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Notes from the Archives

Exhibiting Mental Health History in the Patton State Hospital Museum

by Shannon Long, Amanda Castro, and Sarah Hansen

Introduction

In any museum, it is important that the artifacts on display represent the theme of the exhibit. One of the first steps in creating an exhibit is to choose artifacts that will bring visitors closer to the topic discussed and to help them understand what role the artifacts played in history. Each artifact must provide a means to interpret the story behind that theme. When the right artifacts are chosen for an exhibit the visitor feels transported to another time because physical representations of the past can have a lasting impact on the memory. These same artifacts can also make visitors feel enlightened about the topic in that they are able to see how and when each item was created and used. All artifacts chosen to be on display should aid patrons in leaving the exhibit with a better understanding of the topic being interpreted. These were the exact qualifications that we followed while curating items to be on display at the Patton State Hospital Museum. This article will reflect on the establishment of the museum and archive of artifacts, photographs, and documents belonging to and related to Patton State Hospital (hereafter referred to as “Patton”) located in Highland, California. Special focus will be provided on key items

within each major exhibit throughout the museum and how these items work to interpret the history of Patton.

This museum and archive project, although it has been in the works for years, became a joint initiative between Patton and California State University, San Bernardino's History Department (hereafter referred to as CSUSB) in January 2014. The goal of the project was to provide Patton staff, students, volunteers, interns, official visitors, and researchers with information about the history of the hospital and about the history of mental health care in Southern California from the establishment of the hospital in 1890 to the present. We hope that the museum and archive will provide an educational venue that will raise awareness and will further efforts to provide the best care possible to patients. Ultimately, this project is intended to open the museum to the public in an effort to create awareness of the plight of the mentally ill in California, treatment modalities utilized by Patton State Hospital over the course of its history, and to provide a means by which patients, their families, Patton staff, and the local community can reflect on their stories for posterity.

With over 120 years of history, Patton provides a wealth of information regarding the care of the mentally ill in California, yet until now there has been little effort to preserve the history, artifacts, or buildings of the institution. Though there has been a plan for the establishment of an archive and museum at Patton for many years, Patton lacked the personnel and expertise to take on such a large endeavor. Hospital historian and supervising social worker Anthony Ortega, L.C.S.W., has been collecting and organizing artifacts from all over the hospital for several years and was housing these artifacts in an unused room on the grounds. Two years ago Mr. Ortega was able to secure a location for the museum on the grounds, however, with little available time and no experience in museum and archive methods, the project stagnated until graduate student Shannon Long, who was studying public history and the history of mental health expressed an interest in the project in the Fall of 2013. After a contract was drawn up between CSUSB's History department, Mrs. Long and three undergraduate

public history interns, Amanda Castro, Cassie Grand, and Danielle Bennett began work on the project in January 2014. Two months later another undergraduate public history student, Sarah Hansen, joined the project. Fifteen months later, and with further assistance from undergraduate students Brent Bellah and Casey Lee, the students have established an archiving system, designed all the exhibits in the museum, installed the exhibits, and opened the museum on April 17th, 2015.

In the process of establishing the museum and archive, hundreds of artifacts, photographs, and documents collected over the years by Patton staff have now been preserved and, where possible, digitized and organized into a searchable database. Several of each type of object is on display in the museum and the entire collection is in the process of being logged into the archival system. Countless hours have been dedicated to researching the history of Patton, the artifacts displayed in the museum, and the history of mental health care in general in order to provide an accurate and informative experience for visitors to the museum.

Patton State Hospital

Patton State Hospital was the fifth state hospital established by the state of California to care for the state's mentally ill. It was established in 1890 and accepted its first patients under the name Southern California State Asylum for the Insane and Inebriates in 1893. The hospital was renamed Patton State Hospital in 1927 after a member of the board of directors.¹ A State Commission in Lunacy was established by the turn of the century to oversee the state hospital system.² That commission would be replaced by the Department of Institution in 1920.³

¹ April Wursten, "Patton Time Line," March 28, 2005; Patton State Hospital Library, Patton, California.

² Joel T. Braslow, *Mental Ills and Bodily Cures: Psychiatric Treatment in the First Half of the Twentieth Century* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), 16.

³ California, Department of Institutions, "First Biennial Report Two Years Ending June 30, 1922" (Sacramento: California State Printing Office, 1923), 3.

