loehr confirmed that he continues to have "good relations" with Dean's family.

Location, Location, Location

The John Wayne Birthplace Museum is greatly benefitted by its location, which is at the crossroads of two major interstates, and only a 45 minute drive from Iowa's capital city of Des Moines. "Our location could not possibly be better," wrote Brian Downes, during an interview conducted via email. "We are located right in the middle of the American heartland, just 15

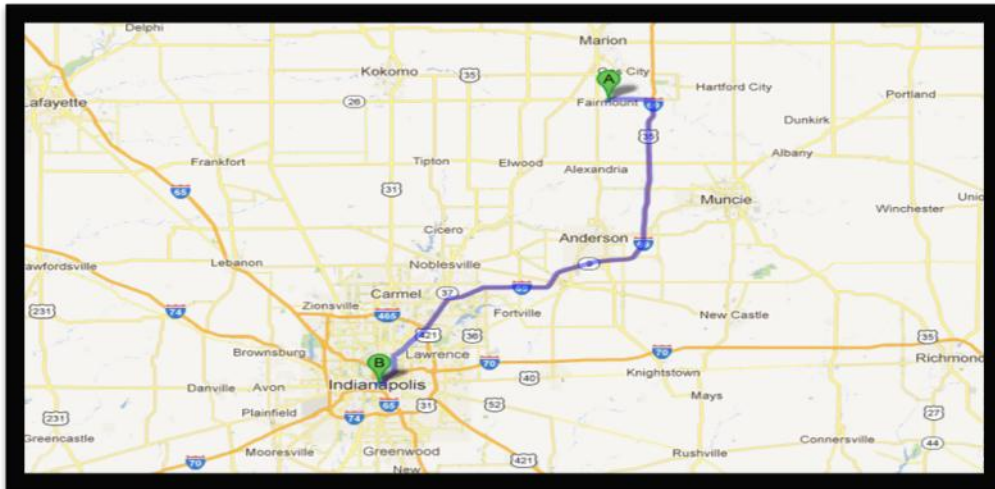
miles from the intersection of two major highways, Interstates 35 and 80. A family cannot drive from New York to San Francisco or from south Texas to Canada without passing within 20 minutes of the John Wayne Birthplace.” Thus, visitors who make the spontaneous decision to stop and visit the Birthplace during road trips account for a significant portion of the site’s annual visitors.

1Map illustrating the distance between the John Wayne Birthplace and Des Moines, Iowa.



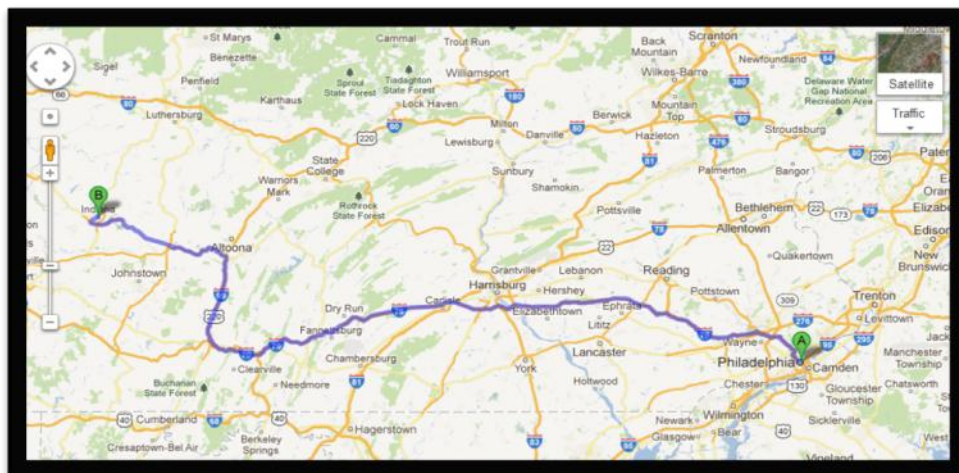
The James Dean Gallery is similarly located in relation to its state capital, and it is less than an hour and a half drive from Indianapolis to the Gallery. Loehr indicated that the museum receives a good deal of visitors, but that they primarily come specifically to see the town of Fairmount, and the various James Dean-related sites that it offers, rather than happening upon it spontaneously. Still, the fans are enthusiastic enough, and the drive is easy enough, that, in Loehr’s mind, visitors have never been in short supply.

