

**AN AUTHENTIC ARCHIVAL EXPERIENCE
FOR THE COLLEGE CLASSROOM
IN THE DIGITAL AGE**

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Abstract: One of the most treasured experiences of historians is archival research, and yet university professors frequently struggle with viable ways to include archival research in their lecture courses. Further, historians, who are generally focused on the content of documents, often fail to provide students with a sense of the process by which historical documents and artifacts are gathered, preserved, and made available. This essay describes a partnership among faculty at the University of Scranton, the Lackawanna Historical Society, Weinberg Memorial Library, Scranton Public Library, and Everhart Museum to create an archival-based digital project for a course on the Civil War and Reconstruction. The students from the course uncovered uncataloged Civil War–era documents and artifacts, preserved, digitized, and transcribed them, and organized them into an online collection. The project acquainted students with local, firsthand historical accounts; introduced them to the complexity of recreating history from archival sources; exposed them to careers in archives, museum studies, and librarianship; and forged a partnership between university students and local institutions.

*R*esearching in the archives is a defining and treasured experience for historians. It is a rite of passage that teaches scholars how to read archaic handwriting, handle priceless artifacts, and

intimately connect with subjects long dead. Archives provide access to materials that would otherwise be lost to the historical record. They also teach budding historians about the problematic nature of retrieving and compiling the scraps left behind by humans in order to construct accurate narratives and compelling arguments. Professors of history frequently try to devise ways to share the pleasures and tribulations of archival research with college students but are hindered by significant challenges. Often the archives to which students have access do not possess manuscript collections relevant to the course subject matter, and professors do not always have the time or resources to train students in archival skills. Further, historians, who are generally focused on the content of documents, often fail to provide students with a real sense of the process by which historical documents and other artifacts are gathered, preserved, and made available—all crucial to understanding the process of historical inquiry. Even historians do not always understand this circuitous process, especially given how new technology has reconfigured archival practices; there is, therefore, considerable value in collaborating with librarians and archivists.

In spring 2011, we—Kathryn Shively Meier, assistant professor of history, and Kristen Yarmey, associate professor and digital services librarian, then both at the University of Scranton—partnered with the Lackawanna Historical Society, Scranton Public Library, and Everhart Museum to create an archival experience for Meier's course on the Civil War and Reconstruction that was relevant to the digital age. The project would have the more traditional pedagogical goal of providing a vibrant local history experience for students, but it would also pursue the novel aim of introducing students to the processes of procuring, preserving, and providing access to archival sources. The project thus expanded the college classroom beyond content learning to inform students about how historical knowledge is constructed and to expose them to job skills in various history-related career paths. Because of the experimental nature of the project, it is our goal in this essay to be forthcoming about its strengths and weaknesses in the hopes that it will be adapted to a variety of topics and circumstances, depending on available university resources.

The primary objective of *The Civil War and Reconstruction*, an upper-level course taken predominantly by history majors, was to master a thorough understanding of the causes, experiences, and outcomes of the Civil War and Reconstruction. Instructional time was almost exclusively

devoted to traditional content-based lectures and discussions of assigned scholarly readings. The digital project, then, was only one component of the course. While it spanned the entire semester, the project consumed few in-course instructional hours and took place largely outside of class (consuming roughly five to ten hours plus limited class time). The only significant project activities that took place in class were group presentations; we used a small amount of class time for administrative purposes (e.g., introducing the project, assigning groups, and other coordination). Our objectives for the project, a blend of traditional and novel pedagogy, were: (1) to complement the lecture and reading content with first-person narratives from the local home front; (2) to introduce students to the complexity of recreating history from archival sources; (3) to expose students to careers in archives, museum studies, and librarianship and their related skill sets; and (4) to forge a partnership between university students and resources and local institutions.

The project began in the archives. Working in task-based teams, students first sifted through uncataloged artifacts at the Lackawanna Historical Society for Civil War-era primary sources such as objects, letters, newspaper clippings, photographs, and receipts. The students then prepared the objects and documents for cataloging. Next, they digitized and transcribed the materials. Finally, students designed an online exhibit to display the artifacts to the public. Along the way, staff members at the Lackawanna Historical Society, the Everhart Museum, and the University of Scranton Weinberg Memorial Library trained, supervised, and advised the students.¹ After the conclusion of the project, the students' work was published by the Lackawanna Valley Digital Archives in an online collection entitled "Out of the Wilderness: The Industrialization and Development of the Scranton Area 1850–1865."² The project thus became a lasting public resource in addition to a vehicle for helping students learn how to conduct archival research, exposing them to the skill sets of a range of careers, and engaging them directly in local Civil War history.