By the end of the nineteenth century, one in every 281 Californians was committed to a California state hospital. Overcrowding quickly became an issue, leading state hospitals to use deportation, parole, probation, and sterilization as the means to reduce patient populations.⁴ During the Great Depression the state established family care homes, urban psychopathic wards, and outpatient clinics to ease the cost of caring for the mentally ill in state institutions, but the financial crisis of the Depression, followed by shortages during World War II, made it difficult for the state of California to provide adequate housing and care for the state's mentally ill.⁵

After World War II, the Department of Mental Hygiene replaced the Department of Institutions and took control of the state hospital system. In 1945 the National Mental Health Act was established to provide funding for research and for the development of community mental hygiene clinics.⁶ This, along with treatment advances such as electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) and new psychiatric medications allowed many long-term patients to leave the institution and to be treated on an outpatient basis. Patton's patient population peaked at over 5,500 patients in the mid-1950s.⁷ At that point there were a total of nine state mental institutions. With the passing of the Short-Doyle Act in 1957, state aid was directed to local governments to increase community mental health services in order to provide care for patients on an outpatient or local basis. This act marked the beginning of the process of deinstitutionalization in California.⁸

The federal government passed the Community Mental Health Centers Act in 1963 which further increased the funding for

⁴ "California State Mental Health Care Historical Summary 1850-1996;" Patton State Hospital Library, Patton, California.

⁵ Al Ostrow, "People in the Dark" reprint from the San Francisco News, circa 1947.

⁶ "California State Mental Health Care Historical Summary 1850-1996."

⁷ "Medical Records Contain Files on 60,000 Patients Since 1893," The Patton Progress, November 1, 1953, 3.

⁸ "California State Mental Health Care Historical Summary 1850-1996."

community services⁹ and between 1963 and 1968 Patton's patient population decreased by nearly 2,000 patients.¹⁰ In 1967, the Governor of California, Ronald Reagan, cut state agency budgets by ten percent and laid off nearly 2,000 state hospital employees, a large number of whom were psychiatric technicians.¹¹ The deinstitutionalization movement reached its peak in the 1960s and thousands of patients were released from state hospitals. With the passage of the Lanterman-Petris-Short (LPS) Act in 1968, California's long history of committing harmless mentally ill patients in state hospitals came to an end. This act ordered the release of those patients deemed harmless and changed involuntary commitment processes in an attempt to balance civil rights and public safety by committing only those who were seen as a danger to themselves or others.¹² Another change in the system took place when the Department of Mental Health replaced the Department of Mental Hygiene in 1973.¹³

Since the passage of the LPS act most of the state hospitals have closed.¹⁴ In the early 1980s Patton became strictly a forensic facility. All current patients are committed by court order as penal code offenders.¹⁵ In 2012 the Department of State Hospitals was formed to streamline the state hospital system. Today, Patton is one of five existing state hospitals in California and is the largest forensic hospital in the United States. Patton currently houses and treats just under 1,500 patients and employs approximately 2,000 people.

Museum Approach and Methodology

The importance of this project cannot be overstated. There are few museums of psychiatry and mental health history on the west coast. By establishing the museum and archive, we hope to create

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Wursten.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ "California State Mental Health Care Summary 1850-1996."

awareness and decrease stigmatization of mental illness through education and transparency. This museum will also be the pilot project for a series of museums the California Department of State Hospitals hopes to establish at other state hospital locations.

As there are few secondary sources relating to Patton's history, we had to rely primarily on primary sources for researching Patton's history. We utilized photographs, various private documents, and some publications from Patton itself. One of the best sources for information about Patton is *The Patton Progress*, a weekly patient-written newspaper that provides a great deal of information for Patton staff and patients. This resource is available in the Patton State Hospital library and has been invaluable in piecing together Patton's history. Unfortunately, the hospital paper was only published from 1947 to 1972. This has had an effect on the approach of the exhibits and text written for the museum because there are few other sources to refer to for information prior to and following the publication of *The Patton Progress*.

For information about Patton prior to the 1940s, we had access to handwritten records held privately by Patton State Hospital regarding the establishment and early history of the hospital as well as annual and biennial reports from the various departments that oversaw the state hospital system over the years. Another resource for information on Patton prior to the 1940s is the California Digital Newspaper Collection (<http://cdnc.ucr.edu/cgi-bin/cdnc>), a searchable database that consists of articles from a variety of California newspapers from the late 19th century to the present.

Information about Patton after the 1970s was difficult to find. Patton became a forensic-only facility in the early 1980s and all patients from that point on were committed by the judicial system. Patient privacy issues and the lack of photographs, documents, and other publically and privately available

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Wursten.