2Map illustrating the distance between the James Dean Gallery and Indianapolis, IN.



As for the Jimmy Stewart Museum, it is located in the actor's hometown of Indiana, PA, mere blocks away from the home where he lived from the time of his birth in 1908 until departing for Princeton in 1929. The nearest major city is Philadelphia, which is 280 miles, nearly a five hour drive by car, from the museum. Tim Harley laments the fact that the museum is "nowhere near an interstate" highway, thus guaranteeing that his institution will never enjoy the same sort of "spontaneous" patronage that the John Wayne Birthplace experiences on a regular basis.

3Map illustrating the distance between the Jimmy Stewart Museum and Philadelphia, PA.



When asked whether they thought their institutions would be better-served in a more highly populated city, or one which is more readily associated with entertainment history, such as New York or Los Angeles, all three men responded that there is nowhere they would rather have these museums be located than in the birthplaces of these respective stars. “Fairmount and The Gallery are a destination for travelers,” said David Foehr, and “the James Dean Gallery was one of the first celebrity museums.” He elaborated by mentioning how the town benefits from having a variety of additional sites which directly pertain to the life of James Dean, meaning that the area can provide a full day’s worth of sightseeing for Dean enthusiasts, particularly since the town is also the actor’s final resting place. “Visitors enjoy seeing the Hometown and gravesite,” he said. Foehr did concede that “Hollywood Blvd. would be a higher traffic location, but operating expenses would be prohibitive.”

Tim Harley had similar comments regarding the Jimmy Stewart Museum’s unique relationship to the town in which it resides. “We’re so specific, a thing all our own,” he said, while going on to insist that the Museum is not something well-suited to “bigger cities.” Unlike James Dean, Jimmy Stewart’s final resting place is not located within his hometown, but rather in Los Angeles. Visitors to the town of Indiana might not be able to pay their final respects to the late actor, but they are able to see other crucial sites pertaining to his life. Stewart’s family home still stands, and remains a private residence in the town. Additionally, visitors can see the building which was the longtime home of Stewart’s father’s hardware store, as well as a life-size stature of Stewart which sits in the town square. The proximity of these sites from Stewart’s youth helps to add greater meaning to the Museum’s exhibits, which feature extensive information and artifacts pertaining to Stewart’s childhood years spent in the town.

The old saying about the benefits of being a big fish in a small pond seems applicable in the case of these museums. Even though larger cities attract significantly more visitors annually, and are more

readily associated with entertainment history, it could also be easier for a certain Hollywood personas to become lost in the shuffle of a bigger city’s institutions which are tasked with providing a more comprehensive entertainment history. A good example of this effect can be seen with the Museum of the Moving Image, where the legacies of personas like Stewart, Dean, and Wayne are reduced to 8x10” portraits on a wall of stars, small cogs in the overall Hollywood machine. While larger institutions of film and Hollywood history would most likely value props and memorabilia pertaining to these three actors’ most notable films, it is not likely that any of them would have the space or desire to present large amounts of background on the lives of these men before their film careers began.

Visitors

The table below provides a comparison of the visitors received by each institution annually in relation to their admission price.

Museum:	John Wayne Birthplace	James Dean Gallery	Jimmy Stewart Museum
# of Annual Visitors	30,000-35,000	10,000	6,500
Adult Price	\$7.00	FREE	\$7.00
Child Price	\$3.00	FREE	\$5.00
Senior Price	\$6.00	FREE	\$6.00
Group Rate	\$5.00	FREE	N/A

When asked to elaborate on the demographic of their visitors, each director’s response was fairly similar. For the John Wayne Birthplace and James Dean Gallery the ratio of locals who visit compared to non-locals is extremely small, in the vicinity of “99:1.” “Like other hometown attractions throughout the country, there are a good number of locals who have never visited at all,” said Brain Downes, regarding the Wayne Bithplace. The Jimmy Stewart Museum attracts a slightly higher percentage of local visitors, in the realm of “25%” according to Harley.

