

# DOING THE ARCHIVES BALLY

***Or what the Midway can teach  
us about Outreach and  
Advocacy***

“If the Archives isn’t a Cabinet of Curiosities, I don’t  
know what is.”

-Jonathan Black, music journalist



# Introduction

- Bally: Short for **Ballyhoo**, defined as talk or writing that is designed to get people excited or interested in something
- How *modified* carnival barking techniques can help archives outreach and advocacy
- Need for education and hopefully expansion of user community, explanation without jargon
- A useful set of techniques for engaging visitors (even a helpful persona for the natural introvert)
- We cannot wait patiently behind doors and booths for people to come to us!

# Turning up the Volume on the Silent Silhouette

- Being on the Society of American Archivists publications committee, circus theme
- Resources used – *Secrets of the Sideshow* by Joe Nickell, *Bally! Sounds of the Old-Time Sideshow*
  - Brief trial at the John F. Kennedy exhibit  
(Ladies and gentleman, the Texas State Library is open today with a fascinating exhibit on the John F. Kennedy assassination, featuring the very suit John Connally was wearing! No charge!)



# The Powwow Experience

- Visitor booth statistics:  
Austin Powwow – 161  
people in **one day**
- Visitor booth statistics:  
Texas Book Festival –  
roughly the same  
amount in **two days**  
(about 200)



# Starting the Bally

- A successful bark begins *before you ever open your mouth*
- First – what is the “show” we want to draw people to – a special exhibit, a visit to your repository’s website, or just the repository itself?
- Traditional barkers stand out side the show when attracting visitors. How close will you be to the show?

# Group Exercise

- Why are we doing this outreach event (what's the “show?”)
- Who is our audience?
- What do we know about them that will help us attract their attention (any common ground to draw on)?
- What do they currently think about our repository (or are we starting from scratch)?
- What we would like them to think?
- What is the most important thing we can convey about the show?
- Are there any creative guidelines (technology limitations, copyright concerns, etc.)?





# An Eye-Catching Display



Harry Ransom Center, the University of Texas at Austin



Harry Ransom Center, the University of Texas at Austin

# Archival Translation



- Clear booth identification
- Instructional handouts and/or document facsimiles
- Vary color, height, size
- Empathize **variety, novelty, beauty, or anything otherwise unusual**
- Encourage participation
- Staff posture - **relaxed, alert and friendly**



# CONSERVATION

AT THE  
TEXAS STATE  
LIBRARY AND  
ARCHIVES  
COMMISSION



# PRESERVATION

CARING  
FOR YOUR  
HISTORICAL  
TREASURES



**Sam Houston**  
**Regional Library and**  
**Research Center**



**Liberty, Texas**



Sam Houston, President of the Republic of Texas



## By A. E. Skinner



tentions quickly spread. On  
gister (Houston) reported that the  
Indian scout. But when the true  
to undertake the mission. The  
he had heard it from so many  
ten warrens were to descend upon

UNANIMOUS  
DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE,  
BY THE  
DELEGATES OF THE PEOPLE OF TEXAS,  
IN GENERAL CONVENTION,  
AT THE TOWN OF WASHINGTON.

ON THE RECORD FILE FOR MURDER, 1934-1935.

[illegible]

RICHARD ELLIS, President.		
MASS.	Concord.	J. W. BENTON.
MASS.	Concord.	THOMAS A. GARDNER.
MASS.	Haverburgh.	R. M. COLEMAN.
MASS.	Leopold.	ROBERT POTTER.
MASS.	Leopold.	THOMAS J. EDGE.
MASS.	Leopold.	CHAS. FAYLER.
MASS.	Leopold.	JOHN M. ROBERTS.
MASS.	Leopold.	ROBERT HAMILTON.
MASS.	Leopold.	COLMAN McKEITHEN.
MASS.	Leopold.	ALB. H. LUTHERY.
MASS.	Leopold.	MARTIN PARKER.
MASS.	Leopold.	E. O. LUGGINS.
MASS.	Leopold.	STEPH. W. BROWN.
		Miss.
		Nampan.
		Red River.
		San August.

