

Podcasting and Museums:
A How-To Guide and Object-Based Example

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PODCASTING AND MUSEUMS

Creating a podcast for your museum can be an excellent and low-cost way to create an additional educational program for your visitors. Podcasts have been gaining popularity in recent years, and 2018 saw a 40% increase in listenership from 2017.¹ They are especially popular with young adult audiences: 44% of podcast listeners are millennials, although 1/3 of Americans between the ages of 25 and 54 listen to at least one podcast per month.² Podcasting is a truly flexible medium as well. While the most popular form of podcasting is audio-only, many podcasts offer a combination of both audio and video episodes. For example, the Smithsonian Institute hosts a wide variety of podcasts across their different museums and collections some of which are audio only, some of which are video only, and some that change depending on the content.³ Further, podcasting is not new to the museum field. The Met and the Victoria and Albert Museum were both early adopters of the medium, often publishing audio tours on podcasts as well as lectures from visiting scholars and other special events as podcasts as early as 2006.⁴

Podcasting can be beneficial to both the museum creating them and the museum visitor. For the museum, there is a low start-up cost involved in creating a podcast: much of the software used to record and edit the audio tracks can be downloaded for free online, a good microphone can be purchased inexpensively (they cost \$100 on average), and uploading the podcast episodes to iTunes or Google Music is free of charge.⁵ Importantly, there is no coding involved with creating and publishing a podcast like there is with creating an app for your museum. Podcast episodes are free to download, too, making them accessible to virtually anyone with access to a smart phone or a computer. Additionally, they can be downloaded from anywhere in the world which can help raise awareness of a museum beyond its geographical location. As stated in the *New York Times*, “podcasts are making countless hours of recorded information – like curators’ comments, interviews with artists and scholars, and even interviews with the subjects of some artwork – widely available to people who have never visited, and may never visit, the museums that are making the recordings.”⁶

¹ Edison Research, “The Infinite Dial 2018,” Edison Research, March 8, 2018, <https://www.edisonresearch.com/infinite-dial-2018/>.

² Rose Leadem, “The Growth of Podcasts and Why It Matters (Infographic),” *Entrepreneur*, December 23, 2017, <https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/306174>; “The 13 Critical Podcast Statistics of 2018 | Baer Facts,” Convince and Convert: Social Media Consulting and Content Marketing Consulting, accessed April 7, 2019, <https://www.convinceandconvert.com/podcast-research/the-13-critical-podcast-statistics-of-2018/>.

³ “Podcasts,” Smithsonian Institution, accessed April 8, 2019, <https://www.si.edu/podcasts>.

⁴ Randy Kennedy, “At Museums: Invasion of the Podcasts,” *The New York Times*, May 19, 2006, sec. Art & Design, <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/05/19/arts/design/19pod.html>.

⁵ “Why Podcasts Are Popular (And 4 Content Lessons To Learn From Them),” accessed April 7, 2019, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jaysondemers/2017/07/11/why-podcasts-are-popular-and-4-content-lessons-to-learn-from-them/#4b00406418f6>.

⁶ Kennedy, “At Museums.”

With the low start-up cost and accessibility of podcasts to museum patrons, as well as the medium's flexibility, it is easy to understand why some museums have been creating podcasts for so long. Outlined in this White Paper is a guide for how to create an object-based educational podcast, using a collections object from the Mayborn Museum at Baylor University. While creating a podcast episode is certainly never one-size-fits-all, it is my hope that the information and resources included will be helpful enough to allow anyone to begin creating a podcast for their institution.

HOW TO CREATE AN OBJECT-BASED PODCAST FOR YOUR MUSEUM

PRE-PRODUCTION

1. Identify Your Audience

Like any educational program, your podcast needs to begin with a specific audience in mind. This can affect the length of the episodes as well as the content included. For example, in the *Mysteries at the Mayborn* example podcast created for this paper, I chose to program for an adult audience and therefore was able to be a bit more in depth with the historical information about the object discussed in the episode. There are examples of podcasts for every age group, but millennials are more plugged into podcasts than any other generation making young adult audiences the most likely demographic to be reached by a museum podcast.⁷

2. Identify Frequency and Length of Episodes

When identifying the frequency with which you will release podcast episodes, keep the amount of time needed to produce a podcast in mind. An educational podcast takes time to be researched and scripted in addition to being recorded, edited, and produced. It is normal for podcasts to release multiple episodes a month, common frequencies being once a week, or once every two weeks.

