



# The FEDERALIST

Society for History in the Federal Government Newsletter

Second Series | Number 66  
Summer/Fall 2020

**SHFG**  
[www.shfg.org](http://www.shfg.org)

## COVID-19 & FEDERAL HISTORY OFFICES

### Dear SHFG members and colleagues:

The Society is interested in documenting how various federal history offices have dealt with Covid-19 and its ramifications for your Departments, Agencies, or Commands.

From speaking with some members, I know many of your offices have been enmeshed in documenting the impact of this crisis on the federal government, its employees, and offices.

We are asking for submissions for short articles on how your offices have dealt with Covid and all the surrounding issues. If you or someone in your office would like to submit an article, please let us know.

Any submissions we receive will be collected and published either online or in *The Federalist*. Please email us at [shfg.primary@gmail.com](mailto:shfg.primary@gmail.com) with any questions.

Sincerely,  
Elizabeth Charles  
SHFG President, 2020-2021

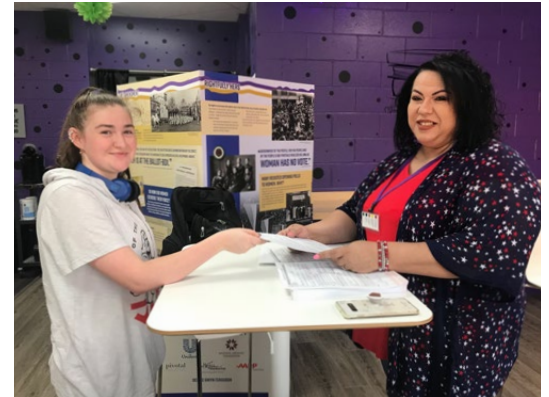
## Taking History to the People one Popup at a Time

By Jennifer N. Johnson

For more than 25 years the National Archives Museum has created traveling exhibits, and in recent years the National Archives Traveling Exhibit Service (NATES) was responsible for producing and managing a variety of traveling shows. As an arm of the museum, traveling exhibits provide new opportunities for access to Federal government records and allow the public to connect to the National Archives in their communities.

Shortly after NATES was established, a popup exhibit was proposed. Embodying the spirit of one of NATES fundamental goals to spread the reach of the National Archives, the display grew from an idea that a product encouraging civic literacy could also be compact enough to produce and send to a variety of institutions. The first popup launched as part of the National Archives commemoration of the 225th anniversary of the Bill of Rights. The goal of the commemoration was to maximize outreach nationwide, and to explore the power of the Bill of Rights and our enduring system of government.

As the permanent home of the Bill of Rights, a special exhibition in the Lawrence F. O'Brien gallery in Washington, DC, *Amending America*, looked at our amending history beginning with the creation of the Bill of Rights. Using *Amending America*, as inspiration, the popup display took that content to audiences and communities outside the Beltway. 2,000 *The Bill of Rights and You*



Students registering to vote with county clerk at voter registration drive, Ozark High School, Ozark, Arkansas, October 3, 2019. (Courtesy of Ozark High School)

popups were shipped to schools, libraries, museums, and archives in all 50 states, and through a partnership with the Federation of State Humanities Councils many shipped to rural and hard-to-reach communities.

*The Bill of Rights and You* exhibit spotlights one of the most remarkable periods in American history and the content was developed to contain simple messages on each panel, conveying the importance of the Bill of Rights, its history and implementation, and what that means for people today. The exhibits were shipped free to sites who requested one and it was theirs to keep. Education and press materials were provided along with suggestions for use, but it was meant to be used however the participating site felt it would be most impactful.

See "Popups" cont'd on page 5

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# The **FEDERALIST**

Society for History in the Federal Government Newsletter

(ISSN 0736-8151)

Published Quarterly

The Society is a national professional organization open to all who are interested in federal history programs. Annual membership fee is \$55, \$35 students, \$100 institutions and includes a subscription to *The Federalist*, *Federal History* journal, and other periodic publications. Contributors are encouraged to submit articles, news listings, and photographs to the editors.

Current and back issues are available to members at <http://shfg.wildapricot.org/Federalist>. Content listings for all issues are posted at <http://shfg.wildapricot.org/page-18090>.