Our first step in project planning was to meet and consult with our community partners. Together, we established a project timeline, outlined expectations for students and partners, and agreed upon description and digitization standards so that the students' work could easily be incorporated into the "Out of the Wilderness" collection. We broke the project down into five major student tasks—(1) discovery, (2) preservation, (3) digitization, (4) transcription, and (5) interpretation—each to be completed by a group

of five to seven students under the direction of a community partner. At the start of the semester, we asked students to rank their group preferences, and we assigned them to groups accordingly. The Lackawanna Historical Society agreed to guide groups 1 and 2 in finding and preserving primary sources in its collection, which is conveniently located next door to the students' regular classroom building. The Weinberg Memorial Library, also close by, would help groups 3 and 4 digitize and transcribe these materials; and group 5 would receive guidance on interpretation from the Everhart Museum and user-interface design from the Weinberg Memorial Library. Finally, the Scranton Public Library would publish the students' work in an online collection of the Lackawanna Valley Digital Archives.

After confirming student group assignments, we began the project in the second week of the semester with a class visit to the Everhart Museum for a guided tour of the featured exhibit, "*With bullets singing all around me*": *Regional Stories of the Civil War*. Composed of artifacts on loan from historical societies throughout northeastern Pennsylvania, the exhibit focused on social aspects of the war, such as African American wartime experience, prisoners of war, local musicians, the women who supported the soldiers from home, and medicine (highlighting museum founder and Civil War surgeon Dr. Isaiah Fawkes Everhart). The museum tour was designed to ignite interest in primary sources, to introduce students to museum work as a potential career path, and to provide training for the "Interpreters" (group 5). The museum's head curator talked with group 5 about the goals and strategies of interpretation, pointing out how the exhibit highlighted individual stories to convey broader historical themes in interesting and accessible ways, just as they should strive to do with the archival resources with which they would create their exhibit. The museum visit was a crucial part of motivating students to embrace a learning experience that extended beyond the four walls of the traditional classroom.

One week later, group 1 (affectionately referred to as the "Diggers") met at the Lackawanna Historical Society to comb through the institution's genealogy materials, a collection of mostly uncataloged papers donated by community members, filling twelve filing cabinet drawers. The society's staff believed that the genealogy collection included some original Civil War-era letters and documents, but they had never had time to methodically review the family folders. Organized into pairs, the students searched for items dated between 1848 and 1870 from soldiers or civilians at home or artifacts that related to Civil War memory, such as materials from the Grand Army of the Republic or newspaper articles reflecting back on Civil War topics. For each piece, the students wrote

down a basic description of the item (creator, type of artifact, date, geographic location, etc.) and in which genealogical file it had been found. They recorded this information on a cataloging form prepared by the Weinberg Memorial Library to streamline the development of the digital collection.

One of the risks of the project was that we were unsure what (if any) Civil War content the students would discover. Happily, the Diggers' findings were more numerous and diverse than we had anticipated. The students uncovered sixty-two items that illustrated personal, local accounts of the war. Some artifacts revealed the experiences of soldiers on the front lines. The written reminiscences of Patrick DeLacy, who served in the 143rd Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry, detailed his memories of fighting at the Battle of the Wilderness, for which he won the Medal of Honor. Students discovered an 1862 British halfpenny coin that was the long-lost lucky charm of Sergeant Benjamin H. Crippen, another member of the 143rd Pennsylvania who at the battle of Gettysburg shook his fist at advancing Confederates instead of surrendering the Union flag. In a bitter twist of fate, he had given the coin (Fig. 1) to his brother for safekeeping before Gettysburg and perished on the battlefield. The coin was accompanied by reproductions of documents related to Crippen's death, including an inventory of his personal effects and his discharge certificate (Fig. 2). In another reminder of the material costs



FIGURE 1: A lucky coin belonging to Color Sergeant Benjamin Crippen of the 143rd Pennsylvania Volunteers. Crippen, who died on the battlefield at Gettysburg, had given the coin to his brother Martin for safekeeping. Courtesy of the Lackawanna Historical Society.

