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Beer and Libraries? Challenging the Community's View of the Public Library

Ross Betzer
Multnomah County Library

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by Ross Betzer
Information Services Librarian
Multnomah County Library
rossbk@multcolib.org

ROSS BETZER
Ross is an information services librarian at Multnomah County Library and co-chair of the Oregon Library Association's Intellectual Freedom Committee. His work includes staff training, copyright and digitization planning, and providing reference and readers' advisory services both online and at the Central Library. His favorite beer (at the moment) is the Helles Belles lager from Ninkasi Brewing.

When you think about beer, you might not think about your local library. You almost certainly are not going to think about the Aspen Institute's 2014 report, *Rising to the Challenge: Re-Envisioning Public Libraries.* Nevertheless, these three things—beer, libraries, *Rising to the Challenge*—all came together in a digital collection created by Multnomah County Library called Portland Brew Stories.

The Portland Brew Stories project was a community-focused effort to gather and share images and other primary documents that celebrate beer culture in Portland and Multnomah County. Planning began in 2014, the bulk of the project work took place in 2015, and the collection went live to the public in February 2016. This article provides a broad description of how the Portland Brew Stories collection was conceived and created, based on conversations with library staff who were involved and my own experiences with the project. Successes are identified and advice is presented for libraries who want to embark on a similar digital project within their community. Finally, the article reflects briefly on how this project embodies the ideas and strategies in *Rising to the Challenge*.

A New Idea for a Digital Project
The initial seed for Portland Brew Stories came about in late 2013 or early 2014, during discussion about directions for the library's next digital project. As best as staff can recall, personal interests in craft beer led to a suggestion to do something which would involve local breweries. When viewed more objectively in terms of the library's goals for a digital project, this idea had merit beyond personal interest. It aligned with the library's mission statement about providing "library resources that anticipate and respond to community interests and needs," and it also met the library's priority to "help the community flourish."

Portland Brew Stories, www.multcolib.org/beer

Multnomah County Library's previous digital projects had focused on the history of the library. With this new one, director of collections and technical services and project sponsor Javier Gutierrez said that the library "wanted it to be fun, we wanted it to be interesting, and we didn't want to do ... what libraries typically do." Erica Findley, cataloging and metadata librarian and later Portland Brew Stories project manager, saw it as an opportunity to "connect with the community ... in a way that they weren't expecting." She thought it would be exciting to patrons because craft brewing is something that this region is known for.

According to the Oregon Craft Beer website (2016), there are 246 brewing facilities in Oregon, 39 percent of which are located in the Portland metro area. At the time of the project, Multnomah County Library already had connections in place with two local breweries. Laurelwood Brewing had hosted a yearly event with the Friends of the Library where people who donated a book to the Friends received a free beer or root beer at the Laurelwood brewpub. Hopworks Urban Brewery had produced a special "Library Lager" in celebration of the library's 150th anniversary, with a portion of sales going to benefit the library. Javier and Erica both pointed out that many of the area's breweries are active in their community, both in the sense of the brewing community and the larger public community. For example, Ex Novo Brewing Company is a nonprofit, Hopworks puts on an annual bicycle and beer festival, and Laurelwood was founded with the idea of being a meeting place where everyone can feel welcome.

The Portland brewing community is constantly producing material of current and future interest, including photographs, artwork, and stories told by workers and owners. Multnomah County Library recognized that this information is not widely accessible, and the library saw an opportunity to help gather and share these resources with the community while also contributing to their preservation for future researchers.

Planning and Building Partnerships

Erica Findley was selected as project manager, and one of her first steps was to look for other organizations who had done similar projects. The Oregon Hops and Brewing Archive at Oregon State University was identified, according to Erica, as an institution which "had done a similar project, might have suggestions for us, and might even have some content for us." Multnomah County Library did not have a previous relationship with the archive, but an initial phone call soon led to an in-person meeting. Tiah Edmunson-Morton, curator of the Oregon Hops and Brewing Archive, recalls her initial thought about Portland Brew Stories as being: "Cool!" One of her goals with the Oregon Hops and Brewing Archive is to "connect with colleagues throughout the state and support their work to save brewing history": Multnomah County Library's new project fit right in with that. Tiah took an active role in attending meetings and supporting the project throughout its duration.

Materials in the Oregon Hops and Brewing Archives, Oregon State University Special Collections and Archives Research Center. Used by permission.

This digital project was different from those that Multnomah County Library had done in the past, due both to the collaboration with the Oregon Hops and Brewing Archive and also to the fact that the library was going to be reaching out to the community to gather items for digitization and sharing, as opposed to looking within its own collections for material. Erica spent a lot of time planning who should be involved and composing a project team, something which was "tremendously helpful" and a "huge step in advancing the project systemwide." The team ultimately included: managers from technical services, programming and community outreach, and marketing and online engagement; librarians who would coordinate programming, outreach, and copyright planning for the collection; and front-line library staff who would reach out to local breweries and collect material for the collection. The team held monthly meetings where members discussed issues related to the project and helped shape the direction of the collection.