Opinions expressed in articles are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the positions of *The Federalist*, the SHFG, or the agencies or organizations where the authors are employed.

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## President's Message

Elizabeth Charles

I intended for this to be an entirely different President's Message, but like most of us, nothing in 2020 has gone as we had

hoped or expected.

The first week of March 2020, I sat in my office with Kristin Ahlberg and Mandy Chalou. We were on a conference call with Mattea Sanders and Jessie Kratz deliberating over whether to cancel the long scheduled March 13-14, 2020 annual meeting. We had many calls that week, text messages, emails. The pandemic had begun. I had just returned from an amazing vacation in southeast Asia on February 29. I had flown. I had been in Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia. Things there seemed under control. However, things seemed to be quickly changing in other parts of the world. The Covid crisis in the United States was about to get much worse, but in early March what did we know?

We were in touch with colleagues at NCPH and the OAH. No one seemed to know what to do or how to make decisions about conferences. The financial ramifications for not hosting a meeting would be tough enough on a small organization like SHFG—much more so on larger history groups. The SHFG leadership pondered our choices. We decided it was not worth the risk of the health and wellbeing of any of our members to host a meeting. We were incredibly disappointed. We had worked hard to organize what would have been an engaging conference. With the cancellation of the meeting, we lost the opportunity for intellectual engagement with our federal history community.

The value of the connections and informal conversations we have at these meetings is important and helps keep the Society growing. However, as time quickly showed, we made the right call.

Now, in August, we are in the same boat for discussions of our 2021 meeting. The AHA has already made the hard call not to host an in-person meeting. For liability purposes alone, this seems imminently reasonable. While we have not made the final decision, SHFG is leaning toward a virtual 2021 conference of some kind. What events we will host and what that will look like is still in the works. This is not only technologically challenging but also financially challenging.

Primarily, I want our membership to remain engaged with the Society but also with each other. If this pandemic has taught me anything, it is the value of colleagues, friendships, and conversations with each other. We can still discuss big ideas and how to move federal history forward. For now, we get to do that over Zoom or some other platform.

During these difficult times, SHFG, our federal history offices, and our country face numerous challenges. The SHFG leadership and I will continue to work hard to promote the important work of the federal history community and to keep our members connected. As always, I welcome your ideas and encourage members to become involved with Society projects and virtual events. When we start to plan what will likely be a virtual meeting, we will reach out to members for input. If you have other ideas in the meantime, please email me at [shfg.primary@gmail.com](mailto:shfg.primary@gmail.com).

## Feature Your Project!

Want to spread the word about your work? *The Federalist* newsletter prints information about federal history projects and issues affecting federal history programs.

If you or your organization have news items related to federal history that you would like printed in *The Federalist*, or if you have a press release, feature article, or profile you would like to contribute, email the editor at [shfgfederalist@gmail.com](mailto:shfgfederalist@gmail.com).

*The Federalist* welcomes contributors with information highlighting news of the profession, or who are willing to describe their projects for the SHFG audience!

## Editor's Note

This combined summer/fall issue of *The Federalist* arrives amid the global COVID-19 pandemic and, for those reading this, I hope that right now you and your loved-ones are healthy and safe. At the time that the last issue went to print, I, like many others, had no idea how disruptive and widespread this event would become. For *The Federalist*, the logistical challenges of printing a summer issue became too difficult to attempt. Looking now at the events calendar printed on the back cover of the spring issue, I note that nearly all of the conferences listed there were held virtually, postponed, or cancelled, including our own SHFG annual meeting. It is likely that many of the events listed on the back cover of this issue, likewise, will be postponed or held virtually. Some SHFG members face unemployment and financial uncertainties; others struggle to work safely in offices, classrooms, museums, and other public environments; still others labor to balance working from home with the demands of family and daily life. In whatever circumstances this message finds you, the work you are doing is critical—not only your contributions to historical projects, scholarship, and education, but also your work maintaining yourself and those around you.

