

I. Introduction

Months before I began my museum studies classes I knew that, in fulfillment of the requirement, I wanted to pursue a project addressing women's history. When I started thinking more seriously about it last spring, I decided I wanted to create an online exhibition using Omeka (or something similar) initially focusing on women's history in Waco with the intention of expanding the content when I move elsewhere.

Throughout my research over the summer at The Texas Collection, my initial vision for the project transformed. After looking at other online exhibits that utilize Omeka, such as The Waco History App, and blogs dedicated to women's history, I realized that I wanted my entries to be more reliant upon visuals than text because they bring history to life in ways that text cannot. In both the Omeka-based exhibits and the other blogs, visuals are certainly a component, but they are secondary to the text, playing only a supporting role. I also realized that I wanted to write the text in a more informal writing style to make these women feel less disconnected from the readers and eliminate the barrier that is often created by rigid, academic writing.

After taking these desired components into consideration and researching Omeka-based and blog-based platforms, I decided to present the research as a blog. Blogs have become a pervasive form of communication that is popular with a variety of people and it allows for me to integrate large photographs into the text. And because blogs are a relatively informal platform, I also felt that I had more liberty to write the entries in a creative style instead of an academic one.

Another reason I chose to do this project as a blog is that museums are starting to use them more frequently to promote their institutions and share their collections with a wider audience, so I think it is becoming increasingly important for at least some museum professionals to be well versed in building and maintaining a blog site, particularly if they work

for smaller museums that likely do not have the money to pay someone exclusively for that work. I do intend to work for a small museum and so I would like to have some working knowledge of the process.

II. Process

But before I could initiate that process, I needed my stories. I spent the entire summer scouring about twenty collections at The Texas Collection. Throughout my research I was looking for collections associated with women in Waco that had enough visual content to accompany the text and an adequate amount of information about the woman, whether it be from the collection or other sources, to write a compelling entry. Because many of these collections that I looked through are very small, often only one box, and there was little information about the individual outside of the collection, my research only yielded seven women for whom I would have enough content to work with. It was not as much I thought I would have, but it was a good start.

Now that I had my content I needed to start building my site. I knew right away that I wanted to use Word Press as my platform because it is the most widely-used and there is a tremendous amount of information available about how to work with Word Press which is help I knew I would need along the way. However, I did not know how I wanted to host my site. At first, I was going to use Word Press because they will host for free. I eventually decided against that because if you go through their free hosting then your site must have Word Press advertising and the domain name will have wordpress.com attached to the end which I did not want.

I spent several days researching different hosting sites after which it became clear that paying for a host would be the best way to go and I had narrowed it down to two sites: Blue Host and InMotion Hosting. Blue Host is the most commonly used hosting site, but I read countless

reviews about both and InMotion Hosting almost always came up on top. InMotion is more expensive but I assumed it would be worth the investment since this is a site that I want to continue adding to, and my assumption was not incorrect. When I first started building the site there were many glitches and problems along the way and InMotion Hosting customer service helped me through them all quickly and my site has never gone down in the almost year that it has been active.

Surprisingly, one of the most difficult components of this project was its name. I must have pondered it for weeks before I finally decided on Roaring Lion Project. What made the decision especially frustrating was that I wanted a name which a) is memorable and b) contains, in a short phrase, the essence of why I pursued this project which is to showcase the powerful roles women have played in the formations and transformations of the world around them, whether it be in their families, their communities, their states or beyond. I also initially thought that the name had to include the words “women” and “history” which severely limited my options.

Luckily for me, I was reading Dee Brown’s The Gentle Tamers: Women of the Old Wild West at the time and I learned about a woman named Carry Nation who was a dominant figure in the temperance movement. One morning, she walked into a barroom in Kansas and started hurling stones destroying whatever was in their path and astounding the customers who were no longer paying any attention to the drinks in front of them. She was of course arrested but after the jailers closed her cell door she yelled ferociously, “You put me in here a cub, but I will go out a roaring lion and make all hell howl.” And I had found a name. This statement embodies perfectly the absolute strength, courage and resilience that the women I had encountered thus far possessed whose stories I wanted to share through the Roaring Lion Project.

Once my hosting and domain name was figured out, I could start thinking about a theme for my site which was more difficult than I thought it would be. There are thousands of WordPress themes, so I needed a clear idea about how I wanted my site to look. I knew that I wanted it to be minimal, simple and easy to navigate so I began looking specifically for these features. Eventually, I found Parallax which met all these requirements and it came with a YouTube tutorial created by the designer of the theme that walked users through building a site with that theme. During the customization process, this tutorial became one of my most important resources and I do not think my site would have turned out as well if I had not had that tutorial.