Creating the Collection

An initial goal was set for 500 items from 10 different breweries. A project sub-team focused on reaching out to local breweries; they identified possible brewery partners and organized the list by brewery size and geographic location so that the collection would represent a variety of businesses. Surprisingly, every brewery approached about the project agreed to participate. Additional breweries were chosen for inclusion in the collection based on relationships already in place with the Oregon Hops and Brewing Archive. The collection ended up containing 489 items from 14 breweries. Additional breweries and items will be added going forward.

Before making contact with breweries, the outreach sub-team prepared checklists for what to talk about when meeting with brewery representatives, including at initial meetings

and later when picking up items. My role on the project was to make a plan for addressing copyright, and I created (with review from the county attorney's office) a form that brewery representatives could sign to assert copyright ownership and give permission for the library to copy and share donated items.

Initial contacts with selected breweries began in May 2015, followed shortly thereafter by in-person visits. The collection of donated items and gathering of paperwork took place over the summer. When library staff met with breweries, they asked for any items which would help tell the brewery's story, focusing on visually interesting items rather than business records. Not surprisingly, there were sometimes difficulties in connecting with very busy staff at the breweries, but overall the experience was rewarding for staff involved (all of whom happened to be lovers of local

1985 photograph of Bridgeport brewmaster Karl Ockert, surrounded by notables from the Portland brewing community. Used by permission.

beer). Library assistant Larry Randall reported that the experience was "fun and interesting" and "very rewarding to connect the library with a community that so epitomizes Portland."

Much of the material received was already digital, in the format of images saved on flash drives. Erica Findley photographed all three-dimensional items, and library volunteers helped with flat-bed scanning of two-dimensional documents. After being digitized, donated physical items were given to the Oregon Hops and Brewing Archive for possible inclusion in their archival collections.

The project team decided that, in addition to images and documents, videos would be "a good way to bring people into the collection" and "get some of the 'stories' into Portland Brew Stories and provide a narrative that went beyond … the individual items," according to Erica.

Screenshot from the video teaser for Portland Brew Stories. Used under license from Hopstories.

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Local video production company Hopstories was recommended by the Oregon Hops and Brewing Archive, and the library worked with them to figure out a plan for the videos that would be created. Hopstories produced four videos for the collection: three featuring the stories of particular breweries, and a shorter video that would serve as a teaser for the collection.

A team of library staff helped research and write metadata describing each item in the collection. The Oregon Hops and Brewing Archive contributed descriptions that appear on the landing page for each brewery within the larger collection.

Portland Brew Stories Makes its Debut

Programming Librarian Anne Tran recruited presenters from the community to put on various programs related to beer, brewing, and hops that could be offered at library branches in the months following the launch of the new collection. A total of 20 events were eventually held at 11 library locations (for example, "Beer Balms and Beauty," a program about making your own cosmetic products with beer). In general, hands-on classes were found to be more popular than lecture-style programs.

Branded tote bag and bottle opener from the Portland Brew Stories kick-off event.

The Portland Brew Stories collection went live on the library website in early February 2016, and a kick-off event attended by 63 library patrons was held at the Central Library on February 11. Staff from five breweries were on hand to distribute tasters of their beer (beer drinking is not typical at library events, and required more-than-usual planning and approval), and gift bags with Portland Brew Stories-branded items like a bottle opener and a coaster were given out. Beer historian Bill Schneller presented a talk about the history of brewing in Portland, and computers were available for attendees to tour the new collection. According to project sponsor Javier Gutierrez, library staff at the event felt like it was "such a different feel and a different community coming in for a program [compared to other library events]... there was a lot of excitement."

In the month after the collection's launch, 2,639 online visitors viewed Portland Brew Stories. The top source of referrals to the collection was the mobile version of Facebook, with 577 users finding their way to the collection via links from that source. The second highest referrer was Google, implying that many patrons were finding the digital collection via Web searches. Videos were the most popular item type in the collection during the first month.

Traffic to the collection has gone down since the first month that it was live, but there is potential to do further promotion and outreach in the future. On March 17, 2016, Erica Findley talked about the collection on a local news radio station. In July 2016, the library hosted a table at the Oregon Craft Beer Festival in Portland. The beer festival outreach was

successful in reaching many community members who had not used the library recently (in some cases not since they were children): 40 new library cards were created for patrons at the event. One of the library staff members, Steve Roskoski, reported that the experience was wonderful and that "people were perplexed to see [the library] at a beer event, so we had fun explaining."

Beer! At the library! Just some of the beer being served at the Portland Brew Stories kick-off event.

Project Successes

Portland Brew Stories was successful in that it met the original project goals: secure participation of local breweries, create a visually-appealing online collection that tells the story of brewing in the Portland area, provide programming at library locations to complement the online collection, and connect with the community in a way they were not expecting. But the project also succeeded beyond those initial goals.

When asked why they most felt the project was successful, project sponsor Javier Gutierrez and project manager Erica Findley both brought up the words engagement and commitment. Javier talked about the experience of involving staff and letting them direct the project, and "seeing how engaged ... and committed they were." Erica mentioned the surprise of discovering the breweries' "level of excitement ... and the level of commitment that they brought" to this project, and seeing the "level of engagement that already exists in our community with the library." Tiah Edmunson-Morton of the Oregon Hops and Brewing Archive commented that the project was a positive example of "building new relationships with regional library colleagues, new and existing patrons, and the business community" and engaging "patrons as content creators."

