

BEE CENTENNIAL FAMILY FARM MUSEUM FORT COLLINS, COLORADO

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PROJECT INTRODUCTION

The Bee Farm Museum maintains and interprets perhaps the most complete record of a single family's efforts to homestead and farm the high plains of northern Colorado. The agricultural history museum is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that preserves the Bee Farm National Register Historic District, located about nine miles northeast of downtown Fort Collins. Since the museum opened to the public in 2002, a very small group of Bee family members have dedicated themselves, without compensation, to cataloging and preserving thousands of artifacts and documents; constructing exhibits; maintaining historic structures; raising crops and livestock historically associated with the farm; and leading hundreds of public tours and educational programs. However, these family members are getting older; thus, they are increasingly interested in securing the future operation of the museum beyond the Bee family. A critical step in this process is developing a site management plan, which will allow museum professionals outside the immediate family to continue to maintain and operate the farm museum, preserving the site and its extensive collection for future generations.

INTERNSHIP GOALS

- researching museum management procedures and policies at peer institutions
- learning and interpreting the significance of the Bee Farm Centennial Farm Museum in the larger context of Colorado's agricultural history
- shadowing museum staff to understand and evaluate daily practices
- authoring a site management plan based on the findings from the previous three goals

HOW DOES THIS APPLY TO YOUR EDUCATION

As a historian, my goal is to work in a museum setting or in a living history museum. The end goal I am working towards is working at the Smithsonian, but I am also looking forward to all of the other museums in between here and there.

This internship allows me to explore the needs of small museums and experience working in a museum with other museum staff.

I also had the opportunity to meet museum professionals at near by peer museums so that helped me expand my professional network.

WHAT YOU DID

I worked with current museum staff to record the daily work at the museum in preparation for the possibility of a museum director. I put together a comprehensive site management plan that was in depth and fully encompassed the work done at the museum. I also collaborated with neighboring museums. From my visits to other museums, I was even able to help the Bee Farm acquire a fiberglass draft horse for demonstrations and scale (picture below). I worked with a fellow intern, Natalie Stacker, to evaluate the high-value items in the collection and help market the museum to further academic research as well as prepare for writing grant applications. Natalie was an intern through the Public Lands History Center at CSU and a graduate student in the Department of History's Public History program. Working with the Bee Family, who started the museum, I recorded the more recent history of the transition from a working farm to the beginnings of the museum.

During the summer months, I helped to lead tours through the museum, diagramed the buildings on the property, aided with museum promotion (and walked in the Wellington 4th of July parade), and had a chance to meet and get to know the Bee family members.

Myself, Liz Harrison (museum founder) and the new draft horse model I attained for the Bee Farm Museum



WHAT YOU LEARNED

This internship taught me a lot about what it takes to run a museum, as well as how to start one from scratch. I learned how to work with family members in the public who have a vested interest in the stories told at the museum. I learned more about how to organize events as well as the struggles that come with live animals at a museum. I learned more about farm museums in Colorado as well. The biggest learning opportunity also lay in the content of the museum. I thought that I had known about agricultural history in Northern Colorado, but this internship gave me a chance to really dig into the agricultural basis for Fort Collins. I learned about the significance of CSU in the area and how smaller farms survived in hard times.

I learned how to communicate the knowledge that I have learned about museums in school into a practical and realistic setting. Another hard thing that was reinforced was the fact that not everything can be saved in museums and that



scope of museums needs to be limited so that it is valuable. Many of the things that I learned about museums themselves were just reiterations of what I had learned in the classroom, it just felt slightly different and more pertinent when I was experiencing it for myself.

NEXT STEPS

In order for the museum to thrive, there needs to be more work done for the family. The list below are some ideas for internships in the future.

- Grant writing
- Cataloging into a professional museum database, like PastPerfect
- Oral histories from the surviving family members
- Community outreach internship to help establish local partners
- Volunteer coordinator internship to organize a volunteer base