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BETWEEN NOTEBOOKS AND PHOTOGRAPHS: THE CONFEITARIA NOGUEIRA DOCUMENTARY COLLECTION AS A SOURCE FOR THE HISTORY OF WORK AND SOCIAL LIFE IN PELOTAS (1941-1978)

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Abstract: This article analyzes a documentary collection consisting of employee notebooks and photographs from a traditional Pelotas confectionery, now preserved at the Museu do Doce (Sweet Museum) of the Federal University of Pelotas. The objective is to discuss the potential of this collection as a source for the history of work, urban sociability, and local memory, without repeating the same approach used in studies focused solely on the internal organization of the establishment. By treating written and visual records as complementary supports, the text proposes a cross-reading capable of highlighting the distribution of functions, forms of remuneration, evidence of gender segmentation, different areas of activity, and the presence of the confectionery as a place of social interaction. A joint reading of the database derived from the notebooks allows us to identify 290 records referring to the years 1941, 1944, 1946, 1948, 1952, 1956, and 1959, with data on age, gender, activity, remuneration, form of payment, and location. The photographs, in turn, broaden the analysis by making visible the environments, scenes, and modes of public presentation of the establishment. It is argued that the relevance of the collection lies precisely in the possibility of bringing the administrative dimension of work closer to the symbolic and visual dimension of memory, allowing for a methodological reflection on the uses, potentialities, and limits of this type of documentation.

Keywords: historical sources; work; photography; bakeries; Pelotas.

Introduction

The history of Pelotas is usually evoked through two major axes of memory: the

beef jerky past and the city's consecration as a reference in the confectionery tradition. Between these two fields, different commercial establishments played an important role in the circulation of recipes, flavors, forms of sociability, and urban images. In this sense, confectioneries cannot be seen merely as points of sale for sweets. They also functioned as spaces for work, meeting, social distinction, and the production of collective memories. When observing the remaining documentation from these establishments, it becomes possible to understand not only what was sold, but also how the workers, environments, and modes of public presence of these commercial houses were organized.

Among the documentary collections preserved today by the UFPel Candy Museum, the collection related to Confeitaria Nogueira stands out for its variety of media and historical density. The collection brings together employee notebooks, photographs, and other materials associated with the daily life of one of Pelotas' longest-running confectioneries. A museological study published in 2021 drew attention to the importance of this collection, especially its segment photographic, highlighting the donation of the collection to the museum in 2016, the documentation process developed at the institution, and the value of the images for understanding the history of bakeries in the city. On another research front, the topic was also addressed from the perspective of labor history, in a study that investigated the employment relationships, remuneration, functions, gender, and age of confectionery workers between 1941 and 1978.

This article draws on the same documentary universe, but proposes a shift in

focus. Instead of returning to the confectionery as a case study of work organization, the text takes the collection of notebooks and photographs itself as its subject of analysis. The question here is what this collection, when read in an articulated way, allows us to understand about work, sociability, and urban memory. It is also important to reflect on its limits: what the notebooks record and what they silence; what the photographs show and what they leave out of the frame; how museumization changes the status of these materials; and how written and visual sources can be cross-referenced without one serving merely as an illustration of the other.

The hypothesis that guides the discussion is that the analytical strength of the collection lies precisely in its heterogeneity. The notebooks record the daily life of the bakery in administrative language, including positions, payments, ages, and locations. The photographs, in turn, provide a visual and social dimension of the establishment, allowing us to observe environments, characters, gestures, and occasions. Read together, these materials do not offer a complete picture of the past, but they do provide consistent clues for understanding the behind-the-scenes workings, social experiences, and subsequent processes of heritage preservation. Ultimately, it is argued that this collection is valuable not only for what it preserves, but also for the way it challenges researchers to think about the relationship between documents, memory, and historical interpretation.

The documentary collection and its preservation at the Museu do Doce

The incorporation of the collection into the Museu do Doce is an important factor in the historical interpretation of the collection. The collection was donated in 2025 by the heirs of the owner of the confectionery and became one of the first major donations received by the institution. The collection's entry into the museum gave a new layer of meaning to the documents, which ceased to be mere traces of everyday administrative life and became part of policies for the safeguarding, cataloging, and dissemination of heritage.