Aside from learning how to do it, customizing the site was the easiest part of this process because I already knew that I wanted it to be minimal. To achieve this appearance, I went with a dark gray and white color scheme with simple text. There is a menu bar on top with the Home, Blog, About and Contact links. There is also a language translator to make the site more accessible to those who do not speak English. Beneath the menu, spread across the top of the page, is a famous black and white photograph from a women's suffrage parade. Under this photograph is Carry Nation's quote followed by a gallery of images that are linked to its associated blog.

Now that my site was live and customized, it was time to start publishing the content. Writing the content was a unique hurdle that I initially thought would be one of the easier components of this project; however, it was exceptionally challenging to transition from an academic writing style to a creative one. I wanted these entries to be written in a way that would erase, at least somewhat, the distance that academic writing tends to create and allow for readers to personally connect to these women's stories. But I did not consider that academic writing is the only writing I had engaged in for the last six years and creative writing was a style I would

need to relearn. My first few entries definitely had more of an academic flair, but eventually my writing loosened up and the entries began sounding more like someone telling a story than a college history book. And they will only improve as I continue adding more.

Something else that I was keeping in mind as I was writing the entries was the length. The entries from the couple of other women's history blogs that I looked at were, I believed, far too long. Some of them were almost as long as a book chapter and even I found myself zoning out while trying to read them. Typically, blogs that are successful are those that have a good balance between visuals and text and understand that blogs, alongside most of what is put on the internet, are geared towards short attention spans. There is so much competition on the internet for people's attention and content on the internet only has a few seconds to catch and keep people's interest.

With this in mind, I kept my entries at a minimal length. Most of them are no more than four paragraphs. To maintain a minimal length, I did not write an entire biography but instead focused on one or two aspects of these women's lives that I thought a reader would find the most interesting. At the bottom of the post I provided resources, with hyperlinks if available, so that readers could continue learning about the woman on their own.

After I finished writing and publishing my content, it was time to think about marketing my site. I utilized some traditional approaches such as creating a Facebook site which is linked to my site. I used a boost feature that Facebook offers which puts a post from your page onto people's newsfeeds that might be interested in your content and this seemed to help generate some new visitation to my Facebook page. I also wrote a blog post about my project for Baylor's Museum Studies Student Association's blog site which others have said they would share once it was published.

Even though these traditional approaches are helpful, I did not want to rely on them solely because I did not think they would help me reach audiences closer to home and outside of the Baylor campus. To bring awareness about my site to the Waco community I created seven flyers that featured the image of one of the women on my site. Above that image was the question, “Did you know...?” and then beneath the image it gave a fact about the woman. It then directed the reader to my website if they were interested in learning more. I printed out several copies of these flyers and left them around the community, particularly focusing on places associated with the women such as the Waco Humane Society which is in existence largely due to the efforts of Kate Harrison Friend.

III. Evaluation

My final task for this project was to have my website evaluated. To do this, I asked for the help of five museum professionals at Baylor including Benna Vaughn from The Texas Collection, Erik Swanson, the library exhibit coordinator, Mary Goolsby from the W.R. Poage Library, Allyson Riley from the Riley Digitization Center and Eric Ames, the Assistant Director for Marketing and Communications. I asked all of them to review my site and evaluate it based on its appearance, navigability, content and anything else they wanted to comment on.

Based on the evaluations, errors within the text such as spelling is what needs the most work. I have asked someone to be an editor for me so that when I publish my content, I know that it is free of these errors. Someone also commented that there should be a short biography about Carry Nation since she is the inspiration for the project’s name. Another suggestion was that the woman’s name should show up when the mouse hovers over her featured image on the home page, which I did fix.

Everyone commented that they appreciated the simplicity of the site's appearance and how easy it is to navigate. They also all agreed that the posts were a good length and provided enough of a story to keep their interest and encourage them to learn more about the women on their own. Benna commented that she liked how the possibility of the site continuing beyond Waco was made evident by the dropdown blogs menu that listed Texas. This suggests that more entries will be added and will expand beyond Texas.

IV. Conclusion

Throughout this process, I have discovered that blog sites are not as simple to create as some sources led me to believe. I have encountered countless glitches, uncertainties of how to make specific changes and struggles mastering the ins and outs of navigating the dashboard and my chosen theme. Needless to say, it has been a challenge. But my site is now up and running and headed in the right direction. It is far from perfect but as I become more proficient with Word Press, my site and entries will improve over time and hope I can use what I have learned professionally.

Blogs provide museums a means of reaching an expansive audience in a unique way. Through them, museums can make more personal connections with people and help people make more personal connections with the museum's objects; and it can act as a virtual gateway into the museum for those who might never have a chance to physically visit. But building a blog site takes time and resources that not all museums have access to. If I gain employment in a museum that does not have a blog site, I can use the skills I gained from this project to help them embrace and manage this powerful tool.