



Last

Call

Craft Beer
Archivist
Concludes
Her Work

BY GREG KITSOCK

All good things must come to an end.

For Theresa McCulla, her tenure as curator of the American Brewing History Initiative for the Smithsonian Institution concluded on November 3. Her final task was to moderate a beer tasting/panel discussion dubbed Last Call: American Beer in a Changing Climate. An appreciative audience, which included colleagues and family members, gave her a round of applause for her work in archiving the history of craft brewing in the United States.

McCulla began her work in January 2017 in what was supposed to be a three-year stint. But thanks to the largesse of her sponsors (the Brewers Association, Sierra Nevada's Ken Grossman, and New

Belgium's Kim Jordan), her employment was extended until this past fall. During those seven years minus two months, McCulla reckons that she added at least 150 artifacts to the Smithsonian's collection and conducted 70 oral history interviews with 99 people in 33 locations. Her work took her as far afield as Anchorage, Alaska, where she interviewed brewmaster and production manager David Short of 49th State Brewing in July 2019.

These interviews totaled nearly 4,000 minutes. They've been professionally transcribed and will be available to researchers at the National Museum of American History's Archives Center.

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Theresa McCulla made an emergency collecting trip to San Francisco in July to preserve historical items from Anchor Brewing, including a bottle with an upside-down label to commemorate the 1989 earthquake.



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Theresa McCulla spent almost seven years archiving the history of craft brewing in the United States.

BEGINNING AND ENDING AT ANCHOR

“When I started this job, it was really a blank slate,” recalls McCulla. “I thought, ‘I’ll start at the beginning.’ My first trip was to San Francisco to interview Fritz Maytag and [Anchor Brewing Co. historian] Dave Burkhart.”

Coincidentally, McCulla was to bookend her travels with a return visit to Anchor this past July—a visit she terms “an emergency collecting trip.”

McCulla was as surprised as anyone to read Sapporo’s July 12 press release that it was shuttering Anchor. She had read about the venerable brewery reining in its distribution and ceasing production of its Christmas ale, but in her words, “I had not expected that the next step would be liquidation. I was concerned about the business records and the items inside the building.”

She immediately contacted the PR firm that issued the press release and was put in touch with Sapporo’s CEO. “He invited me to bring a team of people from the museum. But there were significant constraints—the liquidation date was August 18, and anything collected needed to be out of the building by July 31.”

McCulla flew out to San Francisco with an archivist and a collections specialist. Over the course of two days, July 24-25, she was able to interview several of the 60 employees still working at Anchor, including head brewmaster Dane Volek. “I recorded my final oral histories in Fritz Maytag’s office, where I recorded Fritz six years ago in my first interview.”

Collections manager Kelsey Wiggins, who accompanied McCulla, recalls the hectic pace of the mission. “We spent 11 hours the first day sifting through the site, identifying materials for the collections. We spent an additional 15 hours onsite on the 25th, doing more object selection, oral histories with employees, and packing of the items to be shipped late into the evening. I hand-packed all of the objects myself, as we did not have any time to get on any fine art handlers’ schedules.”

She notes that everything arrived back in Washington “safely and in pristine condition,” including fragile items such as “14 glass slides with historical yeast samples on them from the 1970s and 1980s.”

“Unfortunately, we couldn’t collect any of those beautiful copper kettles!” laments McCulla. But, she says, they shipped “an incredible array of artifacts” that included:

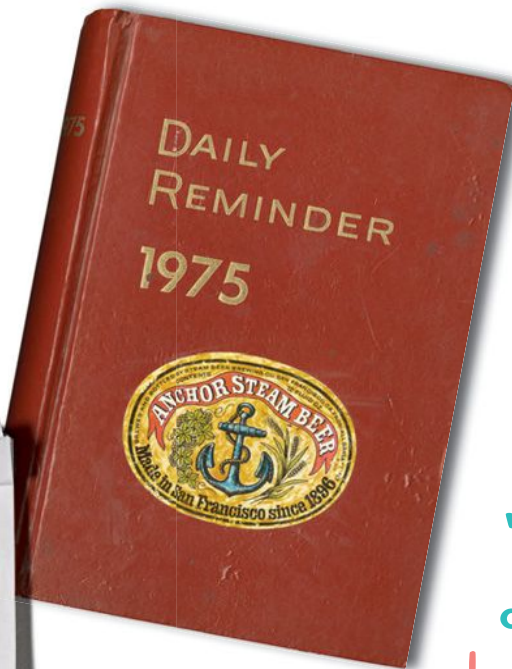
- A long-handled copper ladle used to scoop beer samples from the brew kettle
- A portrait, hung on the brewhouse wall, of St. Nicholas, patron saint of brewers, painted by an Anchor employee during the 60s
- Several limited-edition bottles: one with an upside-down label to commemorate the 1989 earthquake, and two specially commissioned by Microsoft to mark the debut of Windows 2000
- Two tiles in a shade dubbed “Anchor blue” from the brewhouse floor and one white tile from the fermentation room floor
- A heavy-duty wooden barrel, with six iron hoops, used to transport the highly



effervescent steam beer to local taverns during the late 1800s

- About 35 cubic feet of business records, including photographs, blueprints, brewing logs, and label artwork
- Perhaps saddest of all, a small 2023 calendar, found attached to a fermenter, with July 31 circled to note the final day of business

