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Jury Project Proposal

My jury project is very dear to my heart because it developed from a lifelong desire to somehow be a part of a generations-old family tradition- making bourbon. Sadly, my interests in areas like literature and history leave me ill equipped to follow in the footsteps of my father and pursue a career in the actual distilling process. Instead of taking this path, I have designed a project that will allow me to contribute to the bourbon industry, and to Jim Beam Brands in particular, in a way with which I am comfortable. I propose a collection of ten oral histories, taped interviews with members of the Beam family, present and former employees of Jim Beam, and community members from the Bardstown area nearby Jim Beam whose lives have been impacted by the bourbon industry.

So why is this sort of work important and what does it contribute to central Kentucky? While planning this project, I have realized that this work is more important than even I had initially thought. I have come to understand that the bourbon industry is an extremely valuable asset to Kentucky and to central Kentucky especially. It is a cultural asset- something unique to our state that we Kentuckians can take pride in and identify with. Kentucky bourbon is known throughout the world and gives people in faraway places like Japan or Australia something more positive than KFC to associate with our state. In other words, bourbon is a major component of our state's collective identity. It is also an economic asset- bourbon contributes economically to our state not only by providing jobs and generating revenue, but also by attracting tourists.

Since the bourbon industry is so integral to Kentucky, it is important that local scholars and historians do not neglect it. It is our responsibility to study the industry, to record its history and to understand how it helped shape our state. Furthermore, it is important to cultivate interest in bourbon both in order to promote tourism and to encourage Kentuckians to continue taking pride in it. I have chosen oral histories as my medium because they have a unique ability to capture history that probably would not make it into a book, history that exists only in oral tradition. Oral history preserves not only the facts, but also the impressions and emotions of the speakers that are invariably lost on the page.

In my interviews, I will of course record historical information, but I also want to learn how my interviewees *feel* about the bourbon industry and Jim Beam. Do they feel that Jim Beam is a legacy that they are a part of? How has Jim Beam influenced their communities and their lives? How do they feel about the transformations Jim Beam has undergone of late, such as its recent transition to multinational status? These are some of the questions that will underlie the major themes of the complete collection.

After I have conducted the interviews, and they have been transcribed and edited with the help of the Special Collections staff, they will be housed in the UK Special Collections Library, where researchers and amateurs alike will be able to access them. Presently, the UK library system has appallingly little information related to the bourbon industry, and they need to expand their holdings on this subject because it is so important to the community they serve. It is my hope that my project will serve as a catalyst to encourage UK to do more research and acquire more materials related to bourbon. In fact, Doug Boyd, director of UK's Oral History Center, has already suggested that my

research has the potential to inspire a broader project involving other researchers aside from myself, an encouraging sign that my work will have a significant long-term impact.

The oral histories will also be accessible on the Kentucky Virtual Library website, which is very exciting because this will allow any Kentuckian or in fact, anyone with the Internet to access them from home. The transcripts and audio recordings, once on the website, will be searchable and easy to use. I will write an introduction page, summaries of the topics covered in each interview, and create an animated montage of photographs and audio clips from the interviews to make the website even more useful and attractive. Note that the web component will not be fully realized, but only begun by the February presentation deadline due to the extensive amount of time consumed in transcribing and editing the oral histories, which may consist of up to twenty hours of audio. It is feasible, however, that the collection could be fully available online by the end of spring semester. In addition to the library and the website, the collection will also be provided to Jim Beam for use at their discretion for promotional purposes as they work to bolster their ability to attract tourists.

To realize this project, I am working with Bill Marshall, a UK faculty member at Special Collections. His expertise in research and oral history has been and will continue to be invaluable to my success. He has helped me navigate the Special Collections Library to find newspaper clippings and other useful resources and is currently helping me to develop interview questions. He has also worked with me to outline a schedule that defines when I will go out into the field to perform the interviews. It is important that I adhere to a structured schedule because Special Collections staff will be needed to work on the transcripts after each interview and I will also need to request to borrow Special

Collections' recording equipment in advance of every interview (a copy of this schedule can be found at the end of the document). My second juror is Debra Watkins, the curator and director of educational programs at the Lexington History Museum. She is a local historian who is well practiced at oral history and is willing to critique my early interviews to help me improve my technique. She is very enthusiastic about the project and I'm certain that she will be a very helpful contact.

Finally, budget is not a major concern for me because Special Collections is providing me access to most of the resources I need free of charge. My only considerable expenditure will be the cost of travel. My schedule includes five definite trips to Bardstown to conduct interviews and at least an additional two trips will be needed to do field research at the Nelson County Public Library. It costs about \$20 to drive to Bardstown and back so all in all that comes \$140 of gas over the course of the year.

Jury Project Schedule

10/6- 10/17

- Acquire contact information for all potential interviewees
- First draft of interview questions for first three interviewees
- Meet with advisors to discuss questions
- Contact first three interviewees

10/20-10/25

- Second draft of interview questions for first three interviewees
- Meet with advisors to discuss questions
- Acquire recording equipment
- Practice interview
- Contact next two interviewees

11/1

- Conduct first interview

11/3- 11/7

- Meet with advisors to discuss interview
- First draft of questions for next two interviewees
- Discuss questions with advisors
- Contact final two interviewees

11/14-11/16

- Conduct second & third interviews

11/15- 11/17

- Meet with advisors to discuss these interviews
- Final draft of next two interviewees

11/21-11/23

- Conduct fourth & fifth interviews

11/24-12/18

- Discuss interviews with advisors
- Draft for final two interviews
- Discuss questions with advisors

Break- 12/19- 1/14

- Conduct last two interviews
- Write a reflection on the process and my conclusions
- Edit photographs

1/15

- Meet with advisors to discuss progress over winter break and how to proceed with website

1/16-2/16

- Write introductory material for website
- Work on website
- Create animated intro with photos and audio clips for website

2/3

- Last day to schedule final presentation

2/27

- Last day for jury project presentations

References

Grele, Ronald J. Envelopes of Sound. Chicago: Precedent Publishing, Inc., 1975.

Hoopes, James. Oral History: An Introduction for Students. Chapel Hill, NC:

The University of North Carolina Press, 1979.