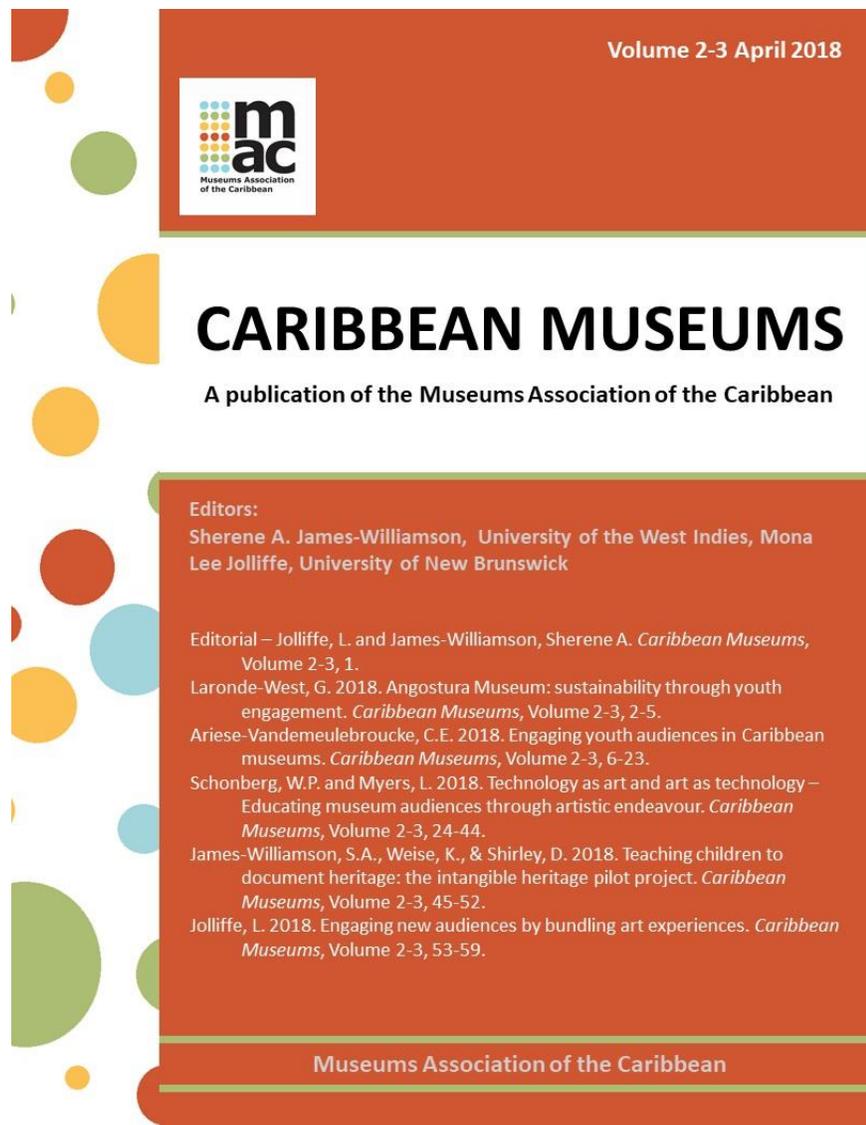


Not for resale, distribution or commercial use



This article appeared in a journal published by the Museums Association of the Caribbean (MAC). The attached copy is provided to the author and paid up members of MAC for internal non-commercial research and education use, including for instruction at the authors institution and sharing with colleagues. Reproduction, distribution, selling copies, or posting to personal, institutional or third-party websites are prohibited.

Angostura Museum: sustainability through youth engagement

GISELLE LARONDE-WEST

Angostura Limited, Trinidad

glarondew@angostura.com

ABSTRACT. Angostura Limited, one of the Caribbean’s leading rum producers, established in 1824, hosts a superb collection of rum brands and is the world’s market leader for bitters. Angostura opened its museum in 1999, under the curatorship of Gerry Besson, a well-known historian and writer. The museum was opened during the company’s 175th anniversary year so that the history of the company and the Siegert family would live on. Many elements of the company, its products and achievements are featured in the museum including the Siegert family tree, the town of Angostura in Venezuela after which the product was named, following the young Siegert during his time in the Napoleonic war, through to his death and take over by his sons.

Hundreds of people come to the museum annually, including many school children and young adults to see the history of this iconic company and products, and to develop a sense of pride in the company which holds a Royal Warrant from the Queen of England and is the only company in the region to hold 4 ISO certifications and the only distillery to attain the most recent certifications ISO 9001-2015 and ISO 14001.

The museum also houses the famous Barcant Butterfly Collection which has become part of the company tour and is a great attraction to the youth and lepidopterists. This paper shows some of the ways the company through the museum has been able to encourage the youth to come and see the unique collection and learn about the collection of items used in the early days of the distillery, the famous iconic product Angostura aromatic bitters and the butterfly collection.

