

# Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum Educational Resources



*Sutton Collection & Making of an Exhibit*

Written by Rachel Smith, Former Collections Assistant

The following article has been adapted from the former website of the Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum.

## Sutton Collection & Making of an Exhibit

### ***Behind the Scenes of The Sutton Collection: Feuds and Family Exhibit by Rachel Smith, Collections Assistant***

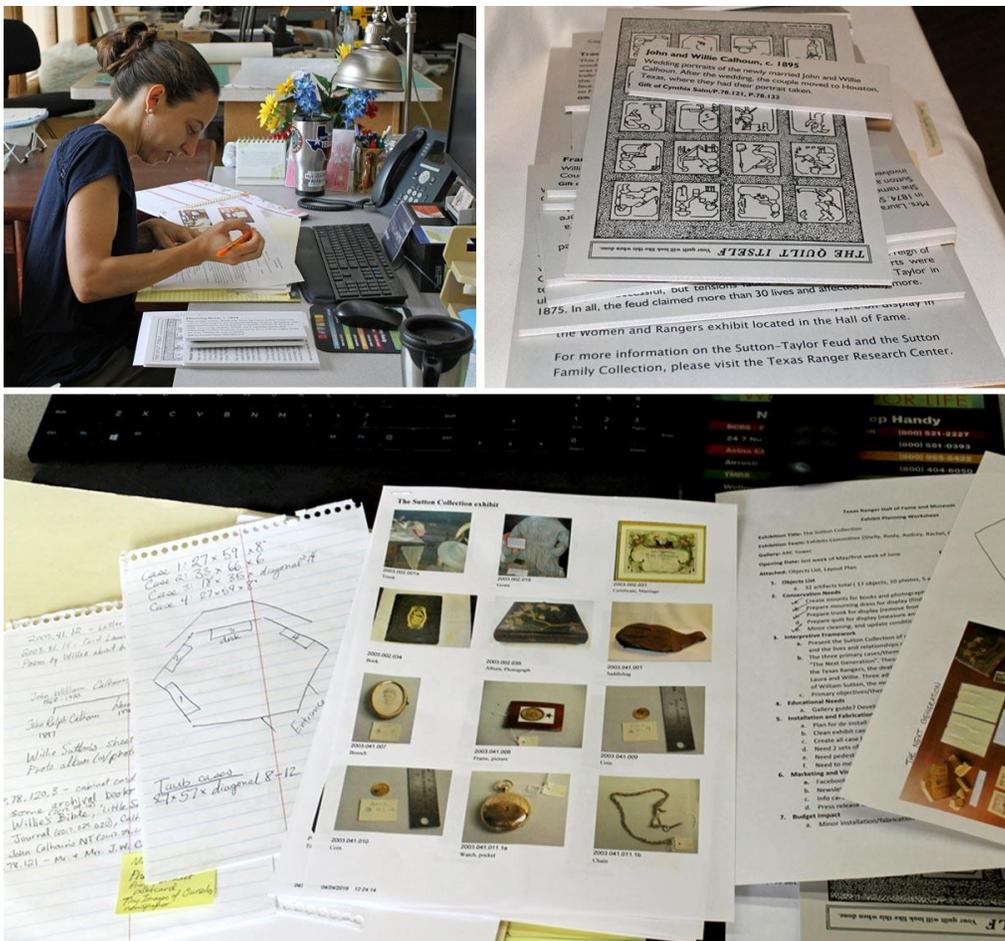
Please [click here](#) to watch the *Discovering the Legend* episode about *The Sutton Collection: Feuds and Family*.

Have you ever wondered what it takes to make a museum exhibit? The Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum offers you a behind the scenes look at the different steps in the exhibit making process for our special exhibit, *The Sutton Collection: Feuds and Family*.

The first step in the exhibit making process is choosing a topic. This involves a lot of brainstorming and discussion to determine what the exhibit should be about. *The Sutton Collection: Feuds and Family* was chosen to highlight a recent donation of photographs, artifacts, and archival materials associated with the Sutton family, of the famed Sutton-Taylor feud, to the museum by donor Cynthia Salm. Ms. Salm is a descendant of the Sutton family, and has conducted genealogical research into her family's history and the heirlooms passed down to her. Along with earlier gifts from Salm, the collection paints a picture of their family life and relationships in late 19th century Texas.

The collection was featured in a temporary exhibit, *The Sutton Collection: Feuds and Family*, in the Armstrong Research Center at the Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum. The exhibit presented the story of the violent Sutton-Taylor feud, including its connection to the Texas Rangers. When William Sutton was killed during the feud in 1874, he left behind his then pregnant wife Laura Sutton. When Laura gave birth to a daughter, she named her William after her husband, but affectionately called her "Willie". The exhibit explored the life and family relationships of Laura and Willie in the aftermath of the feud.





Once the topic is chosen, we start the extensive research portion of exhibit making. Rachel Smith, TRFHM's Collections Assistant, began by learning more about the story of the Sutton family and looking at the objects, photographs, and documents that can tell their story. You can see the list of artifacts she chose in the photographs above.

Next, Rachel began writing the labels for *The Sutton Collection: Feuds and Family*. There are two kinds of labels in this exhibit — artifact labels and interpretive labels. Artifact labels tell visitors what an individual artifact is, while interpretive labels tell the general story of the exhibit. Label writing is an important part of the process — we want to make sure we are telling the story the best way possible.

The first steps of making an exhibit involve a lot of planning, research and writing. Once the research is complete, and text and labels are written, we figure out where all of the artifacts and labels should go in the exhibit space. A detailed layout is created of what the exhibit will look like. Once those layouts are complete, it's time for exhibit install day!





Installation day is when we move all of the objects into their cases and pedestals for display. The TRHFM staff has had extensive training on how to best handle the photographs, objects, and archival materials we have at the museum. In the pictures above you can see the white cotton gloves that Rachel Smith, Collections Assistant, and Audrey Ladd, Education Programs Manager, are wearing while touching the artifacts. The gloves protect the artifacts from the oils and dirt that build up on our hands. We are also always careful when moving artifacts, to ensure they are not damaged during handling and make the trip from storage to display safely.

Exhibit installation can take anywhere from a few hours to a few days depending on how large the exhibit is. It's an exciting time when TRHFM staff can see the exhibit start to come together. Once all the objects and labels are in place, the installation is complete and the exhibit is ready for visitors!



The exhibit displays a wide variety of artifacts, including William Sutton's traveling trunk, the Sutton family Bible, Laura Sutton's mourning dress, and photographs and other family heirlooms. The temporary exhibit *The Sutton Collection: Feuds and Family* was on display in the Armstrong Research Center from June 2019 to December 2021.

Read more about the Sutton-Taylor feud here:

<https://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/jcs03>



Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum Education Resources  
For more information: 254-750-8631  
[texasranger.org](http://texasranger.org) ◊ [info@texasranger.org](mailto:info@texasranger.org)