

## Anthropology Alum Matches Museum Passion with Curating Career



Mark Dodge (MA '00, anthropology) has loved museums since he was a kid, and today he has found a career to match this passion as the Exhibit & Collections Curator for Golden History Museums.

Dodge minored in anthropology as an undergraduate at the University of Michigan, but afterwards was ready to venture from his native state to the Rocky Mountains.

“DU’s anthropology department and museum studies program had a solid reputation and was on my list of top graduate schools. The idea of moving to Colorado appealed to me because of its western history, and the varied museums in the Denver metro area would provide great opportunities to establish myself in the field,” he said.

“I was always fascinated with past cultures and societies, archaeology, and belief systems. It felt natural to combine the study of anthropology with my love of museums for my master’s program,” he added.

His graduate program was small and he made great friendships, some of which he has retained for over 10 years and which also provide connections in his field. “Equally important, the teachers in the anthropology department shared their passion and always pushed me to excel, something I can appreciate now,” Dodge explained.

His most memorable project at DU was his master’s exhibit, which he installed in the old anthropology gallery in the basement of the Mary Reed building. The exhibit was titled *Mascaras Mexicanas: Traditions of the Mexican Dance Mask*. Dodge produced an exhibit catalog and hosted an exhibit opening, which was “a great way to wrap up my time at DU,” he said.

Soon after his graduation, Dodge was offered an exhibit designer position at the Fort Collins Museum.

“That was where I began to develop my own design aesthetic and understand the value of connecting with individuals in the community,” Dodge explained. His first big exhibit was on the Lindenmeier Site, a famous archaeological find in northern Colorado. “I gained an appreciation for local history and saw how the museum exists to serve its community’s needs,” he added.

Currently, Dodge works for the City of Golden, where he is the curator for Golden History Museums, which includes curating Golden’s collection of artifacts and photos and managing the dynamic exhibit program at the Golden History Center.

“It’s hard to believe I’ve been here over eight years and it never gets old. For such a small community, it has more than its fair share of fascinating history, people, and stories,” Dodge said. He also enjoys getting out into the community and speaking with residents, documenting their stories and building the museum collection.

“Working in a small to mid-size museum requires a range of responsibilities. I’ve developed exhibits, overseen construction projects while observing historic preservation standards, accessioned steam engines, learned to “curate” chickens and bees, but the most fulfilling part for me is still the people,” he said.

In many ways, Dodge sees his job as empowering the voices of others whose stories they tell. He solicits stories and information, records what he hears from others, and applies it to collection documentation or exhibit purposes. “Everyone has a story to tell or something to share and museums may be one of the few places still willing to listen,” Dodge explained.

In particular, Dodge is proud of an online archive of historic Golden photographs he developed over the past year and a half. He led a team of volunteers and staff to inventory, document, research and digitize over a thousand historic photographs from the City of Golden museum collection. The photographs and documentation are now available to the public on a database accessed through the museum’s website.

“Mark has really found his niche in Golden and loves what he does. He is a good example of how many of our students, although they have degrees in anthropology, go on to work in many different types of museums and heritage sites,” said Christina Kreps, associate professor of anthropology and Dodge’s former DU advisor.

“Mark now has accumulated a decade of experience and is very good at what he does, so much so that we often call upon him for advice on exhibitions and other work we do in our museum.”

Since graduation, Dodge has returned to DU several times as a guest speaker for exhibit courses.

“It’s gratifying to later encounter students from those classes in a professional setting, and have them not only remember me, but express appreciation for what I’ve shared. It’s cool to be able to go back and offer what I’ve learned in the real world and it feels good to give back,” Dodge concluded.

For more information, visit the Golden History Museums website here:  
<http://www.goldenhistory.org/>