CASUALTY SHEET.

Name: Benjamin H. Crippen
 Rank: Sergeant Company: D Regiment: 143
 Arm: Infantry State: Pennsylvania
 Nature of Casualty: Death

<p>CAUSE OF CASUALTY—(NAME OF DISEASE, &c.) <u>Gun Shot Wound</u></p> <hr/> <p>DEGREE OF DISABILITY.</p> <hr/> <p>BY WHOM CERTIFIED. <u>Capt. M. L. Blair</u></p> <hr/> <p>DATE OF DISCHARGE, DEATH, &c. <u>July 1st 1863</u></p> <hr/> <p>PLACE OF DISCHARGE, DEATH, &c. <u>Gettysburg Penn</u></p>	<p>BY WHOM DISCHARGED.</p> <hr/> <p>FROM WHAT SOURCE THIS INFORMATION WAS OBTAINED. <u>Register of Deceased Soldiers</u> <u>Dec 1st 1863</u></p> <hr/> <p>REMARKS.</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: right;"><u>Thos. A. Quigley</u> Clerk.</p>
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(118)

FIGURE 2: Reproduction of a casualty sheet documenting Crippen's death on the Gettysburg battlefield. Courtesy of the Lackawanna Historical Society.

of battle, an 1865 receipt documented the price of a leg amputation for an anonymous soldier. A newspaper article titled "Lincoln Still a Hero to Local Man Who Met Him," in which Corporal Henry Earley told the story of how he met Abraham Lincoln while on guard duty at Petersburg, illustrated the extent to which politics remained intimately connected to the battlefield experiences of soldiers (Fig. 3).

Lincoln Still a Hero to Local Man Who Met Him

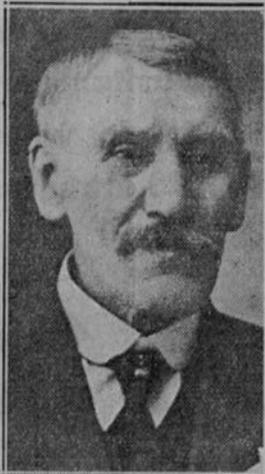
**Henry Earley Maintains
Emancipator Was Neither
"Cold Nor Mannerless,"
as Described by
Edgar Lee Masters**

Frying biographers may strip the glamorous cloak from the stooped shoulders of Abraham Lincoln, son of the Illinois backwoods, but to Henry Earley, who felt the tight grip of the president's bony hands and heard his cheerful greeting, he remains a hero that neither time nor man can disfigure.

Gray haired and with blue eyes glazed by his eighty-seven years, Earley yesterday recalled the four years spent on shell-hacked southern battlefields—the fields where he left his youth.

"Say, mister, did I know the president? Why I shook hands with him. Yes, sir. Back in '64 I was adoin' guard duty before General Hartsuff's headquarters at Petersburg. I was sentry No. 1 when who walks up to the door but the president.

"How are you, soldier?" he said, and smiled. Say, mister, you should have seen him smile, by golly, his face wrinkled all up. I was spell-bound. He shook my hand and chatted for several minutes. "He didn't stay long. Two Negro



HENRY EARLEY

mammies, mister, were on the other end of porch scrubbing. He saw them and hurried over. The president shook their hands but, by golly, they

**"How Are You, Soldier?"
Was Greeting He Gave
To Scranton Veteran
Doing Guard Duty in
'64 at Petersburg**

didn't know him. So after the president went inside, I walks over to them and tells them who the tall, lanky fellow was.

"Mister, you should have seen them. One folded her hands, and murmured, 'Lawd bless him, Lawd bless him.'"

Something besides the years glazed the old veteran's eyes as he reminisced.

Saw Lincoln Second Time

Behind the battle lines of Cold Harbor, Corporal Earley saw the president a second time. Abe Lincoln was riding a donkey, his long legs dangling dangerously near the ground, as he unceremoniously toured the camp.

Edgar Lee Masters, contemporary lawyer-poet, may say Abraham Lincoln was "cold, mannerless, unkempt and at times neurotic," but Corporal Earley who served four long years at the call of the tall, mellow-eyed, bearded leader and saw him riding a jackass, says, "God, mister, he was a man."