BEN. O. PENNINGTON, W. CAY'S CRAWFORD, JAMES POORE, RAY. HICKMAN, DAVID THOMAS, EDWARD CONNOR, JOHN TYLER, B. BRIDGES-GORDON, E. W. BARRETT, JAMES G. KNIGHT, JAMES GUTTER.	} Shelby. } Raleigh. } New Orleans. } Washington.
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*Joseph von*

**General Commissair**

*des Viceroy von Dehaly, Kaiserlicher Ein-*  
*wechsler in Wien* *Anton C. Muesbach, für ihn selbst*

*Nathaniel H.*

**Commissary General**

*of the Emperor's Engineer-Company*  
*Anton C. Muesbach*

Comanche Nation

Camanche Valley

Treaty between John O. Meusebach, Commissary General, German Im(m)igration Company and the Comanche Nation.\* Ratified and signed May 9, 1847. Manuscript Collection #1972/141. Archives and Information Services Division, Texas State Library and Archives Commission

For more Texas history information, visit [www.tsl.texas.gov/exhibits](http://www.tsl.texas.gov/exhibits)  
Texas State Library and Archives Commission, printed November 2014

# Coming to Terms

- Once you have determined your goals and set up your station, there are three basic stages to the bally of a good (outreach) barker
- 1 – **Making the call** – making initial contact with the passerby (sometimes referred to as the mark)
- 2 – **Doing the patter** – telling your story, providing information, answering questions, etc.
- 3 – **Turning the tip** – (traditionally getting the visitor to buy a ticket) wrapping up the conversation with one visitor or group of visitors and bringing in the next

# Making the Call (Initiating Contact)

- **Archival barking is best as a team effort!**
- Get on the other side of the table or out of the building, whenever possible – **eliminate communication barriers!**
- Stand as long as physical comfort allows
- Make eye contact with passersby, smile and greet (**always speak from the diaphragm**)
- If the person hesitates, makes eye contact or responds in any way, have a simple leading question (also known as a call) ready – for example “**Would you like to learn more about....?**” or “**Are you interested in...?**”
- If business is slow, leave one staff member at the booth and another (**with clear identification**) can move through the crowd, passing out individual flyers and directing visitors to the main booth



# Active versus Passive Outreach

Texas Book Festival, October 2013



Austin Powwow, November 2014



# Doing the Patter (Telling Your Story)

- Take pride in your work, your repository, and your repository's records – don't be afraid to talk up the great things in your holdings - enthusiasm is contagious!
- Always identify yourself and your repository
- Speak **quickly** and **rhythmically** – **clearly** and **simply** but **never condescendingly**
- Vary tone and intonation frequently – beware the monotone!
- Accent meaningful words – for example “**Are you interested in genealogy?**”
- Follow the flow of handouts you have set up. Use them as visual aids and point to important and/or interesting information



# Doing the Patter, continued


- **Always highlight FREE, EASY, and NOW** – what's free in your repository (**research assistance? online databases?**), how can your repository's staff help the visitor (**what are their research needs?**), and what is happening now or coming up soon (**a lobby exhibit? a new collection? a special event?**)



# Sample Patter for an Archival Exhibit

THE TEXAS STATE LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES COMMISSION PRESENTS

THE  
**WILLIAM BARRET  
TRAVIS LETTER**



**ON LIMITED DISPLAY  
FEB. 23 - MARCH 6 2015**  
-WEEKEND VIEWING SAT. FEB 28, 9 A.M. TO 4 P.M.-

LORENZO DE ZAVALA STATE ARCHIVES AND LIBRARY BUILDING - 1201 BRAZOS, AUSTIN, TX

“Ladies and gentleman,  
welcome to the Texas State  
Capitol Grounds! I know it’s  
cold so I won’t keep you long.  
See that big pink building  
over there – that’s the Texas  
State Library. And, yes, we  
are open today with the one,  
the only “Victory or Death”  
William Barret Travis letter  
on display for a limited time  
absolutely free! We’re here  
till 4; tell your friends!

# Doing the Patter, continued

- **Give away something, but not everything** – This is where a website handout is useful. Highlight any online or digitized resources the visitor can access at home, but always be clear that there is **much, much more** at the repository itself.
- Give out, but do not overwhelm, visitors with handouts
- Make it personal – Ask the visitor questions to gauge areas of interest and understanding “**Do you have any questions so far?**” – for example, “or “**Is there anything here you’d like me to talk more about?**”
- Encourage them to tell their friends and give out extra handouts, if necessary





## Knockers and Rhubarbs (or dealing with difficult situations)

- **Rhubarb** – heated dispute or controversy
- **Knocker** – a persistently pessimistic critic
- Don't be afraid to admit you don't know – say, for example,
- “If you'd like to give me your contact information, I can look that up and get back to you.”
- Be sure to follow up