This process is important because it changes the very way in which sources are accessed. Documents that were previously linked to a company's routine are now viewed as cultural heritage and objects of research. Photographs can be digitized, described, and circulated in exhibitions or academic studies; notebooks, in turn, can be treated as a serial source for historical analysis. Musealization, therefore, is not an external detail of the collection. It is part of the biography of these materials and influences the questions that can be asked about them today.

In the case of this collection, the diversity of media is precisely what enhances its historiographical value. The employee notebooks allow us to follow very concrete aspects of the establishment's operation, such as form of payment, remuneration, age, gender, activity, and location. The photographs help us to perceive the bakery as a lived, frequented, and represented space. Instead of viewing one medium as complementary to the other in a hierarchical sense,

it is important to recognize that both record different dimensions of the same historical reality. The analytical potential of the collection stems, in large part, from this possibility of transition between bureaucratic records and the visual inscription of memory.

The table above summarizes the documentary corpus that supports the analysis. Its purpose is not to replace the interpretive description, but to provide the reader with an organized overview of the documentation.

Employee notebooks and administrative writing from everyday work

Employee records are particularly fertile ground for the social history of work because they record the establishment from a perspective of control and organization. Unlike retrospective memoirs or commemorative narratives, they record people and roles according to administrative criteria. In these records, workers are linked to categories such as age, gender, activity, form of

payment, and remuneration. The document does not offer direct access to the subjective experience of work, but reveals how the establishment classified it and made it legible for management purposes.

A joint reading of the database derived from these notebooks allows us to identify 290 records, distributed between the 1940s and 1950s. The predominance of monthly payment, with 245 occurrences, suggests the existence of a relatively stable core of workers. In addition, the 45 daily records indicate that the bakery also made use of more flexible employment relationships, probably suited to the specific needs of the production process or customer service. This coexistence of permanence and mobility adds complexity to the workforce and rules out simplistic interpretations of the establishment's labor force.

The occupations recorded reinforce this perception. The set presents functions related to customer service, production, the circulation of goods, and daily business support. The recurring presence of positions

Aspect	Main information
Media analyzed	Employee notebooks tabulated in two spreadsheets and photographic collection preserved in the Museu do Doce.
Time frame	Records referring to the years 1941, 1944, 1946, 1948, 1952, 1956, 1959, and 1978.
Available information	Location, age, gender, activity, remuneration, and form of payment.
Spaces identified	Concentration of records at Rua 15 de Novembro No. 559.
Analytical value	Allows for cross-referencing of administrative routine, work organization, sociability, and visual memory of the bakery.

Table 1 – Summary of the documentary collection used in the article

such as cashier, assistant, pastry chef's assistant, waiter, quadrista, baker, pastry chef, and porter shows that the confectionery functioned as a multifaceted structure, coordinating production behind the scenes, customer service, and supply routines. Although some job titles appear in abbreviated or generic form, the records reveal a differentiated internal division of labor, suggesting varying levels of specialization and responsibility.

Another important aspect is the gender dimension recorded in the registers. Looking at the data as a whole, men and women appear in similar proportions. However, the distribution changes when gender, payment method, and activity are crossed. In addition, certain occupations seem to be more associated with male workers, such as bakery, porter, and comic book artist, while the role of cashier has a significant presence of women. These data do not allow for rigid conclusions, but they point to a work organization permeated by gender expectations. Rather than providing definitive answers to these questions, the notebooks show their strength in raising historical questions that would be unlikely to arise without careful treatment of the documentation.

At the same time, it is necessary to recognize the limitations of this type of source. Not all fields are complete; there are ages that are not reported and categories that are not standardized. The notebooks also say little about actual working hours, conflicts, personal relationships, experiences of exploitation, or individual trajectories outside the workplace. In other words, this is valuable but selective documentation. Its silence on certain dimensions does not diminish its importance; it only requires that historical reading be done with caution, wi-

thout confusing administrative records with a complete description of reality.

Photographs and the visual dimension of sociability

If the notebooks translate the functioning of the bakery into administrative categories, the photographs reposition the establishment in the realm of the visible. The article by Mota, Gonçalves, and Leal shows that the photographic collection documents environments, characters, social practices, and moments of conviviality associated with the bakery, allowing us to think about the establishment beyond its productive routine. In the images, a confeitaria appears as a space for public circulation, permanence, encounter, and social affirmation, which significantly broadens the interpretive horizon of the research.