McCulla was also able to obtain a small library, about 30 books, that Maytag had left behind when he sold Anchor in 2010. They range from a 1789 edition of *The London Art of Cookery* by John Farley to more recent volumes on hop culture, beer, and brewing, all the way up to Michael Jackson’s 1978 *World Guide to Beer*. The books will find a new home in the Smithsonian Libraries and in the Dibner Library of the History of Science and Technology.



"More than anything else, brewers tell me that they appreciate and value the relationships they have developed with their colleagues, customers, and teachers."

The Anchor haul wasn't the only collecting coup for McCulla in 2023. Suzy Denison, co-founder of New Albion Brewing Co., donated an assortment of items from that pioneering microbrewery, including a canceled check for \$1,500, signed by Denison and cashed by New Albion treasurer Jane Zimmerman, which allowed New Albion to get off the ground.

REFLECTIONS ON AN INDUSTRY IN PROGRESS

And yet there was much more to her job than accumulating memorabilia. In announcing her departure, McCulla wrote:

"When I record oral histories, my final question to interviewees is always the same: 'What do you value most about what you do?' Time and again I receive the same response: 'People.' More than anything else, brewers tell me that they appreciate and value the relationships they have developed with their colleagues, customers, and teachers; the ability to issue paychecks to their employees and enable their livelihoods; and the opportunity to give joy to others through the beer they make.

"If I were to answer the same question, my reply would be the same. What an incredible privilege it has been to listen,

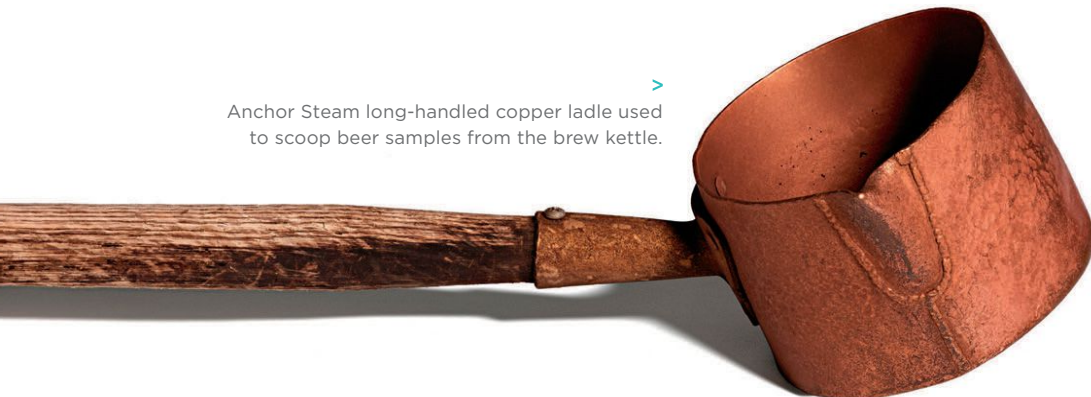
document, and learn from the work of the deeply talented, intensely creative people in this industry."

Asked to describe in a nutshell the impact of American craft brewing, she responds, "Craft beer has on a global scale really transformed not only what beer tastes like, but also where and how people enjoy beer.

"The post-Prohibition taproom has become a gathering place where you see whole families, dogs—a new 'third place' in American culture," she adds, referencing sociologist Ray Oldenburg's term for a locale other than the home or workplace that serves as a center of community life.

As an example of craft brewing's worldwide repercussions, she mentions, "My brother-in-law, in northern Italy near the Swiss border, came upon a little farm brewery that was using Cascade hops to make a California common beer."

Anchor Steam long-handled copper ladle used to scoop beer samples from the brew kettle.





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The hop garden, featuring four different varieties, on the east side of the National Museum of American History.

America's Hopyard

By Greg Kitsock

On the east side of the National Museum of American History (NMAH), at Constitution Avenue and 12th Street NW in DC, lies a “victory garden” patterned after the backyard plots where millions of Americans raised their own food during World War II. (These gardens supplied 40 percent of the nation’s produce by 1944, according to the museum.)

However, in addition to common veggies such as tomatoes and peppers, this garden contains a more exotic crop: hops. “About 10 Cascade plants, five Nugget, five Willamette, and one or two Mt. Hood plants,” counts off Sarah Dickert, supervisory horticulturist for the Smithsonian Gardens.