This issue of *The Federalist* features several articles on federal historical work that has been impacted by COVID-19. **Tracy Baetz** highlights the collection efforts of the U.S. Department of the Interior Museum during the

pandemic. **Gabrielle Barr** and **Michele Lyons** of the Office of NIH History and Stetten Museum discuss collecting COVID-19 history at the National Institutes of Health. **Mattea V. Sanders** describes how the onset of the pandemic changed her work as a historian of the U.S. Air Force 316th Wing. NARA curator **Jennifer N. Johnson** details the fascinating and impactful work of the National Archives Traveling Exhibit Service. Chief Historian of the Department of Veterans Affairs, **Michael D. Visconage**, relates the story of the establishment of the VA History Office and highlights its plans for the future. **David McKenzie** describes the public-private partnership that has formed between the National Park Service and the Ford's Theatre Society. **Jennifer Ross-Nazzal** discusses her work as the historian at NASA's Johnson Space Center, and her forthcoming book, *Making Space for Women: Stories from Trailblazing Women of NASA's Johnson Space Center*, in the History Professional feature. This issue of *The Federalist* also provides details of an exciting SHFG announcement: **Judson MacLaury** describes the formation and goals of the new Committee on the Public Education Project (PEP).

Comments and suggestions are welcome at [shfgfederalist@gmail.com](mailto:shfgfederalist@gmail.com) or on Twitter [@faithtomfaith](https://twitter.com/faithtomfaith).

## National History Day Award

The Society is pleased to sponsor an award at National History Day for a federal history project. This year's winner is Eli Stapler for his Exhibit Project "CCC: Roosevelt's Tree Army."

Congratulations to Eli!

You can watch the ceremony at <https://www.nhd.org/winners>.

### History in the Federal Government

Sponsored by the Society for History in the Federal Government, a national professional organization open to all that are interested in federal history programs and the history of all branches of the U.S. government. The prize is awarded to the best entry in any category, in either division, which illuminates the history of the American federal government.



## SHFG's New PEP Committee

By Judson MacLaury

In May of this year the Society announced the establishment of the Committee on the Public Education Project (PEP) to carry out a mission of outreach to the U.S. public on the history of the federal government. Coming on the 40th anniversary of SHFG, the establishment of the committee links directly to a key original goal of the Society: to promote a better and deeper public awareness of that remarkable history.

The PEP was originally established in October 2018 when, concerned about the long-evident lack of public understanding of federal history, I got together at the Library of Congress with like-minded senior SHFG members Lee Ann Potter, Mike Reis, and Don Ritchie. We agreed that there was an unmet need to engage the public directly with the U.S. government's story and bypass a multi-decade accumulation of misinformation and ignorance about our government. We envisioned building on the Society's History@fedgov web page (<http://www.shfg.org/history-at-fedgov>) to make the histories of federal agencies more accessible to everyone, from K–12 students to working people and retirees. To realize that vision, we have expanded the PEP team, adding established SHFG talent and creative new blood. I introduce the full team below.

The overarching goals of the PEP are to contribute to a better-informed citizenry and to help restore public trust in the federal government—simply by promoting historical understanding. We emphasize that government is not a remote monolith, but a mosaic of hundreds of individual agencies, each with its own identity and engaging past. Understanding of government is needed more than ever as the nation grapples with profound economic, social, and environmental problems, along with the multi-faceted challenges of the covid-19 pandemic.

With this mission in mind, the PEP aims to develop two main programs in the coming years: an exciting historical messaging campaign featuring notable episodes at selected federal agencies; and a broad effort to promote better representation in K–12 curricula of the important role that federal agencies have played in U.S. history. Recognizing that these ambitious programs would require extensive planning and substantial resources, the PEP has focused initially on more limited projects. We began by self-funding a Pilot Project: a set of promoted videos on the USDA's APHIS agency (including its "Beagle Brigade") that we produced in 2019 and circulated via the Society's Facebook and YouTube pages. They are still available there, so please go to [shfg.org](http://shfg.org) and take a look.

As part of a suite of "Year One" projects under the new Committee, the PEP is producing two more videos for release on SHFG social media. One focuses on the colorful and productive early history of the EPA. The other is an illustrated video interview that Don Ritchie conducted with retired federal historian Sam Walker, who talks about the partial meltdown in the Three Mile Island atomic power plant in 1979. Both videos are to be



*Hardy, a member of the Beagle Brigade, featured in PEP's self-funded pilot project: a video on the history of USDA's APHIS agency.*

released on SHFG social media by the end of 2020. In addition to these videos, Lee Ann Potter is developing an exciting series of articles for publication on the planned K–12 curriculum enhancement effort.