# Knockers and Rhubarbs, continued

- Have a supply of business cards on hand
- For more involved discussions, advise scheduling a meeting during the work week to discuss further
- If the line of questioning becomes uncomfortable or overly personal, redirect to the booth display or record topic
- Gentle humor can diffuse many difficult situations
- If, for whatever reason, a visitor becomes aggressive, do not engage or escalate
- Maintain a calm but firm tone and have another staff member nearby

# Turning the Tip (Wrapping it Up and Moving Along )

- Be polite and patient, **but...**
- Clearly signal to the visitor that you have finished what you wanted to say and they are free to ask questions or move on
- For example, **“I know I talk fast and there is a lot of information here. Is there anything you’d like to ask about?”**
- If your conversation draws the attention of other passersby, draw them into the conversation (like attracts like, crowds draw crowds), but **only if it will not be disruptive to the original conversation**
- Don’t forget to count the number of visitors to your booth! Consider using a manual palm counter
- **Always thank the visitor for their time and ALWAYS invite them to come visit your repository**



# It's practice time!



## Group Exercise – Changes

- Why are we doing this outreach event (what's the “show?”)
- Who is our audience?
- How can we grab their attention?
- What is the most important information we have to convey about the “show?”
- What's best way to convey that information?
- What do we want the outcome to be?



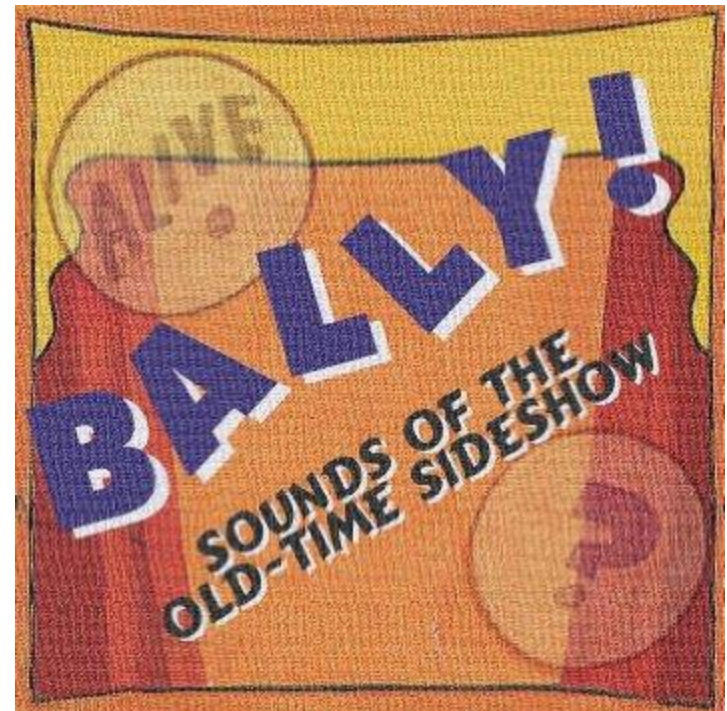
# In Conclusion

- Parts of a good ballyhoo:
  - **Define the “show”**
  - **Create an eye-catching display**
    - Minimize communication barriers
    - Work together
    - Empathize novelty, variety, beauty
  - **Bark!**
    - **Make the call** (initiate contact, simple but not condescending)
    - **Do the patter** (tell your story, enthusiasm, FREE, EASY, NOW)
    - **Turn the tip** (wrap it up and move it on, gratitude and invitation)

**Have fun!**

# Additional Resources

- *Secrets of the Sideshow* by Joe Nickell
- *Bally! Sounds of the Old Time Sideshow* (All carnival barking samples were taken from this CD.)
- *Circus Lingo* by Joe McKennon (Professional barkers refer to themselves as talkers.)
- Hertzberg Circus Collection at the Witte Museum in San Antonio, TX
- All archival circus images take from the Harry Ransom Circus Collection in Austin, TX
- Most definitions are taken from the Merriam-Webster dictionary



I know I talk fast and we've covered a lot information. Any questions?  
Comments? Concerns for my sanity??

**Contact Information:**

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*[jtucker@tsl.texas.gov](mailto:jtucker@tsl.texas.gov)*

**And, before I turn this tip, a big thank you to Dr. David B. Gracy II, whose enthusiasm is always contagious.**



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