

Summer Internship Report 2017

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Hometown: Knoxville, Tennessee



**East Tennessee Historical Society
Knoxville, Tennessee**

Provide an overview of the organization/research project and a summary of your responsibilities, tasks, and/or projects.

During my internship, I worked with the curator of artifacts and the curator of education. I did inventory of artifacts when I worked with the curator of artifacts. I also documented artifacts for the inventory. I worked with the quilt expert for a few days, helping document the quilts that were to be used. I also did research for the upcoming temporary quilt gallery. The curators used some of my research in the gallery texts. I also helped research for the family gallery that will be built in a year. The director of the museum allowed me to go on a business trip to a few museums in Raleigh, North Carolina. There the curators and I interviewed the museum's curators about how they presented their children's galleries. This was for the very beginning stages of planning out the family gallery. The tasks that I did for the curator of education included shadowing the volunteers while they gave tours, organizing the classroom, preparing crafts for children, and reviewing the state standards. I also worked on my own research project about Muslims in East Tennessee.

During your internship, what did you accomplish or how did you make a difference? In what ways did you grow in your professional and technical skills?

In the first few weeks of my internship, I researched how other museums present their children's gallery. I put my research on an Excel spreadsheet so it could be passed around easily. Through my research, the curators and the directors realized they wanted to go through a different route than most museums. Rather than having the gallery be a hands-on play area, they want it to be more educational. They still want the kids to have a little play though, so they liked my ideas for the family gallery such as a dress-up corner and a mini log cabin. Through the business trip, I learned what goes into planning a museum exhibit. I learned a few tips on how to stage a gallery, such as making sure the texts are at a good eye level. I also learned how to date textiles by working with a quilt expert. She

showed me how to date them by looking at the patterns and the colors. She and other quilters helped me improve my sewing skills as we sewed extra cloth on the quilts' backs so we could hang them. I helped review the state standards and give examples of how the museum meets them. Something that I accomplished was that I helped build a bridge between the historical society and the Muslim community. I had a few talks with my main supervisor, the volunteer coordinator, about how to bring in marginalized people's history to the museum and how to reach out to different demographics of people. I took it upon myself to research the history of Muslims in East Tennessee.

Describe a problem that you helped to solve at your internship. What skills or knowledge from your education at Sewanee helped you address the problem?

I felt that there was a severe lack of representation of people other than settlers and their decedents. It is a East Tennessee museum and historical society, so it makes sense they would be focused on these people, but Knoxville has become so diverse that it is important to give other people a voice in history. Most of the museum's visitors are school groups, and those school groups are made up of children of all different backgrounds. It is harder for children of color to get enthusiastic or feel connected to the history that is presented in the museum. In order to get those children participating and wanting to learn more history, I think it is important to teach them history they can connect with. I wanted to learn more about the Muslim community and their history in Knoxville. There is a teaching program about immigration to East Tennessee, so I thought it would be good to include stories about Muslim immigrants. In order to have these stories, I used my research skills I learned at Sewanee and scoured databases online as well as old newspaper articles. Once I exhausted those resources, I reached out to the Muslim community in order to interview some of their members. I wrote a small research paper on my findings and gave that to my boss. She said she will find a way to use the information I gathered. Right now the director doesn't see the issue with a mostly white demographic or with minorities being represented, so it'll have to be used later.

In what way were your teamwork skills strengthened?

I mostly worked with another college student in the artifact inventory. We had to work together to find and identify artifacts. Sometimes we debated whether or not the artifact met the description, so we worked together to figure it out. We worked out a good system of finding the artifacts faster. I also worked with volunteers who were older retired teachers. We worked together to organize the children during the tours. I was good at making sure the kids were following the museum rules while the volunteers taught the programs.

How did your internship affect your career plans?

Working at a museum opened my eyes to more possibilities for history majors like myself. I know I want to do historical research, but I always thought the only way to do that was through being a professor and getting grants. I now know of different ways to research history like being an archivist or a curator. I also found it interesting how the curators contextualize history for the public. It'd be interesting to go into museum studies to see how to make history more accessible.

In what ways did your internship cause you to encounter people of different backgrounds from your own? What steps did you take to communicate effectively with such persons? What did you learn from such persons' perspectives?

When I was researching the history of Muslims in East Tennessee, I had to interview members of the Muslim community about their immigration story and about their lives in Knoxville. It was hard to get people to participate. I got into contact with some people I already knew and asked them to let the older members of the community that I was doing this. I received only one phone call, and it was

hard to understand the man. In order to properly introduce myself and talk to the people in person, I went to a local mosque open house. I met the imam there and learned more about Islam and how the first Muslims immigrated to Knoxville in 1970s. I talked with more members of the community about how they saw their community grow and change over the years. I learned from them how hard working they all are and of how diverse their community is. They've come a long way to become an integral part of Knoxville.

Words of thanks to your internship funding donors:

Thank you so much for funding my internship. I would have never been able to intern at the museum if it hadn't been funded. I learned valuable skills that I will use in the future whether I work in a museum or in an office setting. Having this job has reassured me that I can get a job in my field. It has also reassured me that I do want to go into historical research. I loved documenting the artifacts and learning about their history. Thank you for this opportunity.