

Becoming a Pepper:
My Experience as the Collections Intern at the Dr Pepper Museum and Free Enterprise Institute

by

Rachael Nadeau, B.S.

An Internship

Approved by the Department of Museum Studies

Kenneth Hafertepe, Ph.D., Chairperson

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Julie Holcomb, Ph.D., Chairperson

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ABSTRACT

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Rachael A. Nadeau

Chairperson: Julie Holcomb, Ph. D.

During the summer of 2013 I completed an internship in collections at the Dr Pepper Museum and Free Institute in Waco, Texas. For my internship I processed a large incoming donation while also completing other duties as assigned such as working on exhibit design and educational programs for the museum. In this paper I discuss my various experiences and the methods I used while completing my internship. I also focus on the various issues that I encountered while processing the donation and how I chose to address those problems. Overall, my internship was a rewarding experience and an in depth look at collections management along with the various other aspects of museum work.

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Rachael Nadeau
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I spent roughly eleven weeks working on two distinct projects as the collections intern at the Dr Pepper Museum and Free Enterprise Institute. One project was the inventory, accession, cataloging and housing of a rather large collection donated to the museum by Jim Towns. I also had to determine what to do with those items that are not appropriate or needed for the collection. This was my primary project and was what I spent most of my time at the museum working on. My other project was the housing and organization of the Point of Sale, or POS, collection. This project was to be done as time allowed and I was only able to briefly scratch the surface of it. I was also responsible for other duties as assigned such as preparing for meetings and helping with exhibits and education.

The Jim Towns Collection has been where most of my time was directed this summer. I had to start from essentially the ground up on this project. I was given the temporary custody form and the original inventory that was attached to it and I then had to go through and compare the original inventory to what exactly we had in the donation. The original inventory was completed in haste and due to this there were quite a few discrepancies that I had to work through in order to complete this inventory.

I encountered two main issues when I was inventorying the collection and they both fueled each other. My first issue was that I do not have a large background in soft drinks and soft drink paraphernalia. I have a background in working with history and anthropology collections but as far as soft drinks are concerned I had little knowledge of them when I started my work at the Dr Pepper Museum. This made going through the inventory and comparing it to the original inventory quite difficult and time consuming because I would constantly have to be verifying different logos and the like. To help with this learning curve that the collection came with I had to consult many sources and study them to aid in processing the collection correctly. There are many Dr Pepper and soda-related books and manuals that helped this process along but it was time consuming to have to constantly be double

checking logos and reading about different types of designs and bottles. This process, however, greatly increased my knowledge level in a very specific area of history and I am sure will be helpful to some extent in the future.

The second issue I had was that items had been moved and even misplaced after the original inventory had been completed. Having the items moved and their locations not updated made work difficult for me in the sense that I was less able to make comparison judgements about items in the collection. I could not compare all the items to each other to confirm that those were in fact the items on the inventory. This caused me to have to do even more research into the various items in order to identify them correctly. It also held up my process because more than once I had to go searching for items that were missing because some of the objects had at one point been put on exhibit and never returned to the donation holding area. I believe that overall this and the learning curve the collection presented were my biggest challenges in completing the inventory and initial comparisons of the collection and were in fact the most time consuming parts of the process.

Although not one of the main issues I encountered, another time consuming issue surfaced while inventorying the collection: I discovered mold on some of the items. This is always a difficult issue for any museum but especially for a small museum on a tight budget. Due to budgetary concerns and concerns for the collection I was left with the issue of what to do with the moldy items on a budget. I had to do a lot of research and most of the helpful information came from the Canadian Conservation Institute and the National Park Service. Given the information I found I was able to come up with a low cost solution for dealing with the mold. We created a mold testing area in an unused shower room that was away from the rest of the collection using desk lamps and UV lights. I used the lights to examine the items suspected of mold and other items in their vicinity. Mold will fluoresce under the black lights

so when I found items that did fluoresce I sealed them in plastic bags. By doing this it allows us to monitor the mold to determine if it is active mold and spreading or if something else is causing it to fluoresce and whether or not it poses any danger to the collection. This was a time consuming problem but it was worth taking the time in order to protect the collection and learn about how to deal with mold because it is something that I will more than likely encounter in the future.

Once I had inventoried the collection I had to do initial comparisons on the items in the collection to those the Dr Pepper Museum already had in their collection. Their collecting policy states that they should have two of every object in the collection. Due to this, I had to compare items in PastPerfect to determine which items they already had in their collection and which they needed or needed more of. This was also a very lengthy process. The records for the museum have been kept various different ways throughout its existence and merged into one record later. This creates weird discrepancies in the records that make them difficult to search. Also, they do not have defined terminology for different types of things or a preferred way of cataloging and writing descriptions. This caused me to have to run searches in multiple ways for every item and this created a very time intensive process.

