Problem

Because of its inconvenient location, the Pope House Museum in Raleigh, North Carolina struggles to attract visitors and compete with the many other historic sites in the area. Recent scholarship encourages museum professionals to rethink interpretations at historic houses and their relationships with the public, but museum professionals must also consider how historic houses can transcend their physical spaces.

To address this issue, museum interns developed a museum cart to attract passersby to the Pope House Museum. Our hope is that the museum cart will provide one solution for historic house museums that struggle to attract audiences and encourage historic house museums to push their physical boundaries.

 testing the Cart

To evaluate the success of the exhibit cart, we observed how visitors reacted to the History Mystery Traveling Cart.

When visitors approached the cart, we invited them to look at and pick up the artifacts. We then asked them to approach the objects in a method similar to the process that museum employees undertake when researching an obscure artifact.

Visitors considered questions like: What do you already know about the object? What additional information do you need? How did the object function? Who would use this object? Is the material significant? Would this object have been expensive or affordable? What is its place in the everyday history of Raleigh?

To ensure success, the cart must:

**Connect to an event:** As indicated by our high level of success during First Friday and the living history event and the low level of success on a Saturday afternoon, visitors will stop by the cart only when they know it is connected to an already ongoing museum event.

**Include signage:** The cart currently has no signage that indicates its affiliation with the City of Raleigh Museum or the Pope House, which is possibly why passersby on the street did not stop to engage with the cart. Furthermore, the cart should include visitor information and directions to the Pope House.

**Have appropriate protocols** set in place if artifacts are broken or damaged: Visitors handle objects in the teaching cart, and volunteers at the cart should be aware of the Museum’s collection policies regarding what to do with broken or damaged objects.

We hope that other house museums can replicate this project by following these guidelines.

The Cart

Interns completed The History Mystery Cart, and the museum is in the process of acquiring artifacts for a cart about twentieth-century medicine, specifically designed for the Pope House.

Each cart includes 3-5 artifacts and a script with artifact descriptions and discussion questions.

Cart Objectives:

- Attract passersby and inspire historical inquiry.
- Create an opportunity for citizens to engage tangibly with artifacts from Raleigh’s history.
- Garner interest for both the City of Raleigh Museum and the Pope House Museum.

**History Mystery Cart**
- Marshmallow Toaster, ca. 1930
- Telegraph Transmitter, ca. 1930
- Matchbox Holder, early 20th c.

**Twentieth-Century Medicine Cart**
- Medicine Bottle, pre-1911
- Kielland Forceps, ca. 1916
- Tooth Extractor, ca. 1900

Conclusions

The City of Raleigh Museum is re-envisioning how they can attract visitors to the Pope House Museum. Based on our research, we believe that a traveling exhibit cart will be a successful avenue for taking the Pope Family’s story outside of their home and into the community.

To ensure success, the cart must:

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References


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