Look for announcements on all these projects as they roll out. This summer, members and friends of SHFG also received a survey that Mike Reis developed, inviting your constructive input and participation in the PEP effort. We welcomed your numerous enthusiastic and informative responses, including many offers to assist and participate. We will be taking you up on those offers.

The PEP is supported by the new standing Committee. The Committee's membership coincides with the PEP team, and I would like to introduce you briefly to that team. I serve as Committee Chair and continue as Director of the PEP. Mike Reis is Vice Chair. Besides Mike, the PEP team consists of, in alphabetical order, David Coy, Lee Ann Potter, Don Ritchie, John Roberts, Gwen Sinclair, Anne Strong, and Carly Swaim. Benjamin Guterman is the Special Advisor. For the background of this talented and experienced group, I urge you visit the PEP page at [shfg.org/PEP](http://shfg.org/PEP).

By the time the "Year One" projects are completed, we will be ready to move on to the long-term projects. Building on our pool of volunteers, we will be seeking and using expert assistance from the federal historical community. We will keep everyone informed as these and other projects develop. With your help and support, we look forward to realizing and evolving the PEP's exciting mission in the coming years.

*Judson MacLaury is Director of the Public Education Project, SHFG.*

“Popups” from page 1

As the 100th anniversary of the 19th Amendment approached, development began on a second popup exhibit. As part of the National Archives commemoration, the special exhibition *Rightfully Hers: American Women and the Vote* went on display in the O’Brien gallery in DC, and is the basis for the *Rightfully Hers* popup. The *Rightfully Hers* popup presents key information about the history of the ratification of the 19th amendment, women’s voting rights before and after the 19th amendment, and its impact today.

Since last fall, more than 4,000 *Rightfully Hers* displays have shipped not only to schools, libraries, museums, and archives but to service organizations, retirement homes, community centers, and government offices. There were two print runs of *Rightfully Hers*. The first run of 1,600 exhibits were shipped in September 2019. Soon after, there was interest in a second round of printing and the National Archives and the Woman Suffrage Centennial Commission partnered to print 2,500 more displays to reach participating sites by August 2020. In light of the challenges faced by the COVID-19 pandemic, many sites across the country were excited to receive a popup due to its compact size and relevant content.

Initially the goals of the popup were that it be easy-to-install and appeal to a variety of ages and sites. Both *The Bill of Rights and You* and *Rightfully Hers* were developed to contain simple messages conveying the history of these important amendments. Feedback from participating venues provided insight into the variety of ways the popup exhibits have been received. A teacher responded that the *Bill of Rights and You* display provided a “unique learning experience that was exciting for students to gather around and discuss,” and that the display “led to the design of one of the most effective lessons of the year.”