This figure is most likely impacted by the Museum's more remote location. All three Museum Directors also indicated that the number of group tours, typically a good source of revenue, has been steadily declining since the 1990's. When tour groups do come, they are primarily comprised of senior citizens rather than school groups, a reality that does little to help foster interest in these actors in a new generation of museum-goers. The John Wayne Birthplace is the one institution that seems to be trying to change that reality. The museum has plans in the works to build a large new education facility adjacent to the home itself. This development, which will be discussed in greater detail later on, would seemingly make the museum much more attractive to schools as a field trip destination.

Out of the admission figures provided, the John Wayne Birthplace is the only institution which could conceivably account for a substantial portion of its operating expenses through ticket sales. With these types of numbers, it is easy to see why Downes would be insistent that they could not possibly have a better location for a museum dedicated to Wayne, even if the actor only called Winterset home for a mere three years. As for the Jimmy Stewart Museum, and especially the James Dean Gallery, which charges no admission at all, there are clearly other sources of funding required. Out of the three museums, the Jimmy Stewart Museum is the only one that attempts to increase revenue by offering a membership program. These memberships range in price from \$25-\$50, and provide unlimited free admission, special event invitations, and a 10% discount in the museum store. Harley conceded that the number of memberships sold each year is "quite small," but that they are usually sold to visitors who come from "a distance." This process is facilitated by an online purchasing system which allows visitors to decide to become members at the moment of planning their visit, rather than having to wait to do so when

they arrive. These out-of-town members are an asset, albeit a small one, since they generally pay the membership fee for a year's worth of privileges, but only visit once.

It also proves interesting to compare the operating hours of the three institutions in question:

Museum	John Wayne Birthplace	James Dean Gallery	Jimmy Stewart Museum
Operating Hours	10am-4:30pm daily	9am-6pm daily	10am-4pm Mon-Sat 12pm-4pm Sun
Holiday Closings	New Year's Day, Easter, Thanksgiving, Christmas	New Year's Day, Easter, Thanksgiving, Christmas	New Year's Day, Easter, July 4th, Labor Day, Thanksgiving, Christmas
Seasonal Closings	Closed for the month of January	None	None
Peak Season	May-Oct	June-Sept	March-Nov

As depicted in the table above, the hours for the John Wayne Birthplace and Jimmy Stewart Museum are fairly comparable. During the Wayne Birthplace's weekly operating hours, there are seven part-time employees who staff the museum in its daily operations. The Jimmy Stewart Museum, on the other hand, is only staffed by volunteers, who are primarily local senior citizens or students from the nearby university looking to fulfill community service requirements. Thus, this museum's hours are dictated more by the extent to which volunteers are available than by staffing expenses, since the only other person receiving a salary other than the museum's director is the part-time bookkeeper who works two days per week. This reliance on volunteer staffing might also explain why the museum is closed on summer holidays like July 4th and Labor Day, days which might otherwise draw crowds to come pay homage to a patriotic American persona such as Stewart.

The James Dean Gallery is the one anomaly in this group of institutions, in that it keeps surprisingly long hours for a small-town institution, and particularly for one which does not charge admission. This is explained by the Gallery's relatively low-overhead setup, and the fact that the Gallery's operations are solely manned as a "passion project" by its founder David Loehr, who is sometimes assisted by a partner who is, in Loehr's own words, "meagerly paid."

It was also surprising to learn that, out of these three museums, only one of them, the John Wayne Birthplace, closes seasonally for any period of time. Brian Downes indicated that the museum shuts down for the month of January after the rush of holiday travels has ended, but this is only because of the heavy snow in the area which makes travel by car difficult, and thus greatly decreases the potential for visitor who spontaneously pay the museum a visit as a result of seeing roadside signs.

The Museum Experience

Each of these three museums maintains a unique assortment of artifacts which pertain both to their respective namesake's personal life and their film career. This dual focus on both their public and private personas helps support why these museums are best located within the hometowns of these actors, rather than trying to fold their mission into a larger entertainment-centric institution. The institutions' respective methods of obtaining artifacts are rather varied, though, and say a great deal about the overall status and functioning of each museum.