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information from the late 1970s to the present has made researching Patton's last few decades difficult. We were only able to locate two reports from the Department of Mental Health for the years 1975-76 and for 1990.

All the research necessary for the design of the exhibits and for the writing of text panels was completed by October 2014. We utilized the above-mentioned literature and sources in order to provide an accurate, ethical, and informative experience for all museum visitors. The most current museum and archive methods were utilized in the design and construction of both the museum and the archives.

Key Artifacts in the Patton State Hospital Museum

The various exhibits of the museum were designed around the artifacts and photos we had available, the exhibit space we had to work in, and the information we were able to find. The exhibits were also designed along the wishes of Patton's staff. The artifacts we chose were those that provided a means to interpret key events and trends in Patton's history and that fit within the theme of the exhibits. For the purposes of this paper, we will discuss just six of the key artifacts we utilized in the exhibits in the museum; these include a discharge receipt book, an industrial toaster, a Patton Farms branding iron, a patient toothbrush holder, a hydrotherapy tub, and the first Patton payroll book.



Discharge Receipt Book in the *Patton Then and Now* Exhibit. Photo by Authors.

The first exhibit, *Patton Then and Now*, in the museum provides information about the hospital's history and the history of mental health in California and offers the context for the rest of the museum. The artifacts chosen for this exhibit encompass the entire history of Patton from the discharge receipt book, dating from 1893, to artifacts from a time capsule that was opened in December 2014. The discharge receipt book is one of the oldest Patton artifacts that has survived. When patients were discharged from the hospital they would receive a discharge receipt from this book that would provide proof of their recovery and release from the hospital. This artifact reflects the custodial nature of late nineteenth century asylums. Patients during this time were almost always committed through court proceedings to the state hospitals and were usually released on probation or parole as though they were criminals rather than mentally ill and would often have to provide proof of their recovery and release. This artifact is very much like a large check ledger in that the receipt was handed to the patient

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upon release while the stub was retained in the book for hospital records.



Industrial Toaster in the *Patton Food Services* Exhibit. Photo by Author.

The exhibit entitled *Patton Food Services* offers a glimpse into the momentous operations of preparing and serving food to patients and staff. In building an exhibit to encompass the vital role of nutrition, careful decisions have been made in regards to which artifacts to include. The purpose is to give visitors a feeling for the quantity of ingredients and finished products made in the kitchens at Patton State Hospital. One of the main artifacts in this exhibit is the industrial toaster. Measuring over three feet tall with its own exhaust pipe, it draws the attention of visitors by itself. It also shows how foods that people consume on a regular basis can quickly become extraordinary when large quantities are needed. Just one of these toasters had the capacity to make 720 slices of

toast per hour. This artifact became a centerpiece of the *Patton Food Services* exhibit because it is representative of the amount of work involved in feeding a large patient and staff population. It also allows visitors to understand what a physically large operation it was by being able to see just how large the machinery used in the kitchens was, and still is.



Branding Iron in the *Self-Sustainment* Exhibit. Photo by Authors.

Essential to the understanding of how Patton operated as a community, the *Self-Sustainment* exhibit explains the various processes that allowed the hospital to be a city within itself. There are many artifacts that are of equal importance to the design of this exhibit. The branding iron is a seemingly small choice to highlight, but appearances can be deceiving. A rod made of cast iron with a simple “PF” on the end of it signifying Patton Farms, this tool was used to brand cattle raised on hospital grounds. It is an excellent representation of the exhibit theme of self-sustainment because this simple tool affected many departments. It was made by iron workers in the shops before being used to brand the cattle. The

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cattle were then sent to the butcher shop and used in the kitchens to feed patients and staff. The branding iron shows that even a relatively small piece of an exhibit can communicate a theme thoroughly.



Toothbrush Holder in the *Patient Life* Exhibit. Photo by Authors

The *Patient Life* exhibit's design brings visitors into the surroundings and daily lives of the patients who have called Patton their home. The visitor is able to view various artifacts and images that take them into a housing unit at Patton. The artifact that has had the most impact on museum staff and visitors alike is the toothbrush holder, which has become a conversation starter for those who enter the exhibit. Since found in an abandoned housing

unit on the Patton campus, it has put into perspective the difficulties that come with sharing personal space with such a large group of people. This particular toothbrush holder holds up to 80 toothbrushes. It kept the toothbrushes organized in horizontal rows hanging from small nails in the board. With such large groups of patients averaging eighty per unit even the mundane activity of brushing one's teeth becomes a struggle. The object evokes in most visitors the image of patients fighting over the top spots on the holder in order to keep their toothbrushes out of the line of drippings from other toothbrushes above. This artifact is one that brings the patient's story to life and allows patrons to understand the complexities of patients' daily lives while at Patton.