Keywords: Angostura, Barcant Butterfly Collection, Industry museum, youth engagement

1. INTRODUCTION

A number of local artisans and construction specialists were involved in the actual transformation of an empty shell into the charming Angostura Museum. From inception, the idea behind the curation of the museum was to provide a place to

preserve the history of a company that has been around for over 175 years. It was also decided that this was not going to be a money-making facility, but one where education was the main focus so that school tours and other educational institutions are encouraged to visit the museum (Figure 1).



Figure 1. A tour guide with a group of school children in the museum.



Figure 2. Photograph showing school children viewing the butterflies

The fact that we also house the Barcant Butterfly Collection is an added attraction which we use to market the facilities to schools, and families. For us, it is all about education and experience. The museum offers views of many artifacts which give detailed historical company information, and close up views of the almost 5,000 butterflies on display. It is an easy sell to organisations who understand history and who want to learn about the company and also about the many types of butterflies that make up the collection (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Photograph showing the layout of the Barcant Butterfly Room. A-Before; B,C-after renovation and reconfiguration

The tours encourage students at the pre-school and primary level, high schools students studying history, chemistry, physics, economics, art, as well as field naturalists, botanists, bartenders and professionals in the beverage industry. If coming to Trinidad, it is definitely something to put on the to-do list.

We have engendered a sense of creativity in the museum over the years in order to encourage education and better appreciation of the facility. Art competitions have been executed on the butterfly collection and various elements of the museum - children under 5 years old are brought in to sit and draw the butterflies while others take notes for school reports. Students come simply to work on their biology school assignments. Many projects are built around the facility, both by the company as well as the stakeholders who visit.

To create more excitement, museums like ours should develop programmes and create environments that enhance the location, which will promote the facility in order to bring more patrons to it. Five years ago, the company re-decorated the butterfly room to make it even more engaging for the youth who visit. We found that even adults enjoy the new ambience, which includes the walls wrapped around with imagery of the beautiful rain forest and a huge artificial tree placed in a focal position in the room, with butterfly mobiles placed strategically on it. The sound of birds chirping can also be heard on entry to the room. The butterfly room truly plays to all our sensory instincts, which is what helps children especially, to become enthralled with the place (Figure 3).

We generally conduct daily tours, Monday to Friday for a minimum of 8 persons, once we have three days-notice.



Figure 4. Photograph showing tour guides engaging school children in the butterfly room

The tour includes the butterfly room, the bitters manufacturing and bottling rooms, bottling plant, aging warehouse and cooper shed. Patrons can then taste two products of their choice (children get LLB only), then visit the gift shop.

Some of the takeaways for people who visit are:

- Education on the history of the Company and its world-famous products.
- History on Simon Bolivar and Venezuela's proximity to Trinidad.
- Instilling a sense of Pride and ability to understand the reach of Angostura regionally and internationally.
- Education on processes of alcohol production – Fermentation, Distillation, Aging and Blending.
- Entertainment – Sampling of some of our product
- Souvenirs, sold in our shop – key chains, magnets, pencils, postcards, mousepads and products.

What we have found is that once the youth visit the museum, they spread the word fast, verbally and through social media. This prompted us to create a Facebook page for the museum and butterfly collection. This

way we are able to reach out to a wider audience which would otherwise not be possible through traditional media. We also signed up with Trip Advisor so that people can review us and recommend visiting us, and this has been growing.

Another novel thing that we did at our museum was install a Time Capsule. Placed in the capsule by one of our maintenance staff on 21st December 2004, are the following items:

- 1 first day cover of Trinidad and Tobago/Angostura stamps
- 1 each of Trinidad and Tobago monetary denomination
- A company Share certificate – AH1 – 04843
- Stock Exchange listing – October 27, 2004
- 1 Angostura letterhead
- Labels of all products
- 1 Scottish leader mini and one HINE mini (CL WorldBrands)
- 1 large bottle of bitters
- 1 bottle of XS
- Raw materials for bitters in a White Oak bag
- Annual Report for 2003

In 2014, a Calendar was printed to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the Barcant Butterfly Collection (Figure 5). Proceeds from the sale of these items were

donated towards a project to develop a guide of local butterflies. The guides were distributed to key personnel in the business

and sold in the company's shop, as well as UWI.



Figure 5. A calendar was printed to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the Barcant Butterfly Collection.

In order to continue to engage youth and encourage them to come back and bring others, all museums must continue to be creative and keep on refreshing its facilities. We must remember that the youth are our future and we do not want them to think of museums as archaic and places that only old people go to reminisce. We want our museums to be fun, interactive, engaging and encouraging for all to visit. We have already started looking to the future, as our butterflies will soon be on an online filing

system done in collaboration with the University of the West Indies. In 2016, we started a questionnaire on the museum and bottling plant to be done periodically for visitor feedback. This will assist us in future

development and enhancement. We will develop a new museum in the Distillery area to focus on the technical side of things rather than the history. We aim to re-design the museum to modernize its look, and introduce more interactivity for a more trendy and educational experience for years to come.

Acknowledgements. I wish to thank the Museums Association of the Caribbean for accepting the original abstract for presentation at the annual conference held in St. Lucia in October 2015. I would also like to thank the reviewers for their comments and suggestions that helped to improve the manuscript.

Article submitted: August 2016

Accepted: August 2017

Published April 2018