Libraries used the popup as a centerpiece to display books

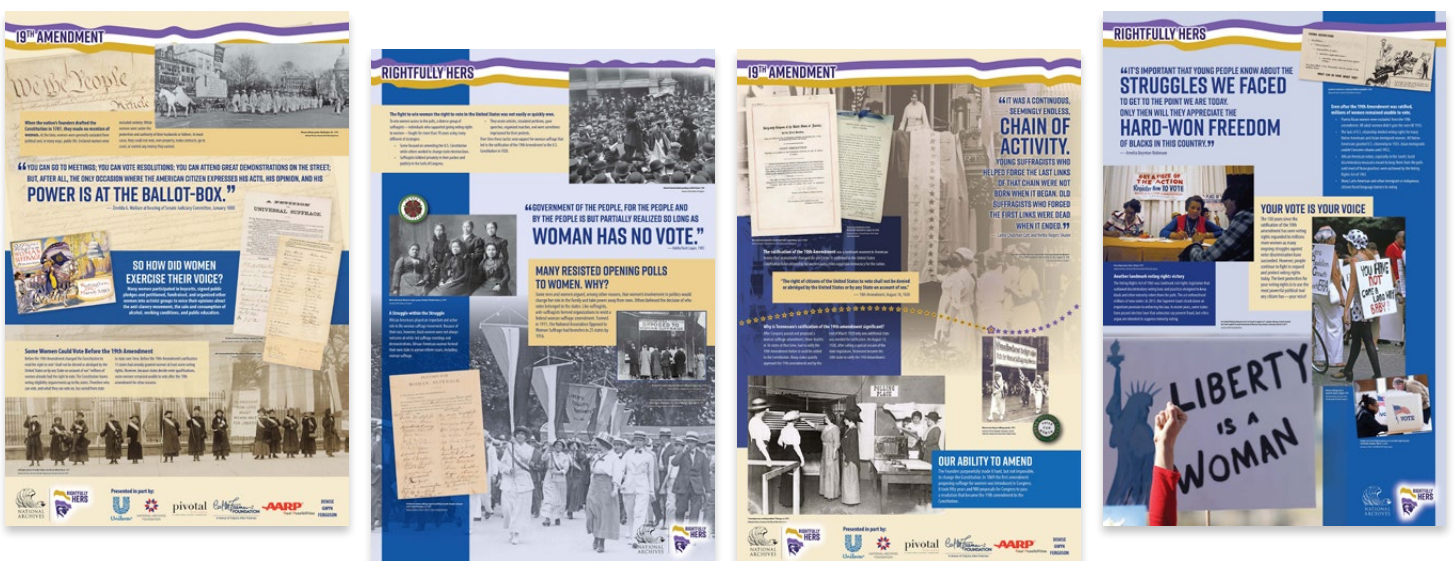
and planned programs around the exhibit. A librarian shared that “patrons often stopped to read the display to their children, and it allowed us to deepen connections in our community.” Photos were sent in showing the *Rightfully Hers* display being used at a voter registration drive for young people. Many shared that they were going to save the display to use again in the future, or were sharing it among other partners in their community.

Currently, traveling exhibit projects in development have paused but in addition to the *Rightfully Hers* popup, a traveling exhibit *One Half of the People: Advancing Equality for Women* is on the road through 2022 and will continue its three-year tour as quarantine regulations allow. *One Half of the People* looks at the history of women’s voting rights as well as other areas of women’s lives in which they fought for more equality, such as in finance, employment, and education.

*The National Archives’ Rightfully Hers popup display is presented by the Women’s Suffrage Centennial Commission, Unilever, Pivotal Ventures, Carl M. Freeman Foundation in honor of Virginia Allen Freeman, AARP, Denise Gwyn Ferguson, and the National Archives Foundation.*

*Each panel of the Rightfully Hers and The Bill of Rights and You displays have been made available as free hi-resolution downloads on our website. <https://www.archives.gov/amending-america/visit/bill-of-rights-pop-up> and <https://museum.archives.gov/rightfully-hers>.*

*Jennifer N. Johnson is a curator for the National Archives Museum. She has worked for NARA since 2004 and has a Masters in Library and Information Science from the University of Maryland.*



Panels from the Rightfully Hers popup exhibit.



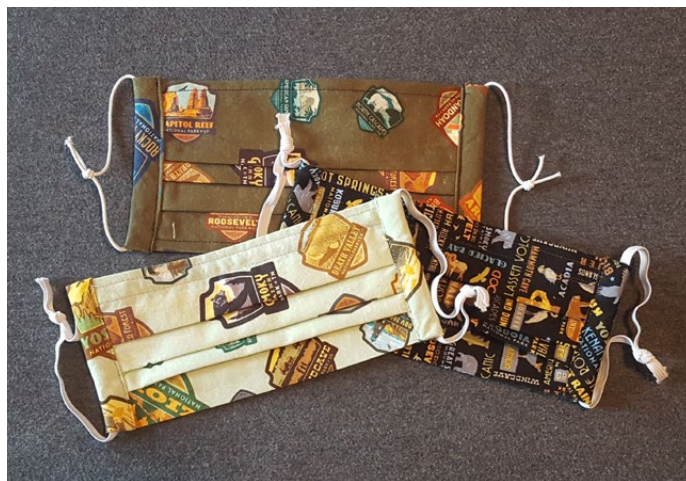
## U.S. Department of the Interior Museum Documents COVID-19

By Tracy Baetz

The U.S. Department of the Interior Museum’s collection documents the work of the Department of the Interior and includes objects relating to key issues and events in the agency’s history. COVID-19 has impacted the people and places of Interior in myriad ways, and with that has come an opportunity to assemble resources and to collect objects reflecting the Departmental response. These materials will serve as touchstones to help contextualize these unprecedented times for future generations.