The length of your podcast episodes depends on your audience first and foremost, and needs to be long enough to fully explain the concepts being discussed without being too long and overwhelming. In examining several different museum podcasts, a common length seems to be between 20 and 30 minutes. Here are five examples of educational podcasts and their average episode lengths for reference:

- i. The British Museum's *Membercast*: ~25 minutes⁸
- ii. *Art Talk*: ~5 minutes⁹
- iii. *Stuff You Missed in History Class*: ~ 30 minutes¹⁰
- iv. The International Spy Museum's *Spycast*: ~40-60 minutes¹¹

⁷ "The 13 Critical Podcast Statistics of 2018 | Baer Facts."

⁸ "Podcasts," The British Museum Blog, accessed April 9, 2019, <https://blog.britishmuseum.org/category/podcasts/>.

⁹ "KCRW's Art Talk," NPR.org, accessed April 9, 2019, <https://www.npr.org/podcasts/381444891/k-c-r-w-s-art-talk>.

¹⁰ "Podcasts," Stuff You Missed in History Class, June 16, 2016, <https://www.missedinhistory.com/podcasts>.

¹¹ "SpyCast," Spy Museum, accessed April 9, 2019, <https://www.spymuseum.org/multimedia/spycast/all/>.

- v. The University of Iowa’s Special Collections’ *Historically Yours*: ~20 minutes¹²

While it is best to release podcast episodes on a regular basis, the length of each episode may vary. There is no reason to feel confined to a certain time limit, especially as different topics may demand a different amount of discussion time.

3. Assess Your Collections

Think about and identify the objects in your museum’s collections that you’d like to highlight during podcast episodes. Do you want to highlight objects already on display but that might be less interpreted? Do you want to highlight objects in storage? As a podcast can be part of a museum’s educational programming, remaining aligned with your mission is key, but we know a common occurrence in 21st century museums are collections full of incredible objects – some of which may not pertain to the museum’s mission at all. While it may not be the wisest decision to make these the center of your podcast episodes as a whole, spotlighting them every once in a while may be a fun way to not only give them a new life and purpose at your museum, but also to give a “behind the scenes” or “exclusive” look into your museum’s collection. In the same way that the recent trend of open-visitation storage gives museum visitors a peek behind the curtain, a podcast allows listeners to peek behind the curtain while gaining in depth insight about what they find there.¹³ Podcasts also have an additional advantage in this regard by having an unlimited reach; patrons can visit this area of the museum regardless of their physical location.

4. Assess the Resources of Your Museum

Collections objects aside, your museum may have myriad helpful resources for you. Any associated documentation about the object can be useful in giving specific information not only about the object itself, but its provenance and “life” before it came to the museum as well. Additionally, who do you have on staff with knowledge or expertise about some of the objects you plan on exhibiting in your podcast series? Are there scholars in your museum’s community you might be able to draw upon? If your museum is associated with a university, faculty members come to mind. Not only will incorporating outside experts add to the depth and breadth of the information you can convey but can help build additional relationships in your community.

¹² PodBean Development, “Historically Yours from the University of Iowa Special Collections,” accessed April 9, 2019, <https://historicallyyours.podbean.com>.

¹³ Steven Lubar, *Inside the Lost Museum*, First (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2017), 228–32.

There are multiple ways to incorporate their expertise as well. One option would be to interview them for information “on air,” recorded and used as part of the “body” of the podcast. When choosing this route, make sure to prep the interview questions in advance and to give them to your interviewee for the comfort of both parties, and also to make sure the best information is coming across. Another option would be to interview the outside expert “off air” and incorporate the information as part of your script. With this method, I would recommend making a transcript of the interview for ease of reference. A third option might include the guest expert making a solo appearance, either on or off air, in which they create their own written portion of the body of the podcast to be read in totality by the host or appear and read it themselves. However, this might cause some of the overall style and voice of the podcast, written and oral, to become jumbled and could potentially lose some of the interactive nature of the podcast. At its core, a podcast is an interaction - in this case between the listener and the object, facilitated by the host. It is worth being aware that the choices you, as the host, make will be noticeable to the listener episode-to-episode. This does not mean once a decision is made it cannot be changed: absolutely feel free to make changes as you feel they are necessary! This is simply a reminder that the podcast host will become a sort of “home base” for the listener and that to change the style and voice of an episode too much may disrupt a listener’s expectations and therefore their experience with the episode as a whole.