Visitors to the John Wayne Birthplace are able to explore the actor's first home, complete with period furnishings which help recreate the space as it would have looked in 1907, the year of Wayne's birth. The museum also boasts a good deal of artifacts pertaining to Wayne's personal life, and his years spent living in Southern California, including his last car, as well as a detailed scale-model of his personal yacht. Visitors can also see items related to the actor's film

career, including the iconic eye patch that he wore as Rooster Cogburn in *True Grit*, as well as several key sets from Wayne's last film, *The Shootist*. According to Downes, the museum has no trouble obtaining materials to exhibit. "We do not pursue artifacts," he said emphatically, "artifacts come to us." The Birthplace has had to spend no money whatsoever on obtaining artifacts, and the items put on display are "private donations exclusively." Despite the extreme popularity of Wayne and his films, the Birthplace still tends to get first pick of items pertaining to the actor's life, even over larger film-centric institutions. Other institutions do frequently seek to borrow items held by the John Wayne Birthplace, though, and Downes grants these requests on a case-by-case basis.

The James Dean Gallery primarily presents the actor's life story and enduring legacy from a fan's perspective. This is appropriate since the Gallery is essentially made up of what founder David Foehr calls the "world's largest" collection of James Dean memorabilia. Thus, while the gallery does boast a few personal items owned by Dean, most of the exhibition space displays the items that Foehr has amassed over the years. When asked about the nature of the collection, Foehr concurred that it consists of nearly all "private purchases with very few donations."

The collection includes magazines, original movie posters, books, novelty items, and original artwork, all of which depict James Dean. In this respect, the gallery is more of a representation of the nature of Dean's fandom, rather than a complete account of his life and career.² This seems fitting given that Dean's life and career were both cut short due to his untimely death in a car accident, and he is a figure whose fame increased exponentially in death. It is also highly likely that, out of the three actors studied in this investigation, Dean's visage has

² For a more chronological presentation of Dean's life, fans would need to visit the Fairmount Historical Society, a local institution which also possesses a fair number of items which once belonged to Dean, but which failed to respond to requests for information for this project.

been the most-duplicated over time. This would explain the Gallery's continued success, since Dean in particular has amassed more and more fans within younger generations over time thanks to his "forever young" persona.

As for the Jimmy Stewart Museum, it capitalizes on its location in that its collection focuses a great deal on the Stewart Family's history in the town of Indiana, Pennsylvania, and Stewart's boyhood spent there. Many of the exhibits make reference to surviving buildings in the town that have connections to Stewart and his family. The museum even owns the "V for Victory" which Stewart's father constructed out of lumber and light bulbs when WWII ended and his son was due to come home from combat. The museum also holds a large collection of posters and still photographs from Stewart's body of work, as well as several key props from films like *Winchester 73* and *The Flight of the Phoenix*.

Arguably the most unusual item found in the museum is the booth from Chasen's, the now-closed Hollywood eatery where Stewart and his family would habitually dine twice a week. The fact that this piece in particular ended up at the Jimmy Stewart Museum, rather than in one of the Los Angeles-based museums dedicated to Hollywood history, is quite a coup. When asked about how the museum goes about acquiring artifacts, Tim Harley indicated that all "2D" items such as posters and photos are purchased at his discretion, whereas all "3D" items like props and personal belongings were donations directly from the Stewart Family.

None of the museums in question have the staff or facilities to make efforts at maintaining any sort of film archive or to possess original elements of the work of their respective namesakes. Of the three institutions, only the Jimmy Stewart Museum hosts a regular screening series thanks to the presence of their on-site theater. These screenings are all of work starring Stewart, or else of biographies which have been produced about his life. These

screenings are often curated into thematic series, and are typically free with paid museum admission. The museum also traditionally screens *It's a Wonderful Life* around the holidays. These screenings all have to be coordinated through licensing agreements with Swank Motion Picture Company.

