Dr. McCulla is well-qualified to fill the post: she has a doctorate in American Studies and a culinary degree from the Cambridge (Mass.) School of Culinary Arts. She’s worked in restaurant kitchens and, along with her siblings, helped her father homebrew when she was young. You could almost say beer runs in her blood.

Since starting her job in January 2017, McCulla has traveled across the country conducting 46 interviews with 66 brewing notables, most recently Jack McAuliffe, who ignited the craft-brewing revolution when he opened New Albion Brewing in Sonoma, Calif. in 1976. (She’s interested not just in professional brewers but homebrewers, maltsters, farmers, collectors, even journalists.)

Another part of her mission is “to collect and maintain items significant to American history.” But she’s not after just any beer-stained coaster or tin sign or old bottle.

As she elaborated in a New Brewer article last year, “The item must tell a story in and of itself ... not a mug that was merely owned by a brewmaster, but maybe a mug that held the first batch of beer he ever brewed.”

**Buckets, Spoons and Tap Handles**

Recent acquisitions include plans for Buffalo Bill’s Brewery, the first brewpub in the United States, hand-drawn by founder Bill Owens, as well as his first business license explaining what exactly a brewpub does. The Smithsonian also received a set of Buffalo Bill’s tap handles spanning 1983-1994, including one resembling a large orange pumpkin, used to dispense the first pumpkin ale in modern times.

Another prize catch is homebrewer Jeff Lebesch’s notebook detailing his first bike tour of Belgium in 1988. That trip was instrumental in inspiring Lebesch and his then-wife Kim Jordan to open New Belgium Brewing in Fort Collins, Colo. in 1991. New Belgium also donated the old metal milk can that Lebesch and Jordan used for storing yeast during the brewery’s early days when they were brewing out of their basement.

The father of homebrewing, Charlie Papazian, donated his much-used and well-stained wooden spoon, central to thousands of homebrews that would form the backbone of his book *The Complete Joy of Homebrewing.* “It makes for a stirring tale, doesn’t it?” commented Papazian, who also contributed the 15-gallon trash can that he used for his “pail ales,” as well as his original homebrew recipe dating from his undergraduate days at the University of Virginia.

A number of these items will be showcased in the upcoming revised exhibit “Food: Transforming the American Table,” highlighting the rise of home- and craft brewing.

**Theresa McCulla and Fritz Maytag, former owner of Anchor Brewing in San Francisco, view a press sheet from the first modern printing of Anchor Steam beer labels in 1968. PHOTO BY PAULA JOHNSON**

Although there are exceptions, the Smithsonian generally relies on donations rather than purchases. Thus, when some of the first beer cans ever made came on the market recently—punch-top cans of Krueger’s Cream Ale filled in 1935—McCulla had to pass.

But if you have something to donate—like for instance early homebrew club licenses explaining what exactly a brewpub represents to the nation’s small, independent brewers. (The BA will reportedly extend her mission another three years to 2022.)

**Penn Museum’s B.C. Breweriana**

Collectors of pre-Prohibition trays and lithographs can brag about the beauty and rarity of their collections. However, a visit to the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (3260 South St. in West Philadelphia) can allow you to experience breweriana from the dawn of civilization!

The museum first came on our radar in the 1990s, when Dr. Solomon Katz’s translation of the *Hymn to Ninkasi* (basically a 3,300-year-old beer recipe in poetry form) was used by Anchor Brewing and the Brewers Association to reproduce an ancient Sumerian beer. (Only the professor who translated the poem was part of the Penn Museum; the clay tablet that it’s etched on is at the British Museum.)

Later on, I first became aware of the museum’s Dr. Patrick McGovern (aka the “Indiana Jones of Beer”) when one of his associates climbed into a fermenter at the original Dock Street brewpub to collect beerstone. This residue (also called calcium oxalate) would become the key to determining which ancient vessels held beer.

Dr. Pat is well-known for his book *Ancient Brews* and his collaborations with Dogfish Head’s Sam Calagione (the late Michael Jackson introduced the two at the Penn Museum). Most recently, he chemically identified the oldest (circa 3400 BC) barley beer jar in the world: a wide-mouthed jug, unearthed at Godin Tepe in Iran, that resides in the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto.

“Museums are really just great repositories of ancient drinking vessels,” observed Dr. Pat as we began to wind our way through the exhibits at Penn.

Currently, Dr. Pat pointed out, “There is a splendid exhibit on the Puabi tomb at Ur with its gold and lapis drinking-tubes and the silver jar of the queen’s daily allotment of beer.” (That daily allotment measured five liters!) The exhibit contains many jars that once held beer, as well as many depictions of brewing and imbibing, such as on a Philistine beer jug. One other stunning example is the golden head of a harp, with a figure of Gilgamesh and a group of animal-headed gods sipping Sumerian beer through long tubes in a frieze below. The long tubes helped to remove the beer from its chunky drags—I guess Sumerian ale was brewed in the New England style.

You can work up quite a thirst tour—walking through the exhibits with its dry air (necessary to keep free of humidity for the sake of preservation) —all the better for the city’s breweries and pubs!

—George Hummel