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Internship Reflection

The Colorado Springs Pioneers Museum has a mission to build lasting connection to the Pikes Peak region by preserving and sharing our cultural history through educational outreach, exhibits and preservation. Through my internship I was able to share and preserve the cultural history of a founding institution of Colorado Springs. The Colorado Springs Day Nursery, co-founded by Alice Bemis Taylor in 1897, provided an essential service to the community by offering daycare services to working mothers. At the time, tuberculosis was a prevalent disease in the area, and the nursery played an important role in preventing its spread. The Day Nursery ensured a safe and healthy environment for children, reducing the risk of exposure to tuberculosis and other infectious diseases including the flu pandemic of 1918. The rich history of the Day Nursery is continued to this day by Early Connections, the stewards of the historic building and Alice Bemis Taylor's original mission. Taylor's philanthropic legacy continues to be felt in Colorado Springs, where several institutions are either founded by her or bear her name. Though I am not native to Colorado Springs, it was an honor to contribute to her lasting legacy in this small way.

My tasks in this internship were to assess artifacts at the Day Nursery that were in need of proper preservation, combine theory and practice of the redesigning of the Heritage Room Exhibit at the Day Nursery site, develop skills as a team while demonstrating individual

leadership, conduct provenance from primary sources of local history, and implement best practices of collection management of artifacts. The combination of these tasks ended up aligning in a manner of me performing as a consultant/ contractor in relation to my working knowledge being loaned out by the CSPM to the Day Nursery (DN) to perform the vital tasks listed above.

Upon inspection of the artifacts originally on exhibit, I identified a number of books as most in need of proper display and storing. By starting with these artifacts, we were able to inspect each book's condition and log their current state. Many of these books contained extra newspaper clippings, and pictures that we later used in the redesigned exhibit. However, this also led to a delay in confirming the exact contents to display in the exhibit, as we wanted to ensure we had the most interesting and relevant items and could not do that until we went through everything. It did take some back and forth with team members to finalize what was deemed pertinent to the story. To be honest, it was at this point I decided it would be time saving to utilize Beth Hansen's exhibit worksheet in her book, *Great Exhibits*. This allowed the team to narrow our focus to create take home messages, main facts, and a preliminary outline.

These documents allowed me to start making a proposal to present to Liz Denson, CEO and President of Early Connections and our supervisor Curator Leah Davis-Witherow. Though I ensured each team member contributed to the proposal I was tasked with its creation. In it the team outlined the three-step project goals as (1) Identifying and preserving artifacts in most need of preservation, (2) Curate an impactful interpretation of the unique relationship the DN has with Colorado Springs and, (3) Use best practices to write exhibit text, hang panels and ensure the stewardship of artifacts on display. Next, we stated the exhibit thesis we created

with the organizations mission in mind, this being; Early Connection is an invaluable resource for families, businesses, and residents of the Pikes Peak region through its role as the caretaker of children, local relationships and the unique DN building. We then outlined the “Pieces of the Puzzle” (the Early Connections’ logo is puzzle pieces and I thought this could be a nice tie in) which were the organizing concepts of the exhibit; these were Alice Bemis Taylor, Community and Children, The Building, Outreach/ Support and a Historic Timeline in the hallway just outside of the Heritage Room. Our proposal then stated our key takeaways as (1) Preserving a rich history of the heirs to Alice Bemis Taylor’s philanthropic vision, (2) Show *how* the DN is continuing the legacy of the founding mothers in mission and stewardship of the building and, (3) The impact the DN provides as Early Connections to the families of this region, past and present. Finally, an estimated budget consisting of new picture frames, materials for wooden platforms to get artifacts off the floor, paper products such as panels and prints, and display risers for artifacts.

The pitch meeting went really well, and they approved all of our ideas. I will note that I learned there is a delicate line to draw with the amount of work you are able to perform in a semester internship versus the amount of work the business you are working for as a consultant wants done. It seems they always want more, and I had to navigate not over promising more than we could deliver in the timeframe allotted. As it stands now, we have one more working day to finish up the Heritage Exhibit Room. I am currently working on making them a next steps/ collections care document, finalizing labels, and reprinting a wall panel that somehow has an incorrect photo that everyone missed. My teammates have other tasks such as finalizing the archival inventory and printing out some last-minute additions.

This semester also saw a pivot in relation to the historical timeline hallway we proposed. This was something that took a lot of time to prep for and design only for it to be nixed two weeks after we submitted it to Mrs. Denson and her committee. We never heard directly from her what happened, but our supervisor explained that they decided this hallway was a highly visible location and wanted to highlight Early Connections rather than historical facts. Unfortunately, we allocated a lot of time into the research and design of this timeline and had to redesign our panels in the exhibit space to reflect the concepts we promised in our proposal.

Overall, I would say I have taken away valuable lessons in this internship that I will be able to apply in many ways. As a museum studies student I am always interested in learning more about artifact care, archiving and exhibit creation, which this internship allowed me firsthand access to. But it also allowed me to experience the proposal process from start to finish, how to navigate the various inputs of teammates for a common goal and the difficulties working in an offsite location as a consultant. I would say the offsite location was the most difficult to navigate as I did not have mentors readily available to seek guidance about best practices. Knowledge I am sure to gain with time, but it would have perhaps saved time if I could have just asked quick questions every so often rather than saving them up for meetings. However, I can see how that hardship made me more resilient as I had to research more to find an answer and inevitably this would highlight something else I could apply to other situations as they arose. This internship has given me the confidence to seek out museum employment that I can do during my last semester this fall.