I was finally able to compile my searches into an accession list and a not to be accessioned list during the fifth week. This allowed me to finally create an accession record for the Jim Towns Collection and begin to catalog and store the objects from the collection as well as recommend what to do with the items that are not being accessioned. This process consumed almost the rest of my time at the Dr Pepper Museum aside from a few other duties on the side. During this process I spent most of my time cataloging items in PastPerfect. This process went fairly smoothly aside from the occasional technological problems or having to research odd objects that were found in the collection in order to

catalog them correctly. I also had to mark the objects with their object ID numbers, which sometimes brought about unique learning opportunities. There were not always the appropriate materials to mark the objects or the objects did not exist in the *Museum Registration Manual* so I would have to come up with creative solutions or use my best discretion in marking the objects. I would then have to house all the items in the collections storage rooms. This was usually a pretty straight forward process but at times there were items that were difficult to store because of their composition or lack of storage materials. I would then have to use my best discretion here as well in order to store the items. I also had to create custom dividers using foam board to house fragile items such as drinking glasses in boxes to best protect them. Although there were some complications in the process of cataloging and storing the objects, I completed a substantial amount during the remainder of my time at the internship with 694 items cataloged.

Throughout my internship I was also in charge of the rehousing of the POS Collection. To do this, I had various conversations with the facilities manager in order to build new shelving so that I could rehouse this collection. To do this, I had to measure and get a general idea for what sizes the boxes and items were so that the shelving would be built correctly. I was also in charge of delegating some of these tasks to other interns and directing them in how to move and organize some of the items because some of the items needed to be moved and organized faster than others to create room for a new exhibits shelf. I had to explain to the other interns how the area should be organized and where it should be moved to so that we could complete the task as quickly as possible. Unfortunately, due to the size of the Towns collection, I did not have much time to devote to working on this project and did not get very much completed. However, the amount of this project that was completed allowed for valuable space to be opened up in one of the collections rooms and will make the job easier for the next person

who gets assigned this collection.

My internship also consisted of a few other duties as assigned. On any given day I answered phone calls and tried to help people with their product questions. If I was unable to help the person then I was responsible for taking their information so that one of the staff members could get back to them at some point in the future. Along with answering the phone, I also attended many meetings. I attended a meeting with a man from a digitization firm who had contacted the museum and was interested in helping to digitize our collections. Having some knowledge and experience in digitizing already, this was a great meeting to sit in on because it reaffirmed what I already knew and helped to add to my knowledge base in the area. I was also involved in exhibit development meetings and the subsequent research that is needed for them. I was even responsible for writing drafts of some of the text panels that were needed for an upcoming exhibit. I also helped the exhibit interns with locating objects they needed in the collection and rehousing them once they brought them back. Along with this, I helped the exhibit interns test items they were making and provided input on their projects. I also had the great opportunity of being able to see an exhibit design team install an exhibit and interact with them. This was a great experience and I am sure that this will help me in my future career as a museum professional.

As part of my other duties I also attended and helped with board meetings. I was a part of an interpretation committee meeting in which the board members and staff discussed their current progress in the interpretation department and their future plans and needs. I also helped prepare food and did other work to prepare for a general board meeting. I then attended the board meeting and was able to experience what a museum board meeting was like, which is a great experience to have at my level. I often helped prepare for other events as well, along with cleaning up afterwards, which is all a part of

the true museum experience.

On top of all of this, I have also discussed travelling trunks and programs with the education staff and intern so that I could recommend items for the education collection while processing the Towns collection. I also helped the education staff by learning their basic tour program and giving a tour. The tour I did give had to be modified on the spot because I received a group of very young children and much of the information in the tour would have not been appropriate or relevant to them. I had to try to relate to them to get the general tour information across, which was an interesting and valuable experience for me. I also was able to help with one of their summer camps. This was a great experience to be a part of and to see from the inside how a summer camp is prepared for and run.

In conclusion, I believe my experience as the collections intern at the Dr Pepper Museum and Free Enterprise Institute was extremely beneficial. I was able to have not only an intensive collections experience but was also able to see how the museum functioned and participate in many aspects of the museum. The knowledge I gained processing an entire donation along with the other tasks I participated in during my internship gave me a truly valuable experience that I probably would not have attained elsewhere.