These were planted between 2013 and 2015. Dickert elaborates, “While hops were likely not a common crop produced by families in their home gardens during World War II, they are an interesting perennial crop to demonstrate in the garden, and an opportunity to highlight the long history of homebrewing in the United States.”

Although the bines predate Theresa McCulla’s arrival, “our brewing collaboration really kicked off when Theresa joined NMAH,” says Dickert. “She was able to bring in homebrewers from the DC community to help harvest, dry, and brew beer with our

hops, which she was then able to serve at her Last Call events.”

This year’s harvest yielded 22 pounds of cones. Cole Christian and Paulette Palacios of the local DC Homebrewers club joined McCulla and a Smithsonian Garden crew to pick the hops in September. Christian recalls, “There was a ton of Cascade, as they seem to be beasts compared to other hop strains, and they were chunky cones at that. They smelled amazing. The Nugget and Willamette hops also grew well—just not as much as the Cascade—but they looked good. They also had Mt. Hood hops, but those did not grow well, and the cones did not look very enticing, so we passed on those (they went to compost).”

Christian and Palacios bought a food dehydrator to dry out the hops, then vacuum-sealed them. They used them to brew an amber ale and an ESB for Last Call. Two other club members, Jake Grover and Lisa Dettling, contributed a pre-Prohibition lager and hazy IPA.

Dickert notes, “We have been thrilled to work with Theresa and everyone involved at NMAH to see our hops grown onsite and used by local brewers. Even though Theresa is moving on, we look forward to continuing this collaboration with her colleagues at the museum.”

She continues, “The industry isn’t perfect—its demographic is not representative of the American population.” But that’s changing. She cites in particular Barrel & Flow, an annual beer festival in Pittsburgh that also serves as a showcase for Black arts and culture.

The final event hosted by McCulla reflected the increasing diversity of craft beer. The 2023 edition of Last Call (a talk and tasting that takes place during the Smithsonian’s annual Food History Weekend) featured an all-women panel discussing how the industry was coping with climate change. Representing the growers were Andrea Stanley, founder of Valley Malt in Holyoke, Mass., and Victoria Garza, sales manager for Yakima Chief Hops and co-founder of Sesiones del Migrante, an annual U.S.-Mexico collaboration beer that celebrates the migrant workers who harvest the hops.

Supplying beer were Montclair Brewery in Montclair, N.J. and 7 Clans Brewing in Asheville, N.C. Montclair is run by Denise Ford-Sawadogo, whose family hails from Jamaica, and her husband Leo Sawadogo,

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a native of Burkina Faso, Africa. (“We’re the first Black-owned brewery in New Jersey,” states Denise.) 7 Clans, represented by co-owner Morgan Owle-Crisp, is both woman- and Cherokee-owned. Both breweries poured beer made with ingredients reflecting their cultures: Montclair offered a golden ale flavored with baobab fruit, while 7 Clans served an amber ale made with sweet potato, squash, and acorns.

“A lot of people are trying to make it more representative for everyone,” observes McCulla of craft brewing.

Given her many successes, does McCulla have any regrets about goals not met? She notes that the pandemic put a crimp in her activities. She was able to conduct a few interviews via Zoom, and even do some collecting. (A bottle of hand sanitizer produced by Urban South Brewery in New Orleans is now part of the Smithsonian’s collection.) But it did ruin her plans to visit the Pacific Northwest to witness the hop harvest firsthand. “I would still like to visit,” she says.

Maintaining a connection with craft beer shouldn’t be too hard for McCulla, since her uncle, Jeff Kleppin, co-founded a microbrewery called Long Way Brewing Co. in Radford, Va. It shares its quarters, a former Seventh Day Adventist church, with Radford Fairlawn Daily Bread, a charity that provides free meals to the underprivileged. “I’m proud to say that I looked it up on Google and it has nothing but five-star ratings,” laughs McCulla.

FROM BEER TO CHOCOLATE

What’s next for McCulla? Without skipping a day of work, she reported to her new job on Monday, November 6: curator for

Mars, Incorporated, the international confectionary company that makes M&Ms, Snickers, and Milky Way. Since Mars is headquartered in McLean, Va., 10 miles from Washington, she will remain in the DC area.

And what about the Smithsonian’s American Brewing History Initiative? The National Museum of American History will continue to display items related to the birth of homebrewing and microbrewing—including Charlie Papazian’s wooden soup spoon and a pumpkin-shaped tap handle from Buffalo Bill’s brewpub—in the exhibition FOOD: Transforming the American Table, on the first floor of the museum.

The Smithsonian, asserts McCulla, will continue to collect artifacts related to brewing, although there will not be a curator focused on beer solely.

As for Last Call, the future of the annual panel discussion is up in the air, but McCulla notes one reason for continuing the beer event: “It sells out every year.”

Greg Kitsock has been covering the beer industry since 1986. He is a frequent contributor to *The New Brewer*. **NB**

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