The Interior Museum has heard from field staff throughout the country supplying anecdotes and images unique to the Interior’s experiences with the pandemic. Examples include:

- An aerial photograph of the National Mall taken in April showing the effects of reduced visitation; the turf is as lush as any time in recent memory.



### **Cloth face masks handmade by volunteers in the Period Costume and Textiles Department at the National Park Service’s Fort Vancouver National Historic Site, Vancouver, Washington**

Beginning in early March, volunteers—who normally sew apparel for costumed interpreters at the site—made more than 1,800 cloth face coverings. At a time when such face coverings were not otherwise widely available, the volunteers provided them to essential park staff and delivered them to front line health care professionals and patients in hospitals and clinics as well as to essential workers at organizations such as Meals on Wheels and food banks.

- An official memorandum from the Office of the Solicitor identifying the bearer as “an essential federal government employee, free to travel without regard to any quarantine, shelter-in-place or other local restriction.”
- A large-scale COVID-themed public art mural in Shiprock, New Mexico, in the Navajo Nation bearing the message, “Beware of COVID-19 / STAY SAFE / STAY STRONG EVERYONE / T’ahdii k’óó honiidl’ó [We are still here]”.
- A banner welcoming employees back to the Bureau of Reclamation regional office in Billings, Montana, as part of the phased reopening.

In addition, the Interior Museum has processed two new accessions to the museum’s collection:



### **Cloth face masks sewn by the Bureau of Land Management’s Great Basin Smokejumpers**

Based at the National Interagency Fire Center in Boise, Idaho, these firefighters parachute to remote wildland fires. The sewing skills they master in caring for their gear and mending parachutes found an unexpected additional outlet due to the pandemic. Throughout spring 2020, crew members used any spare moments in their busy schedules to sew face coverings to help prevent virus spread. Assembled and distributed in accordance with CDC guidelines, these cotton masks have parachute cord for ties. Between March and June, the Boise Smokejumpers generously donated more than 8,000 masks to their greater community and to Department of the Interior employees.

*Tracy Baetz is the Chief Curator of the U.S. Department of the Interior Museum.*

## Collecting COVID-19 History at the National Institutes of Health

By Gabrielle Barr and Michele Lyons

Since January 2020, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) has been at the forefront of combatting the COVID-19 pandemic. Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, became the public face of the NIH when he began serving on the White House Coronavirus Task Force. NIH researchers—many of whom changed their research focus during this pandemic—are working hard to develop diagnostic tests, therapeutics, and vaccines; initiate clinical protocols at the NIH Clinical Center; and disseminate the rapidly accumulating knowledge about the virus. This response to the pandemic required laboratory, clinical, animal-care facilities, information technology, and administrative staff to change how and where they worked.

To document this historic endeavor, the Office of NIH History and Stetten Museum (ONHM) began a collaboration with the National Library of Medicine (NLM) and the NIH Records Management Program. These three components formulated the NIH COVID-19 Collecting Plan, which has outlined the types of material sought, the responsible collecting units, and the final repositories. The types of materials include objects, photographs, websites, articles, news releases, video clips, social media, signage, emails, public correspondence, and manuscripts. Although the emails of senior officials are automatically routed to the National Archives and Records Administration, other types of material require active collecting. The NLM, whose collecting mandate is broader than solely the activities of NIH, is crawling thousands of relevant web sites as well as securing digital artworks. The ONHM is relying on its staff of two—one of whom joined the office via telecommuting in April—and its volunteers to document the NIH's role in the research and clinical realms, the daily challenges of managing an agency of over 30,000 people during a pandemic, and NIH's image in popular culture.

