

Treasure or trash in a transportainer?

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Now

that Wendy Strohmeyer, the Museum's artifact collections specialist, has been at the Lab for over a year, she's reaching a new goal on her "to do" list. She has begun to go through a transportainer (a contraction of "transportable container" and according to our research library a word that's used but can't be found in any dictionary) located on Lab property. Its contents are under the auspices of the Environmental Stewardship organization and she'll look particularly for items of interest for the Manhattan Project National Historical Park but will inventory everything from Tide to toilet paper. When Wendy started here, one of the first things she needed to address was the inventory method used for the various pieces at the Museum and its warehouse. Items in the collection had been logged, but with the acquisition of PastPerfect software not only would items already in our possession have more-robust identification (via photos, barcodes and other new information), but as new artifacts are identified, they can be entered directly into the new software.

Wendy, who has both a scientific and museum studies background, is just starting to discover exactly what the transportainer holds.

"There are some items, like vintage light fixtures, that we normally wouldn't hold on to as the Museum," said Strohmeyer, "but with the Manhattan Project National Historical Park coming online, those same items could be used to re-create what the interior of buildings here once looked like so they've taken on a new value."

While her job is to log in each artifact and make sure there is sufficient information on each included for it and note where it is held, she also researches each item's provenance (think history) and their conservation (think preservation).

We've come across an old mop and broom so far as well as tins of crackers and a "sanitation kit," she said (think improvised toilet using a cardboard container and plastic bag for a liner—toilet paper included!).

In some cases the finds are just perplexing. For instance, there are civil defense drums (most of which are empty) in the transportainer but one held five, 10-pound bags of sugar whose contents have become giant lumps these many decades later.

She's been told to accession (add new items to a collection) everything in the container so that now includes the bags of sugar and toilet paper.

So far, most of the items she's come across have been from the 1950s and '60s but who knows what she might come across as she works her way through the various pieces.

If there are any finds of note, we'll be sure to pass them on to you through this publication.

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