

## **Mary Ford Legacy Project**

### **Project Write Up for Future Teams (1.1)**

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#### **1. Project Overview**

The project focuses on building a comprehensive research foundation for a future museum exhibit on Mary Ford, in connection with Les Paul for archival materials and related historical institutions. The goal is not to design the exhibit itself, but to create a structured, well documented research repository that future exhibit designers can directly use.

The final output consists of:

- A structured Word document, with citations
- A categorized Excel database
- A collection of museum contacts, interviews, and archival leads

#### **2. What I did**

I collected and organized approximately over 100 secondary and primary sources related to:

- Mary Ford's biography and musical career
- Les Paul Collaborations and recordings
- Country music archives and historical recordings
- Museum and institutional collections

#### **Institutional Outreach:**

I contacted multiple museums and historical institutions to identify:

- Available archival materials on Mary Ford
- Existing exhibit documentation on Les Paul
- Opportunities for interviews with curators or exhibit designers.

## Institution Contacted:

- Waukesha County Historical Society
- Mahwah Museum
- Les Paul House of Sound
- Les Paul Foundation

## Outcome:

- Received response from Les Paul House of Sound / Foundation network
- Scheduled and conducted interview with Ken Pokrowski (Mahwah Museum exhibit lead)



Fish, Ryan

To: director@mahwahmuseum.org



Tue 6/2/2026 9:55 PM

Hello,

My name is Ryan Fish, and I am currently a student at Worcester Polytechnic Institute. I am working on a project to showcase the life/music of Mary Ford. In reflection of my project, I am trying to collect as much information about her and how she is currently being remembered. Now I know that there is the permanent exhibit of Les Paul and Mary Ford, but how is Mary Ford included in the exhibit? In terms of research, how was it all collected? How is Mary Ford remembered today? I have many more questions, and if we could set up a zoom call to talk about it, all or multiple zoom calls that would be amazing. If you could also point me in the right direction, that would be amazing as well. I am resending this email in attempt to get a response or if you missed the first one.

Sincerely,

Rvan Fish | WPI 27'

## Museum Exhibit Research:

I studied museum exhibit design theory to support future exhibit development. Key focus areas included:

- Audience Analysis
- Narrative Structure Development
- Object-based storytelling
- Visitor Experience Design
- Exhibit Evaluation Methods

## Knowledge Organization System:

To ensure scalability and usability, I created a structure system:

Tools used:

- Narrative Research Document in Microsoft Word
- Structured Source Tracking Database in Excel

## Excel Structure Includes (Image Below):

- Source Name
- Source Relevance to Mary Ford or Exhibit Design
- Source Type
- Access Links

Name Of Source	Relevance to Mary Ford	Type of Source	URL
<b><i>Academic Papers:</i></b>			
<b>The Birth of Loud</b>	4	Academic Paper	<a href="https://doi.org/10.1080/03007766.2020.1765279">https://doi.org/10.1080/03007766.2020.1765279</a>
<b>Rock'n Roll American Society</b>	4	Academic Paper	<a href="https://rb-sample-assets.s3.amazonaws.com/rb-1739530/9781461840176_RocknRoll.pdf#page=9">https://rb-sample-assets.s3.amazonaws.com/rb-1739530/9781461840176_RocknRoll.pdf#page=9</a>
<b>Paul, Les (1915-2009)</b>	4	Academic Paper	<a href="https://academicworks.cuny.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1443&amp;context=yc_pubs">https://academicworks.cuny.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1443&amp;context=yc_pubs</a>

## Literature Review and Case Studies:

I collected and reviewed museum exhibit research literature, including:

- Exhibit storytelling methodologies
- Visitor Engagement models

- Learning and interaction design in museums
- Case studies of successful historical/music exhibits

### **3. How I did it**

#### **Research Methods:**

The project used a mixed archival and digital research approach:

- Academic library catalog searches (WPI Library System)
- Library of Congress archival searches
- Google Books historical references
- Google Scholar for Historical documents
- YouTube archival recordings
- Museum website archives and institutional contacts
- Google for websites on Mary Ford

#### **Data organization Workflow:**

To ensure future usability:

- Sources collected from multiple platforms
- Entered Excel
- Cross-referenced and exported into Zotero for the bibliography
- Integrated into structured Word document

This created a three-layer documentation system for redundancy and accessibility.

### **4. Where resources are Located**

#### **Word Document:**

- The Mary Ford Legacy Project Ryan Fish word document contains full explanation of the excel document, a decomposition of what was being looked for with each category, exhibit planning research, and other things.

#### **Excel Database:**

- Structured source tracking system

## **External Archives Used**

- Library of congress
- Country Music Hall of fame Archives
- WPI Library Catalog
- Les Paul Foundation materials

## **5. What is Vital to understand**

### **Core Goal:**

This project is NOT a finished exhibit design.

It is a research and infrastructure foundation for future exhibit teams.

### **Key Conceptual Framework:**

- The exhibit should be built using
  - Audience
  - Story
  - Objects
  - Experience
  - Evaluation

This will ensure audience-driven design, strong narrative coherence, artifact-based storytelling, and measurable visitor impact.

### **Major Research Gaps:**

Future teams should focus on:

- Expanding images and visual archival materials.
- Strengthening primary source verification
- Developing physical exhibit layout concepts
- Increasing direct museum archival access
- Conducting additional expert interviews

### **Risks / Challenges:**

- Limited response from museums early in the process
- Difficulty accessing high-quality historical images
- Fragmented archival material across institutions
- Need for stronger metadata consistency across databases

## 6. Next Steps for Future Teams

### **Future contributors should:**

- Expand image archive
- Build physical exhibit mockups or CAD layouts
- Strengthen narrative arc of Mary Ford's biography
- Integrate Les Paul and Mary Ford collaboration timeline
- Develop interactive exhibit outreach for primary artifacts

## 7. Conclusion

This project established a structure, multi-source research foundation for a future museum exhibit on Mary Ford. All research has been organized for scalability ensuring that future teams can directly transition from research into exhibit design and fabrication planning.