5. Other Activities You Might Produce as a Podcast

If your institution hosts a variety of lecture events or discussion panels as part of their programming, it might be interesting to record and publish those events as “special” podcast episodes.

CREATING THE EPISODE

1. Writing the Episode

This may be one of the most time-consuming parts of the episode production process. Because of the educational nature of a museum podcast episode, I do recommend writing the body of the podcast episode in which you discuss the object and its contextual information. Think of a podcast episode in three parts: the introduction, the body, and the conclusion. For the introduction and conclusion sections of the podcast, you may want to be slightly less formal. In these sections, simply introduce the podcast, who the host is, and give quick introduction to the episode as a whole. During the conclusion, state again the name of your podcast and your name, give a preview to what the next episode might be about, and give listeners a way to contact you.

When writing the body of the episode, be cognizant that any or all of the information you are conveying may be entirely new to the listener. Because of this, “sign-posting” may be useful. Sign-posting is giving clear indicators that you are moving to a new section of information while recapping the information previously given. This allows the listener to have a clear direction of where the podcast is going while also providing a reminder of where they have already been and what they have already learned. A great source for object-based writing is Laurel Thatcher Ulrich’s *The Age of Homespun* in which she writes chapters focusing on one object and relates it to its historical context to better explain the objects’ cultural and historical significance. It may be beneficial to use slightly less formal language in the body of the podcast, even when you are discussing academic subjects. Like sign-posting, this creates a level of comfort between the host and the listener and allows for first-person interjections from the host. If it is helpful, think about the podcast episode as a conversation between friends, even though it is scripted.

In an object-based podcast episode, remember that an aural medium is being used for what is usually a visual experience. To help with this, be as descriptive as possible when describing the object and, if possible, include an easy way for listeners to view a photograph of the object. This can be done either through uploading a link to the photograph in the podcast description, by including the photograph on your institution’s social media pages, or by creating a designated page on your institution’s website for photographs and information from the podcast episodes. It is helpful to have someone less familiar with the object being discussed in a podcast episode to read the descriptive language describing the object. They might be able to identify what needs clarification or whether or not the description of the objects makes sense at all.

An example of a podcast episode script has been included in the “helpful resource” section.

2. Recording the Episode

Once the podcast is written, you’re ready to record. See the “recording software” section for more information on the recording and production process.

3. Publish Your Podcast

Podcasts are free to upload and can be hosted through a variety of servers. The most popular hosts are Apple Podcasts, compatible with Apple devices, and Google Podcasts for Android devices. Each of these hosts offer a simple sign up process and step-by-step guides to how to upload your episodes.

PRODUCTION EQUIPMENT

1. Recording Software

There are many different recording software options available for download online or to manually load onto your computer. If working with a Mac, their recording and production software *GarageBand* is most likely already operational on your computer.

Audacity is a free, download-ready software available online, and is used by professional podcasters such as the team behind *Harry Potter and the Sacred Text*.¹⁴ It is easy to download and use, and its website has a wealth of information about how to best learn and use the software.¹⁵

2. Recording Equipment

One of the benefits of podcasting for museums is its low start-up cost. As recording software has already been discussed, it is important to discuss microphones used during the recording podcast. It is important to purchase a high-quality microphone – they will last longer but more importantly will give you a better sound quality during your episodes. Because of the popularity of podcasting today, it is easy to find many podcasting-specific microphones.

Even if you only plan on having one host during your podcast episodes, it may be a good idea to have 2 or 3 microphones on hand. This ensures you have enough microphones to accommodate any podcasting guests and have spares in case of technical malfunctions.

¹⁴ Ariana Nedelman, October 3, 2018.

¹⁵ “Audacity ® | Free, Open Source, Cross-Platform Audio Software for Multi-Track Recording and Editing.” accessed April 8, 2019, <https://www.audacityteam.org/>.

POST-PRODUCTION

1. Give Your Listeners a Way to Contact You

Make sure and have an email address specifically related to the podcast – or some other means of communication – ready when you begin releasing podcast episodes. This allows for a dialogue between the podcast/museum and the podcast listeners for follow up questions about an episode, suggestions, and, as often happens with podcasting, corrections. It also provides an avenue through which the audience can actively participate in the podcast, making it a more personal educational activity.

2. Archive Your Podcast

It is important to keep the files created during your podcast production process archived, either as part of your institution's archives or as a separate entity. This can be done simply with files for each episode grouped together (such as the audio files, research, scripts, etc.). Regardless of the archival order you choose, it is important to keep analog/hardcopy files in addition to any digital files created. For example, the audio files created for each episode may best be kept on an external hard drive as well as on a cloud server. By storing these files in two or more places, you ensure the ability to recover information in the case of a network or computer malfunction.