Keeping Afloat

As previously indicated through these museums' annual visitor counts, they are each in need of additional funding sources apart from ticket sales throughout the year, although some more than others. Of course, they each have their own museum store in which they sell their respective actor's films on DVD (and, in the case of the Jimmy Stewart Museum, on VHS, too) as well as t-shirts and other custom-made souvenirs. Each museum's director indicated that in-person sales at the museum shops are steady during peak tourism season, but that online sales have declined significantly in the past two to five years. The John Wayne birthplace sells everything from beef jerky to playing cards depicting its namesake, while David Foehr's gallery primarily sells t-shirts and postcards featuring original James Dean-related artwork. Only the Jimmy Stewart Museum has an item unique enough to still even spark a steady flow of online sales, though, and that item is their custom coffee mug on which Harvey the rabbit (as featured in the Stewart film of the same name) appears and disappears with the presence of hot or cold liquid. None of these museums stores earn enough to make a significant impact on revenue, though, so these institutions must seek even further options for supplementing their funding.

One such option is to host special events to draw in larger crowds, or else to participate in pre-existing events hosted by the city or neighboring institutions. All three museums host celebrations in honor of significant dates in the lives of their respective subjects. The John Wayne Birthplace's celebration is by far the most elaborate, consisting of a two-day themed

event which draws guests from 35-40 of the United States, as well as several foreign countries, annually. According to Downes, this celebration accounts for the museum's "largest source of annual funding" and draws "massive media attention." This year's event is themed after the John Wayne film *The Quiet Man*, and will feature live Celtic music, Irish food, a screening of the classic film, as well as Irish dance and theatrical performances over the course of the weekend.

The Jimmy Stewart Museum also hosts an annual birthday celebration on May 9, which consists of a craft fair, a special film screening, and a book signing. The Museum's special event efforts are less centralized than those of the John Wayne Birthplace, though, in that it dabbles in a handful of other annual events as well. One month after the birthday event, the museum partakes in the town's outdoor summer festival affiliated with the Jimmy Stewart Airport. They also play a role in the Tourism Bureau's "Light up the Night" event around the holidays, and they host two annual awards ceremonies, "The Harvey Awards" and the "George Bailey Award" in order to honor good citizenship at a national and local level. While this plethora of events initially comes across as impressive, it might also be hindering the Museum's efforts at attracting tourism as opposed to if they had one centralized time for out-of-town visitors to plan to visit, much like what the Wayne Birthplace does. Admittedly, the Museum's involvements are tied to the City of Indiana and the Tourism Bureau, from whom they continue to receive access to their exhibition space, as well as some annual funding.

When it comes to celebrating James Dean, events are a bit more macabre. The James Dean Gallery plays a supporting role in the town's annual festival in commemoration of Dean's death in the month of September. This event draws a great deal of visitors to town for the weekend, but is primarily hosted by the Fairmount Historical Society. Many visitors get consumed with the other special events going on and fail to even visit the Gallery at all. Because

of this division of attention, Foehr decided to stake out his own weekend as a time to bring “diehard” fans specifically to his Gallery. This “Fans Weekend” takes place in July each year, and draws several hundred fans who participate in special ticketed events which help to generate additional revenue for the Gallery.

These institutions are also frequently rented out for private events. The James Dean Gallery hosts a number of private catered parties each year, and also hosts its own special ticketed dinners for Dean’s most-devoted fans, or “Deaners” as David Foehr calls them. These types of events serve as the primary source of income for the Gallery, along with donations from interested individuals. The Jimmy Stewart Museum has a similar reliance on special events for additional income, and has played host to a number of weddings, rehearsal dinners, and graduation celebrations, as well as corporate and government functions, over the past few years. This is something that director Tim Harley “very much hope[s] will continue to grow” in the coming years in order to help keep the museum afloat.

As for the John Wayne Birthplace, the site also plays host to a number of private events, but these are never used as a source of revenue, only as an expression of goodwill towards the community. These types of events are varied, and have included summer camp programs and company picnics for businesses like the local bank. No matter the cause, Downes was quick to point out that they “never charge” for the use of the space. This sort of charitable gesture is a great way to foster a greater sense of awareness and appreciation in the town, and will potentially help to further expand the local community’s participation in the programs that the museum offers. This is unfortunately not a luxury available to all institutions, though, as sites like the Jimmy Stewart Museum rely on revenue from private events like these simply to remain in

business, as much as they might like to similarly foster a greater sense of goodwill and interest amongst the locals, particularly the younger generations.