Photographs matter not only for what they show, but for how they show it. Every image is the result of choices: who is photographed, in what context, with what framing, and for what purpose. Thus, the visual collection should not be read as simple proof of what the notebooks record. Its value lies precisely in highlighting another documentary dimension, marked by the construction of a scene, the selection of characters, and the production of a visual memory of the establishment. By capturing interior environments, counters, tables, groups gathered together, or special occasions, the images signal the type of public presence that one wished to preserve or remember.

This aspect is especially relevant to the history of urban sociability. The confectionery appears not only as a workplace, but as a place of socializing and visibility. In the photographs, the reader is led to realize that

the life of the establishment went beyond the manufacture and sale of sweets. There were rituals of permanence, interactions between regulars, and a specific way of occupying the space. This brings the confectionery closer to other central institutions of modern urban life, in which commerce, leisure, and social distinction were intertwined.

The images also help to historicize the very construction of memory about the confectionery. By being preserved, cataloged, and studied in the context of the Museu do Doce, they cease to be merely private records and become heritage documents. In this shift, photography gains new circulation and becomes part of public narratives about Pelotas' confectionery tradition. What may have previously served as a family or institutional memento becomes a source for research, exhibitions, and museum communication activities. Thus, the photographs not only represent the confectionery's past: they actively participate in its symbolic permanence in the present.

Cross-referencing notebooks and photographs: methodological possibilities

The main gain from a cross-reading between notebooks and photographs is that it avoids both an economistic reduction and a purely celebratory reading of the confectionery. When analyzing only written records, there is a tendency to focus on job structure, remuneration, and employment relationships. When looking only at photographs, there is a risk of emphasizing the elegant and memorable face of the establishment, leaving the work that sustained it in the background. The articulation between the two media allows us to bring together

behind-the-scenes and window dressing, routine and representation, management and memory.

This articulation also favors a multi-scale approach. On a broader level, the collection is part of the history of Pelotas' confectionery tradition and the heritage process conducted by the Museu do Doce. On an intermediate scale, it helps to understand the internal structure of a specific confectionery, its spaces, and its forms of organization. On a closer scale, it reveals fragments of work trajectories, task divisions, gender arrangements, and scenes of sociability. Rarely does a single documentary typology allow for such mobility between levels of analysis.

From a methodological point of view, however, cross-referencing requires caution. It is not possible to assume a direct correspondence between an entry in the notebook and a person depicted in a photograph, nor to conclude that what the image shows is necessarily representative of the entire routine of the establishment. The documents work with different temporalities and logics. The notebook records because it needs to manage; the photograph records because it wants to show, remember, or value. The researcher's challenge is precisely to explore the potential of this asymmetry, not to erase it.

Based on this idea, the collection does not offer a single truth about the bakery. It delivers fragments of different orders, which only gain interpretive density when placed in relation to each other. The productive backdrop of the work, visible in the notebooks, gains prominence when contrasted with the social visibility produced by the images. Visual memory, in turn, becomes more historically concrete when the labor

infrastructure that sustained it is recognized. It is at this point that the collection proves especially productive for future research: it allows us to think about work, city, consumption, and heritage in an articulated way, without subordinating one dimension to another.

Final considerations

By taking the collection of notebooks and photographs from Confeitaria Nogueira as an object of reflection, this article sought to construct a distinct perspective from one focused exclusively on the organization of the establishment's work. This shift does not mean abandoning the social history of work; on the contrary, it means expanding it through a discussion of documentary supports, uses of sources, and processes of heritage preservation. The notebooks allow us to observe the administrative language of everyday work, while the photographs highlight the visual and social dimension of the establishment. Together, these materials reveal the confectionery as a space of production, coexistence, and memory.

The analysis showed that the collection is of great value for research into the urban history of Pelotas, its confectionery tradition, and the ways in which work was organized in commercial establishments during that period. At the same time, it was also evident that this documentation is selective and incomplete. The notebooks are silent on many individual experiences; the photographs record only certain moments and certain frames. Rather than disqualifying the source, these gaps reinforce the need for a critical reading, capable of recognizing that all documentation simultaneously preserves and conceals.

Finally, the collection shows how the historical permanence of a confectionery shop goes beyond its commercial life. By being preserved in the Museu do Doce, this documentary collection becomes part of a broader circuit of knowledge production, heritage education, and the construction of public memory. This allows the confectionery shop to continue to exist, in another form, in research, in the museum, and in the writing of history. Between notebooks and photographs, new possibilities open up for understanding not only a specific establishment, but also the relationships between work, sociability, heritage, and urban culture in southern Brazil.

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