AN IMPORTANT NOTE AND HELPFUL RESOURCES

There is no one right or wrong way to create a podcast. Just as each museum is different in its mission, collections, and aims, podcasts are all unique as well. The guidelines given above are methods I used to create an object-based podcast, using an object currently on display at the Mayborn Museum that discussed 19th century women's sewing activities. I created this method based on interviews with podcasting professionals, creating my own podcast and script through trial and error, and listening to a lot of podcasts. The beauty of podcasting is being able to learn, share, and grow with the creators and listeners of different podcasts, and I invite anyone interested in creating their own to listen to a variety of different podcasts and find what works best for them.

EXAMPLE PODCAST SCRIPT: HYPASIA BEATRICE PERRY'S SAMPLER

INTRODUCTION: Hi, and welcome to *Mysteries at the Mayborn*, a podcast where we go behind the scenes with special objects from the collections at Baylor University's Mayborn Museum. I'm Sarah Andrews, and I'm glad you've joined us today! Today we are looking at a nineteenth century sewing sampler currently on display at the Mayborn. Sewing samplers are excellent examples of women's education and culture, and we're excited to learn about the history of sewing samplers as well as about the woman who made this one- Hypasia Beatrice Perry! Let's get started.

BODY: The sampler made by Hypasia Beatrice Perry (H 20053) was donated by Zuma Young Salaun with a large collection of other family artifacts and keepsakes. Hypasia is four generations removed from Zuma on her father's side of the family.

Zuma was an amateur genealogist and was very interested in keeping the stories of her family and the objects associated with them recorded. In the associated documentation of her different donations to the museum are handwritten notes explaining what some of the items are, who they belonged to, and when and how they came into Zuma's possession. She also goes into detail on how the family members are related to her from time to time, which helps to give us a fuller picture as to who her family is and how they experienced life in Texas and Louisiana during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

For all the stories and documentation, though, Hypasia Beatrice Perry is a very vague figure. In one of Zuma's notes, Hypasia Beatrice Perry is mentioned to be the sister of Sarah Olivia Henry (n. Perry) and that she married Thomas Waters – and that's it. From information in the records about Sarah Olivia Henry, we know that she had another sister, Louisa Medora Perry, who also married a Waters brother, Jonathan P. Waters. This Louisa Medora Perry Waters is Zuma Young Salaun's, the donor of this sampler, great grandmother. These three girls were the daughters of

Aaron Perry Jr. and Susan E. Fowler, who settled in Limestone County, Texas around 1844.¹⁶ From the information we have about Sarah Olivia Henry, she remained in Mexia, Texas where her husband was president of the bank until she died, and both she and her husband are buried there.¹⁷

So, to simplify the family record, we know that Hypasia Beatrice Perry was born in Limestone County, and probably spent much of her early life, if not well through adulthood, in Mexia, Texas. She had two sisters, one of whom was our donor's paternal great-grandmother, and the other of whom was an influential lady in Mexia, Texas in the mid-to-late nineteenth century.

While we may not know much about Hypasia Beatrice Perry, we do know a little bit about her family and, more importantly, we do have something that she made. Let's discuss her sampler:

Hypasia's sampler is quite large, about twelve inches by twelve inches. The background fabric is a neutral color, and she's used brightly colored embroidery thread throughout her designs. Around all four edges of the sampler, she has created a border of pink and crimson flower buds on a green vine. These flowers are almost heart-shaped, which are lovely, and they frame the rest of her design nicely.

Inside the flower and vine border, Hypasia repeats the letters of the alphabet four different times in different styles and colors. The first alphabet set is done in a light blue color and uses all lowercase letters. The next alphabet set is in all capital letters and is sewn in a very light pink color. Although the light blue and light pink are fading from age in this area of the sampler, but it is still easy to read and see the details on each letter. The next two sets of letters are both in capital letters and are larger in scale than the previous two sets. The third uses a fuchsia-colored thread and includes letter A through Y, skips Z, and then repeats A, B, and C to finish out that row of stitches. It doesn't appear that Hypasia ran out of space for this line of letters, so it's interesting to wonder why she might have skipped the letter Z and continued on with another set of A, B, and C in the same style to finish out that row of stitches. The final set of letters is the largest set of letters on the sampler and is embroidered in a golden-yellow thread. Perhaps because of the larger size of these letters there was a spacing issue as Hypasia only includes letters A through W in this set. This demonstrates to me that although time and effort was put into making this set of letters beautiful and aesthetically pleasing, its greater purpose might have been simply for Hypasia to practice different styles of stitches, color combinations, and letters.