Meanwhile, the John Wayne Birthplace is just now undertaking a massive expansion effort in order to ensure they can accommodate even more annual visitors in the future, as well as meet the needs of the local community. This new 9,000 square foot facility will be situated next to the Wayne home itself, and will primarily be used for hosting “citizenship programs” for children and families. The overall budget for this project, as well as the projected completion date, have not yet been released, but the Museum continues to solicit PayPal donations via its website, and is also spearheading a campaign to sell John Wayne-themed memorial bricks which will be placed in front of the new facility. This expansion represents a ray of hope for the overall concept of the celebrity birthplace museum, and looks towards a future in which younger generations will become more engaged with the museum and its programming, as well as with the iconic figure who it celebrates.

4: The plan for the new Birthplace Museum Facility



Conclusions

When considering the nature of the “celebrity birthplace” museum, the key conclusion is that they are by no means an altogether dying breed. There are, however, a few key factors at stake, only some of which the museum’s staff members are able to control. First of all, it seems these sites are ideally suited for attracting those who are inclined to explore “roadside America.” The personalities which these museums represent each have a nostalgia about them which fits well with family car trips and the age-old tradition of being persuaded to make a “pit stop” by a particularly effective highway billboard. This is an area where the John Wayne Birthplace is particularly well-suited, primarily because of its ideal location which has allowed the museum to thrive.

A good deal of passion for the subject matter is required when making one of these institutions successful. This is particularly useful in the case of a smaller institution like the James Dean Gallery, which is not thriving per se, but is able to maintain its status quo because its founder is determined for it to do so, and has no great needs or expectations in terms of annual visitorship. This passion is similarly useful in larger institutions like the Wayne Birthplace, which is clearly thriving under the direction of long-time John Wayne fan Brian Downes. Downes may not have had a background in museum operation, but he had amassed a great deal of knowledge about the man whose life he is tasked with celebrating. This sort of enthusiasm is a crucial part of what makes the Museum’s programs and special events so successful, for they are perfectly tailored to directly pertain to Wayne and his work, thus providing a one-of-a-kind experience for visitors.

The Jimmy Stewart Museum is caught in a state of limbo however, and is currently the most humble of the institutions in question in terms of location and annual success. This is

perhaps oddly appropriate given the actor's own well-known humility. Stewart himself may have been uneasy about an entire attraction in his honor, but now that it has come to fruition, his museum now needs a figurehead who is anything but humble when extolling the merits of the site and the man which it honors. This has the potential to prove a bit more difficult task for a director whose passion does not lie first and foremost with the subject matter at hand.

The Museum also faces the difficulty of reconciling its commitment to programming geared towards the local community versus that which will continue to convince out of town visitors that it is worth making the trip. At the moment, the Museum's special events serve as excellent community-building activities for the locals of Indiana, but they do little to entice Stewart's most loyal out-of-town fans. These events feature components like live music, craft fairs, and outdoor carnival-like activities, but they offer little which pertains immediately to Stewart and his life and career. This current approach might fit well with the initial mission of the Museum at the time of its founding, which was to first and foremost benefit the town in which it is located. If the locals are content to generally remain ignorant or apathetic towards the Museum and its everyday operations, then it is definitely time to focus more exclusively on attracting additional out-of-town visitors.

The Jimmy Stewart Museum would have little to lose and everything to gain by becoming even more specialized in the programming that it offers. In this sense, returning to the *It's a Wonderful Life* references is quite apt, since the Museum's current role in the community is just about as thankless as George Bailey's was in his little town of Bedford Falls. To remain viable, the museum will need to cut back on the production of more generic sorts of entertainment meant to amuse the locals on a widespread scale. Instead, the museum needs to move towards programming that is extremely unique and totally Stewart-centric, something that

would entice the true fans of the actor to venture from far and wide in order to participate. Should these efforts succeed, then the Museum might eventually be in the position to further follow in the footsteps of the John Wayne Birthplace by facilitating additional community-friendly programs and events, thus continuing to fulfill Stewart's own intent, that the Museum would serve as an asset to the town of Indiana on both a financial and a cultural level.

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