FIGURE 3: "Lincoln Still a Hero to Local Man Who Met Him," undated newspaper article. Courtesy of the Lackawanna Historical Society.

Other items related to life on the home front. In some cases, daily activities carried on with relatively little disruption from the war; for instance, much of the correspondence belonging to prominent businessman Joseph H. Scranton (whose 1871 estate forms the heart of the University of Scranton campus) was routine. But other transactions were relevant to the ongoing war: in a letter dated September 3, 1862, Colonel Richard A. Oakford of the 132nd Pennsylvania Infantry asked for Scranton's aid in purchasing a horse at an affordable price (Fig. 4). (Oakford would be killed just two weeks later at the battle of Antietam.)

Several letters unearthed by the Diggers included commentary on national politics and civilian morale, especially those from Scranton's brother-in-law David Davis, a Supreme Court justice and associate of Abraham Lincoln. Davis even sent Scranton a document addressed to Abraham Lincoln recommending Scranton's son Joseph for a civil service appointment, though he wrote that he preferred it not be used "unless it is necessary," since "with Mr. [Hendrick B.] Wright's aid and Mr. [Galusha A.]

Head Quarters 132 Regt PV
 Camp Whipple Sept 3 1862
 Jrs H Scranton Esq
 Dear Sir

It is an old adage that there is no use in having friends unless you can use them, Now I think this saying is true & take the liberty of calling on you for a little help just now.

When School Wilcox & myself left home we intended & expected to get our horses from the Government at Government prices this ordinarily we could have done, but just now the Army having lost very heavily in horses as well as men has sent all the spare horse forward to the front & it is utterly impossible for us to get horses from the Government. As for buying from individuals in Washington that is also out of the question. Now I thought that among your horses you most likely would have one that would answer my purpose, I want one of some dark color, good size, tough & sound from 7 to 9 years old. I do not want a fancy horse, but a good serviceable horse.

FIGURE 4: Excerpt of an 1862 letter from Colonel Richard A. Oakford to Joseph H. Scranton. Courtesy of the Lackawanna Historical Society.

Grow's there will be no trouble whatever" (Fig. 5). The students also found several letters belonging to the family of George Peck, a Methodist minister and grandfather of author Stephen Crane. The correspondence includes a letter written by George's brother Andrew Peck, also a Methodist minister, in which he outlined his views on references to slavery in the Bible. Another

Bloomington, Ill.
 July 14. 1862
 His Excellency
 A Lincoln, President U.S.,
 My Dear Sir,
 I would
 like exceedingly, if consistent
 with your views, that you
 appoint my nephew, Joseph
 A. Scranton, of Scranton, Pa.
 Collector for the Congressional
 district in which he lives.
 He lives in Luzerne Co.
 Pa. which is represented in
 Congress now by Col Henonick.
 B. Wright. - By the new appor-
 tionment, the County of Luzerne
 is placed in the district with
 Mr. Grow, the Speaker -
 Joseph A. Scranton
 Esq. the father of this young

FIGURE 5: Excerpt of an 1862 letter from David Davis addressed to Abraham Lincoln recommending Davis's nephew Joseph A. Scranton for a civil service position. Courtesy of the Lackawanna Historical Society.

letter written by Peck's daughter Mary Crane, mother of Stephen Crane, describes labor union meetings taking place in New Jersey in the fall of 1864 (Fig. 6).

Students from group 2 began work at the historical society approximately one week after group 1. Group 2 was charged with assessing the condition of the documents and artifacts group 1 had uncovered, noting and reporting the presence and location of tears, discoloration, folds, wrinkles, or ink blotches. After examining the items, the students rehoused them for long-term preservation in protective Mylar sleeves and acid-free folders. They also completed loan forms so the items could be transported to the nearby Weinberg Memorial Library for digitization and transcription. Along the way, these students had to study and interpret the content and physical characteristics of primary sources.

Groups 3 and 4 were responsible for digitizing and transcribing the artifacts at the Weinberg Memorial Library. Working in pairs during scheduled shifts, group 3 students scanned each item and recorded important technical and administrative information, such as the equipment and settings used for digital capture, the date of digitization, and the format of the files they produced. Group 3 was, furthermore, responsible for standardizing the descriptive information provided by groups 1 and 2 so that dates and names would be consistent across the whole digital collection.

