

Creating a Local Beer Archive from Scratch

Briana Giasullo

During a 2016 proposal review for the California State University San Marcos (CSUSM) to implement a brewing science certificate program, Judith A. Downie, special collections and history librarian for the university, discovered that nobody in the San Diego area was actively collecting research materials from local breweries. Fearing that an “epicenter for the craft beer movement” would lose its collective memory of local beer history, she requested and received approval from Library Dean Jennifer Fabbi to gather items from breweries that would eventually become the Brewhive collection (Downie, 2018). Now successfully up and running, the Brewhive can be visited online and will be an integral resource for the CSUSM brewing science certificate program to be offered in the Spring of 2019. There is still much work to be done before then, and while visiting local breweries for research purposes may sound fun and easy, Judith faces many challenges that are common to the archival profession: determining a reasonable scope, finding relevant and unrestricted materials, and building long term relationships with other busy professionals.

Defining the Brewhive’s scope and collection policy was the first step in its creation, and Judith first needed to determine her main audience. Students enrolled in the brewing certificate program are the obvious priority but other local researchers are also kept in mind. The next step was to establish a clearly delineated scope, without which the archive would risk being overwhelmed by materials that do not hold enduring value or are only representative of one facet of San Diego’s brewing history. As noted by Bruce W. Dearstyne’s guide for historical agencies, subscribing to an explicit collection policy that coincides with the parent organization’s mission is critical for every aspect of the archive’s success, from its overall usefulness to its ability to justify continued funding (2000). The policy needs to be both specific to the target audience and inclusive of all records creators within the designated region and timeframe.

Perhaps the most important part of the acquisitions process is for Judith to include adequate representation of the full range of brewing history in the San Diego area and to avoid keeping certain records only because she believes they are more important or more readily available than others. Her article in *American Libraries Magazine* explains that Stone Brewing, the largest brewery in Southern California, “has donated hundreds of boxes of its archival materials,” which is certainly beneficial, but poses a threat to other breweries in the area who are less able or willing to provide such a large quantity. The problem is even more severe for pre-Prohibition era breweries for which historical records are dwindling, and for the smaller breweries that cropped up after Prohibition but were ultimately unable to compete with larger operations. It is for this scarcity of earlier materials that Judith decided to narrow her focus to brewing activities dating back to the 1980s, which is when the beer industry in San Diego really began to thrive. Her decision appears necessary to better serve

the students of CSUSM, but it unfortunately leaves a significant gap in the timeline of the region's brewing history.

In addition to the shortage of materials from earlier years and smaller breweries, other barriers have made the Brewchive's acquisitions process difficult and have tested Judith's perseverance. Developing strong, trusting relationships with brewery owners is key to securing certain objects and documents that the owners either do not see the value in saving or are reluctant to share with the public. Beer recipes may be the most difficult records to acquire as they are considered proprietary information, and Judith notes that even recipes that have been "retired" often cannot be shared in case the beer is eventually brought out of retirement for a special batch. Mary Jo Pugh confirms in her book on archival reference services that companies often "expect archivists to protect intellectual property, corporate trade secrets, and research and development data" (2005), which means that Judith risks betraying the hard-earned trust of her local brewers if she fails to adequately safeguard their information.

The long and arduous process of acquiring, accessioning, and digitizing the Brewchive collections is ongoing, and Judith acknowledges that it's "too early to measure" the archive's success. Luckily she appears to be on the right track; she has clearly demonstrated her commitment to provide a collection that will best serve the students of CSUSM, and her ability to collaborate with the local brewing industry to ensure that the right materials will be collected and properly preserved. Defining exactly what to keep and how to manage access policies will always be obstacles, but careers in beer history appear to be expanding which means that research and strategies will only increase in both volume and quality over time.

References:

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