Lessons Learned and Advice for Other Libraries

The Portland Brew Stories project was a learning opportunity for Multnomah County Library. When asked what they would tell other libraries who are planning a similar community-based digital project, staff identified the following suggestions.

• **Have a vision and a plan before you get started.** In this project, the work of creating a vision for the collection happened at the same time as kicking off the meetings of the project team. In hindsight, project manager Erica Findley felt that it would be better to have had a stronger vision and direction for the project in place before the project team's work began, so that team members could have a clearer idea of their role and be more able to focus on their areas of expertise.

- **Create partnerships, internally and externally.** Project sponsor Javier Gutierrez emphasized partnerships as being key, both external partnerships such as the one with the Oregon Hops and Brewing Archive, and also partnerships internally among library departments so that there is investment from across the institution. Partnerships can let you share the workload, introduce you to people, and help you learn. Recruit team members who are genuinely excited about the work (in this project's case, it wasn't hard to find staff who are passionate about beer!) and then let those staff be the face of the project.

- **When working with community organizations: plan ahead, be enthusiastic, and be firm and clear in your communication.** The Portland Brew Stories brewery outreach sub-team gave the following suggestions for reaching out to community organizations. Start with easy ones first, those where you already have a connection or an in. Do research ahead of time about organizations you will be contacting so that you already know something about them before your first meeting. Give firm deadlines for participation; you can always be forgiving and extend those deadlines later. Be enthusiastic, and demonstrate how visible and popular the end product will be. Remember to be effusive in your thanks.

- **The first digital project is the hardest.** Planning and managing a digitization project can be difficult, especially when it is new for your library. With Portland Brew Stories, Erica created a lot of documentation around the work that was done, including "how much of a time commitment people actually had to give," and "how much money we ended up actually having to spend between all the different departments ... now we can use that in the planning for the next project." The planning for digital projects gets easier when you have some sort of baseline, even if every new project will have its own unique (and challenging and exciting) aspects.

Rising to the Challenge and Challenging the Perception of the Library

Portland Brew Stories was already underway when the Aspen Institute's *Rising to the Challenge* report began being widely discussed at Multnomah County Library. In hindsight, however, the project is a good example of a library leveraging the key assets identified in the report (people, place, and platform) and pursuing the strategies for success that it lays out (aligning library services in support of community goals, providing access to content in all formats, ensuring the long-term sustainability of public libraries, and cultivating leadership) (Garner, 2014). With this project, Multnomah County Library identified a subject of interest to the community and took a leadership role in gathering and sharing the community's historical and cultural content relevant to that subject.

Will this project, and the Aspen Institute's strategies, help lead to future success and long-term sustainability for the library? It is too soon to say. Already, however, Portland Brew Stories was a valuable opportunity to create a digital collection which pursued these aspirations. More importantly, the project provided a chance to engage with the community in new ways, and it challenged and expanded the community's idea of what a library can be.

References

(All quotes from individuals are the result of personal communications which took place between June 6 and July 13, 2016.)

Garmer, Amy K. (2014, October). *Rising to the challenge: Re-envisioning public libraries: A report of the Aspen Institute Dialogue on Public Libraries.* Retrieved from: http://csreports.aspeninstitute.org/documents/AspenLibrariesReport.pdf

Multnomah County Library. (n.d.). *Portland brew stories.* Retrieved from: https://gallery.multcolib.org/exhibit/portland-brew-stories

Oregon Craft Beer. (2016, June 29). Another good year for Oregon beer: Oregon craft beer by the numbers. *Facts.* Retrieved from: http://oregoncraftbeer.org/facts/

Additional Resources

If you would like more details about any aspect of the Portland Brew Stories project, contact Erica Findley (ericaf@multcolib.org) and Ross Betzer (rossbk@multcolib.org). Erica recommends the following online resources for libraries new to digitization projects:

Association for Library Collections and Technical Services, Preservation and Reformatting Section. (2013, June). *Minimum digitization capture recommendations.* Retrieved from: http://www.ala.org/alcts/resources/preserv/minimum-digitization-capture-recommendations
These are a really great set of guidelines for digitization compiled from many sources.

Digital Public Library of America. (n.d.). *Public library partnerships project.* Retrieved from: https://dp.la/info/about/projects/public-library-partnerships/
The curriculum on this website is designed for public libraries. It includes tutorials that are good primers on each stage of a digitization project including planning, selection, and metadata.

OCLC, Inc. (2013, June 20). *Best Practices for CONTENTdm and other OAI-PMH compliant repositories: Creating sharable metadata.* Retrieved from: https://www.oclc.org/content/dam/support/wcdigitalcollectiongateway/MetadataBestPractices.pdf
This is an easy to follow guide on creating a metadata schema. It will allow an institution to easily share their collections across other repositories.

Acknowledgements