Once digitization was complete, group 3 transferred the digital files and original documents to group 4 for transcription. Group 4 was responsible for converting handwriting into searchable, machine-readable text. Working in pairs, group 4 students typed out transcriptions that retained the capitalization, punctuation, and spelling of the original items. They carefully noted words or phrases that were unclear or entirely unreadable, informing future researchers of possible gaps and inaccuracies in the transcripts. The students struggled with scrawling, cursive handwriting, unfamiliar abbreviations and terms, and "creative" spelling and grammar. With practice, however, they began to make sense of the texts they were trying to decode and to experience the thrill of the researcher in growing personally conversant with people of the past (see Fig. 7). Several students exclaimed over connections between the letters they were reading and the names of people and places they had learned about in class. For instance, learning about the staggering death toll at the battle of Gettysburg in class was one thing; transcribing the discharge paper for Sergeant Benjamin H. Crippen "by reason of death caused by gunshot wound" was quite another, bringing home the personal nature of the war for

and I'll try and respond to all letters, I feel as if it was not right for us to wait so long for an answer but rather if the looked for letter does not come let's write again.

I don't correspond with any of the family but you, and sometimes I feel very lonely about it. Can scarce believe that I have three brothers the same flesh as myself. Luther writes at long intervals, but his letters are very short and unsatisfactory. I would not have thought that it could be so perhaps it is my fault. but if it is why don't they ever cume me for a letter? Do write soon.

We are very happy here but there is great spiritual death here. Mr Crane and the children join in love to you both. Pray for us.

'Sis'

FIGURE 6: Excerpt from an 1864 letter from Mary Crane, mother of author Stephen Crane, to her parents, George and Mary Peck. Courtesy of the Lackawanna Historical Society.

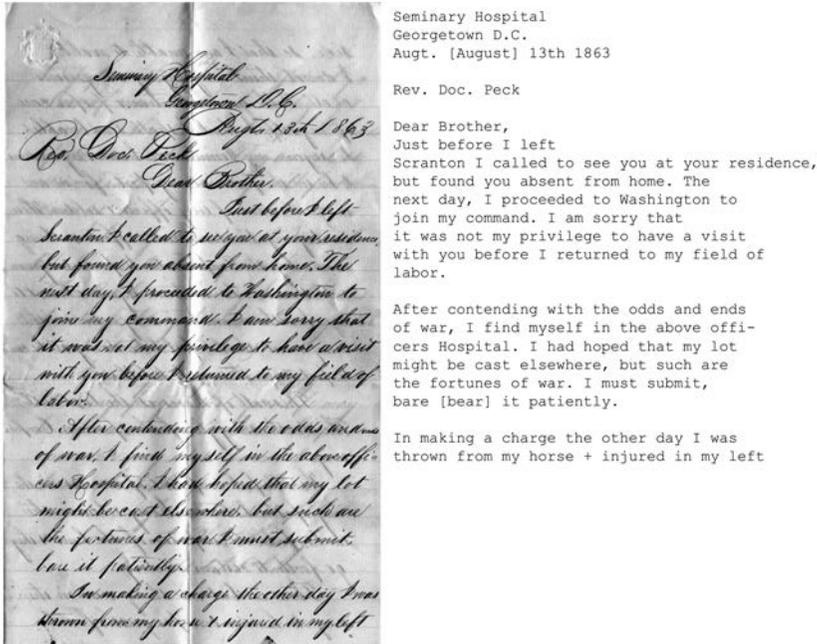


FIGURE 7: Excerpt of an 1863 letter from W. B. Herring to Rev. George Peck, with transcription by University of Scranton students. Courtesy of the Lackawanna Historical Society.

the students. While groups 1, 2, and 3 all engaged with the primary sources they found, preserved, and digitized, the students of group 4 had the most in-depth interaction with the texts, and they found it particularly gratifying to be able to connect local stories to the larger narrative of the Civil War.

After groups 1 through 4 completed their tasks, they presented their group experiences and findings to the class. They described their training and the skills they had acquired, reflected upon the local history stories that had most resonated with them, and explained the pleasures and tribulations of their rehearsed temporary professions. Importantly, the presentations afforded the members of group 5 the opportunity to gain an overview of the collection they would be organizing, as well as the process by which it had come together.