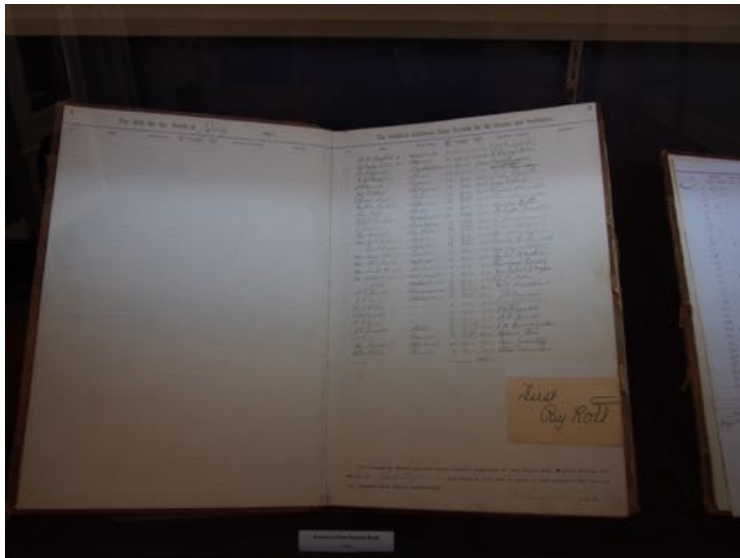


Hydrotherapy Tub in the *Patient Treatment* Exhibit. Photo by Authors.

The exhibit titled *Patient Treatment* includes artifacts, photos, and information related to historical and current psychiatric treatment modalities utilized to treat the patients at Patton over the

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course of its history. It is the goal of this exhibit to ensure that visitors will leave mindful of the changes made in psychiatric treatment over the last 125 years. Included in this exhibit is a hydrotherapy tub from the second decade of the twentieth century. Hydrotherapy was a common treatment for the mentally ill in the early twentieth century. Patients were confined in hydrotherapy tubs by being wrapped in sheets and covered with a canvas top to regulate temperature. It was thought that water could have a healing effect while confinement would cause agitated patients to calm down. Treatments could last several hours. Hydrotherapy fell into disuse in the mid-twentieth century when more effective treatments, such as electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) and psychopharmaceuticals became available. This artifact represents one of many treatments that were once commonly utilized at Patton but are no longer practiced.



First Payroll in the *People of Patton* Exhibit. Photo by Authors.

One of the most historically significant artifacts within the Patton collection is Patton's first payroll book. The *People of*

Patton exhibit highlights this artifact. It works as a starting point to help visitors understand how the staff and volunteers who have kept the hospital functioning since 1893 have shaped the history of Patton. Opened to the first page, the book includes the first set of staff members to work on Patton grounds. Listed are staff members from the Executive Director of the hospital to the dairy man. Categories included on the payroll are name, occupation, days worked, rate of salary, amount due, and a received payment signature from each staff member. This gives visitors an idea of how times have changed and how the system of pay has changed. Rather than the mass-produced checks, pay stubs, and direct deposit the hospital uses today, the first staff members had to sign out their payment. All staff members were able to view pay and hours worked for other staff. The first Patton payroll is an artifact that has a huge impact on employees who visit the exhibit. They are struck by the differences in pay and even the intricate signatures that cover the page. As part an exhibit focused on staff this artifact brings current staff into contact with those of the past in an immeasurable way.

Conclusion

As the above items show, there were many diverse artifacts from which to choose when designing the exhibits for the Patton State Hospital Museum. The museum opened recently on April 27th, 2015 with various exhibits, each representing a different aspect of the institution's history. When designing exhibits for display in any museum, many aspects must be taken into consideration: artifacts and space available, exhibit themes, audience, educational goals, and creating lasting impact. It is vital for the artifacts to not only communicate to patrons the significance of historic events, but for those artifacts to provide an avenue to the past that can lead to a greater understanding of the relationship between that past and the present. One of the most essential objectives of a museum is to be able to interpret history in a transparent, non-biased fashion, yet also allow space for debate. The exhibits designed for Patton State

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Hospital Museum have been carefully curated to these standards so that they may convey the importance of the hospital's history and the history of psychiatric treatment in California in the most honest, enlightening, and thought-provoking way possible.

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