Finally, at the bottom of the sampler right above the bottom vine and flower bud border, Hypasia stitched her name and the date – "Hypasia Beatrice Perry 1852" – into the sampler. I love this about this sampler and was one of the first things I noticed about this object. Hypasia's sampler has been very well preserved; most of the colors of the thread are still vibrant and beautiful and there are very few holes or sign of wear overall. But because Hypasia included her name on her

¹⁶ Associated Documentation, Zuma Young Salaun, Mayborn Museum, Baylor University.

¹⁷ "Sarah Olivia 'Sally' Perry Henry (1833-1853) - Find A Grave Memorial," accessed April 7, 2019, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/52798650/sarah-olivia-henry>.

sampler, it is instantly personal when you look at it. Instead of being an object made by someone anonymous from a time long ago, we are able to immediately identify the creator's name and the year it was made. That really grabbed my attention and excited me as I learned more.

By looking at similar samplers in the collection at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, we also know that it was typical for young women – Hypasia would have been around 20-years-old when she made this sampler, at my best guess – to stitch their names and the year they completed their samplers somewhere on the fabric, just as Hypasia did, which makes their handstitched creations “valuable historic records in and of themselves.”¹⁸

When it comes to looking at the significance of Hypasia's sampler, we can turn to several historians for interpretations on women's sewing objects across American history.

Laurel Thatcher Ulrich examines several homespun objects from colonial and early-Republic America to demystify the myth of homespun nostalgia in her book The Age of Homespun. One of the objects she studies is an embroidered chimneypiece, sewn by a young woman in eighteenth century Boston.¹⁹ While this chimneypiece is quite a bit larger and more intricate than Hypasia's sampler, not to mention that the chimneypiece predates our sampler by 99 years, they both speak to a long tradition of cultural ideals, specifically about women's education and inequality – to this point she also asserts that “needlework education was a form of consumption, but it was not frivolous.”²⁰ Additionally, Ulrich contends, these sewn and embroidered objects are cultural in their importance, rather than personal.²¹ Feminist scholar Elaine Hedges reminds us of this important aspect of women's sewing too: “it has always been necessary for women to sew,” that it is “a form of activity that is universal – not confined to any one class or race – and that has combined the practical with the esthetic or artistic.”²²

CONCLUSION: Hypasia's sampler is currently on display in the Log House in the Texas Lifeway's Room. The next time you're at the Mayborn, we invite you to spend some time around the Log House – take a peek inside and see if you can find Hypasia's sampler, along with other nineteenth century household objects! Thanks again for joining us for *Mysteries at the Mayborn* today. If you have any questions or comments from today's episode, you can reach us at [email address]. We hope you'll join us again next week when we'll be discussing a new and exciting object from the museum collection. See you then!

¹⁸ “William J. Hill Texas Artisans and Artists Archive,” accessed April 7, 2019, <http://texasartisans.mfah.org/cdm/sampler>.

¹⁹ Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *The Age of Homespun*, First (New York City: Vintage Books, 2001), 142–73.

²⁰ Ulrich, 145, 147.

²¹ *Ibid*, 153.

²² Elaine Hedges, “Quilts and Women's Culture,” *The Radical Teacher* 4 (March 1977): 7.

MUSEUM PODCASTS LISTS

Museum Hack’s “11 Must-Listen Museum Podcasts”²³

H. Hethmon Consulting’s “Every Museum Podcast in One Big List”²⁴

RECOMMENDED PODCAST MICROPHONES

The Podcast Host’s “The Best Podcast Microphones on the Market”²⁵

²³ “Eleven Must-Listen Museum Podcasts,” Museum Hack, January 10, 2017, <https://museumhack.com/eleven-museum-podcasts/>.

²⁴ “Every Museum Podcast in One Big List – H. Hethmon Consulting,” accessed April 7, 2019, <https://hhethmon.com/2018/02/08/every-museum-podcast-in-one-big-list/>.

²⁵ “The Best Podcast Microphones on the Market, for All Budgets & Levels,” accessed April 8, 2019, <https://www.thepodcasthost.com/equipment/the-best-podcasting-microphones-on-the-market/>.

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