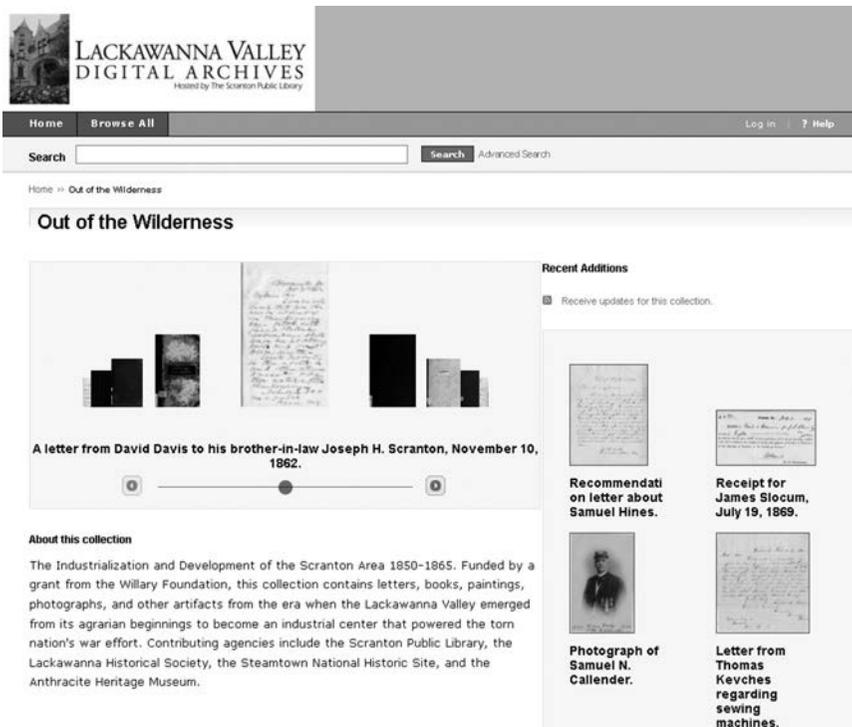
At this point, with just a month left in the semester, all of the digital images and their accompanying transcripts were given to group 5 for interpretation. Group 5 was charged with designing a web-based public interface that would help users search the digital collection and convey a

sense of the content it contained. Due to the time constraints of the class, and because few students had any experience with web design, group 5 prepared a mock-up of a website rather than a functional interface. Having already received guidance from an Everhart curator on interpreting primary sources for the public, group 5 reviewed other online collections of Civil War materials and then consulted with Yarmey on strategies for making digital content accessible, searchable, and user friendly. The students categorized the digitized items into themes (business transactions, death records, military records, personal correspondence, public documents, the Scranton family, and visual artifacts), laid out a home page with search and browse tools, and compiled photographs and presentation slides from their classmates to describe how the collection had come together. Group 5 students then presented the completed project to their classmates.

At the end of the semester, we returned the original documents to the Lackawanna Historical Society and transferred the digital collection files to the Scranton Public Library, where staff members selected the artifacts they wished to include in their collection. Out of the sixty-two items found and digitized during the project, fifty-four were uploaded into the Lackawanna Valley Digital Archives, approximately doubling the size of the “Out of the Wilderness” collection.³ In October 2011, the Lackawanna Valley Digital Archives formally launched, with “Out of the Wilderness” as its inaugural collection. As a result of the University of Scranton students’ work, these Civil War-era materials, previously uncataloged and accessible only to researchers who could physically visit the Lackawanna Historical Society, are now full-text searchable on the web, just a search box away from an interested public (Fig. 8).

Because of the unusual nature of the project and its many moving parts, we also designed several means by which to evaluate whether the project was meeting our learning objectives. Students provided informal comments on their groups’ progress at the beginning of each class, while we communicated regularly with our supervising partners. At the end of the semester, Meier also led a classroom discussion on the overall project. What we learned from monitoring the progress of each group and reflecting back upon the project was that we largely accomplished our learning objectives, but the project certainly had room for improvement.

Our first project objective had been to complement course content with first-person narratives. The students valued the experience of connecting local Pennsylvania perspectives to the larger wartime picture, remarking upon the



LACKAWANNA VALLEY DIGITAL ARCHIVES
Hosted by The Scranton Public Library

Home Browse All Log in Help

Search Search Advanced Search

Home >> Out of the Wilderness

Out of the Wilderness

Recent Additions

Receive updates for this collection.

A letter from David Davis to his brother-in-law Joseph H. Scranton, November 10, 1862.

About this collection

The Industrialization and Development of the Scranton Area 1850-1865. Funded by a grant from the Willary Foundation, this collection contains letters, books, paintings, photographs, and other artifacts from the era when the Lackawanna Valley emerged from its agrarian beginnings to become an industrial center that powered the torn nation's war effort. Contributing agencies include the Scranton Public Library, the Lackawanna Historical Society, the Steamtown National Historic Site, and the Anthracite Heritage Museum.

Recent Additions:

- Recommendati on letter about Samuel Hines.
- Receipt for James Slocum, July 19, 1869.
- Photograph of Samuel N. Callender.
- Letter from Thomas Kevches regarding sewing machines.

FIGURE 8: Lackawanna Historical Society items digitized and transcribed by University of Scranton students are now available to the public via the Lackawanna Valley Digital Archives (hosted by the Scranton Public Library at <http://www.lackawannadigitalarchives.org>). Courtesy of the Lackawanna Valley Digital Archives.

fact that, in some cases, life on the home front progressed with minimal impact from the war; in other cases, such as the deaths of a number of local men at the battle of Gettysburg, war changed Scranton forever. They also recognized the importance of framing the local history they uncovered in terms of the context they had learned through course lectures and readings. At the same time, the local primary sources brought the history learned in the classroom to life. The Battle of the Wilderness, for example, became more vivid because of a letter from a soldier who wrote of rescuing a fallen comrade from the forest fires that raged in the hand-to-hand combat of the Spotsylvania Wilderness.

Our second objective had been to introduce students to the complexities of working with primary sources. Handling the artifacts taught students the difficulty of reconstructing history from fragmented evidence and to

become more critical of what is presented as historical “fact” in textbooks. Items they might have once considered rubbish, such as receipts, suddenly became their only viable links to the local past. They began to learn firsthand the common problems with primary research—that many voices, especially those of women and African Americans, were often lost to the local record, while the voices that remained, often of more prominent male citizens, were fragmented and decontextualized. Students gained a deeper understanding of what primary sources are, where they may be found, and how their audience, purpose, and tone may differ from more familiar secondary sources. Furthermore, recognizing names and places from class lectures in the primary documents, they began to grasp the value of context, applying knowledge gained from their secondary source class materials to help them understand the primary sources they uncovered. At the same time, the project brought into clear relief the significance of archives and digital collections, not only to the class but to scholarship in general. In short, they discovered the arduous tasks of professional historians and archivists, while getting a taste of the painstaking process of assembling and creating knowledge.

Our third project aim was to expose students to careers in archives, museum studies, and librarianship and their related skill sets. Students in group 1 not only gleaned experience in the archives as historians, but, through the process of digging through the historical society files, were exposed to processing and arrangement challenges that are central to the archival profession. Group 2’s task introduced the students to archival preservation practices, such as proper handling and storage of fragile and unique primary resources, as well as the fundamental archival concept of provenance. As they worked, the students gained experience in recognizing the significance and potential uses of primary sources and gained an appreciation for the role archivists play in fostering historical preservation and knowledge. Group 3 learned the important role of digital librarians in providing online access to archival materials. Group 3 expressed surprise at the resource-intensive, time-consuming nature of digitization as well as at the attention to detail required for the creation and preparation of the descriptive, technical, and administrative information researchers rely upon to discover relevant information. Group 4 students had gained the most experience as historians, carefully reading the content of primary sources and pondering how the local stories they read fit into the larger picture of the Civil War. Group 5 learned about museum curation and the myriad interpretive decisions involved in designing meaningful public displays of artifacts.

Our final objective for the project had been for the students to contribute a valuable information resource to the local community. To assess this objective, we asked our community partners for their input and received positive feedback. The Lackawanna Historical Society stated, “The project was a great way for the LHS to uncover valuable primary documents and provide better storage and accessibility for the items.” The staff of the Lackawanna Valley Digital Archives described the project as a “great example of fortuitous timing and community cooperation” and noted that the “the fruits of [the students’] labor are available for all to see.” For the Everhart Museum, the project’s benefits were less informational than promotional: “The project was also very beneficial in bringing University students into our site and educating them about our mission and related activities.” All expressed interest in collaborating on more digital projects in the future.

From the instructor’s perspective, evaluating student content learning on the project proved the greatest challenge. While the digital project was only one component of the course, it did constitute 25 percent of the students’ grades. Content knowledge gleaned from lectures and scholarly reading was assessed as part of the broader course via two long-form essay exams. Student work on the project was evaluated via a group presentation about their task (40 percent) and a final reflective paper, which explained the students’ experiences and roles in their groups and connected their local history finds to the larger themes and readings of the course (60 percent). In retrospect, the greatest deficiency of the project was the lack of a long-form research paper that would have systematically analyzed the content of the artifacts. Such a project would have helped students learn to construct cohesive historical arguments from primary sources. Unfortunately, one of the challenges of digital history is the amount of time it requires to build an online resource. In this course, digitization and transcription were not completed until nearly the end of the semester, and the published digital collection was not available online until several months later, making it difficult for students to analyze the documents in a systematic way.

The students who expressed the most gratification with the project were in groups 1 (the Diggers), 2 (the Preservers), and 4 (the Transcribers). They had interacted most intimately with the primary sources. Group 3 students (the Digitizers) found their process arduous, leaving them with less time to read and analyze the documents, while group 5 students (Interpreters) felt they lacked the technical and creative skills necessary for collection curation. Part of their difficulty was that they had received training at the beginning of the semester during our group field trip to the Everhart, and their task did not

take place until the last few weeks of the semester. These deficiencies led us to consider the possibility that the entire class should have a more extensive opportunity to work with the primary sources, perhaps reserving digitization for library staff and replacing organization of the artifacts with a classwide end-of-term research paper on local history that utilizes the collection. Overall, however, the project was a success. It enabled students to venture outside of the classroom to learn about the underpinnings of historical research and experience the process by which knowledge is created.

Many of the opportunities digital history can provide for university learning remain unexplored. What truly set this project apart from similar endeavors was its explication of the archival experience for students, including the roles of historians (both traditional and public), archivists, librarians, and museum curators. While the project was not perfect, it successfully introduced students to local history, provided them with a range of skills, and even served as a window into a variety of career opportunities.

NOTES

We extend our utmost gratitude to our community partners: Mary Ann Moran-Savakinus, executive director of the Lackawanna Historical Society; Sara Strain, a Pennsylvania Conservation Corps member then stationed at the historical society; Nezka Pfeifer, curator at the Everhart Museum; and Scott Thomas and Martina Soden of the Scranton Public Library, project coordinator and collection manager for the Lackawanna Valley Digital Archives, respectively.

1. A fortunate confluence of events set in motion the initial design for this project. As 2011 was the first year of the Civil War Sesquicentennial celebrations, rising popular interest in the war meant that several of Scranton's cultural heritage organizations were featuring Civil War collections that spring. The city's Everhart Museum had assembled an impressive Civil War exhibit entitled "*With bullets singing all around me*": *Regional Stories of the Civil War*. Additionally, a group of five Lackawanna County heritage organizations, led by the Scranton Public Library, had jointly secured funding from the Willary Foundation to digitize Civil War-era photographs, maps, books, and artifacts for the "Out of the Wilderness" project, which would become the inaugural digital collection of the collaborative Lackawanna Valley Digital Archives. One of the contributing organizations was the Lackawanna Historical Society, whose unique nineteenth-century collections, knowledgeable, enthusiastic staff, and physical proximity to the University of Scranton were driving forces behind our project. Lastly, the university's own recent investments and efforts in digitization and digital collections, coordinated by the Weinberg Memorial Library, meant that the class would have access to equipment, software, and expertise from the library's Digital Services department.
2. "Out of the Wilderness: The Industrialization and Development of the Scranton Area 1850–1865," Lackawanna Valley Digital Archives, Scranton Public Library, Scranton, PA, <http://content.lackawannadigitalarchives.org/cdm/landingpage/collection/outwild>.
3. The remaining items were either deemed out of scope or not included due to copyright concerns.