We have been using BOX, an NIH-approved application, as a place to store and organize files. BOX has also been a helpful tool for tracking incoming submissions and for planning for the next stages of documentation including conducting oral histories and acquiring objects currently being used by NIH staff as part of their jobs. Guides and the application of metadata are already being created by ONHM to contend with the quantity of materials and in an effort to make resources available as soon as possible.

To capture the experiences of all NIH employees, contractors, trainees, and volunteers who would not necessarily be part of the official record, ONHM launched the website “Behind the Mask: Real Stories from NIH Staff During the COVID-19 Pandemic” in May 2020. This project seeks reflections as well as documents, photographs, and other media that help narrate NIH staff stories. ONHM has promoted the venture in a variety of ways including having the project webpage and flyer translated into Spanish for people who do



**Top:** The empty parking lot of NIH's main administration building in early May 2020. Administrators and many other NIH staff quickly adjusted to telecommuting.

**Left:** The loading dock door of NIH's Building 2 sports one of the many signs on campus reminding people to maintain physical distance. A digital version of the sign has been added to the NIH COVID-19 Collection.

**Right:** This prayer candle featuring Dr. Anthony Fauci was donated to the NIH Stetten Museum collection as one of several examples of popular culture's take on NIH and the pandemic.

not speak English as their first language. Submissions have included photos of the NIH Clinical Center ICU staff, an account of the challenges of creating new procedures for procurement officials who are teleworking, and a video about one person's experiences at home with young children.

As the weeks have progressed, we have contacted more NIH representatives to assist with collecting. These include representatives from the Office of Facilities Management, the public affairs office of the Rocky Mountain Laboratory (located in Hamilton, Montana), and representatives from NIH publications. The NIH COVID-19 Collecting Plan has been presented to the scientific directors of all institutes and centers (ICs). In the coming weeks, the collecting team will be approaching representatives from the IC communications offices to aid with collecting, planning for oral histories, and promoting “Behind the Mask.”

This pandemic is the first to occur in a digital world. Even though the amount of information is daunting, we will not learn any lessons without a conscious and conscientious collection of our part of this story.

*Gabrielle Barr is the Archivist and Michele Lyons is the Associate Director and Curator of the Office of NIH History and Stetten Museum.*

## The History Professional *An Interview with Jennifer Ross-Nazzal*

Dr. Jennifer Ross-Nazzal has served as the Johnson Space Center (JSC) Historian since 2004. In this position she provides reference assistance to NASA and the public and has shared her expertise with journalists, writers, broadcasting agencies, documentarians, and many others. She was awarded her Ph.D. from Washington State University, her master's in History from New Mexico State University, and B.A. in History and Political Science from the University of Arizona. In 2011 she published her first book, *Winning the West for Women*, a biography of suffragist Emma Smith DeVoe. Her latest manuscript, *Making Space for Women*, is forthcoming from Texas A&M Press and focuses on the history of JSC through the experiences of its female employees.



Jennifer Ross-Nazzal

Interview by Thomas Faith

### What are your current duties at NASA's Johnson Space Center (JSC)?

I spend a good portion of my day working on our oral history program where I help to capture experiences from current and former NASA and contract employees. (The interview is only one part—I also prepare for the sessions by researching individuals and writing questions, and finally editing the transcripts.) We receive reference requests from the public as well as other Agency historians and staff, which I answer. Like many government historians, I take great pride in sharing NASA history by giving talks at local colleges and universities, our visitor center (aka Space Center Houston), and community, state, and national organizations. I also occasionally write for publications. My current research focuses on the impact the Apollo Program and the decision to build a NASA Center in Houston had upon the Clear Lake community—the area surrounding the Space Center.

### What aspect of your personal or professional experiences do you think most influences your approach to your current position?

I am a women's historian by training, but NASA is an engineering, scientific, and technical organization. When possible, which is not very often, I try to combine the two. Several years ago, for instance, I wrote a chapter on the first female astronaut of color, Mae Jemison, for *Texas Women: Their Histories, Their Lives* (University of Georgia, 2015). *Spacefarers: Images of Astronauts and Cosmonauts in the Heroic Era of Spaceflight* (Smithsonian Institution Scholarly Press, 2013) featured my essay, "You've Come a Long Way, Maybe: The First Six Women Astronauts and the Media." My chapter explored the gender biases the first female space flyers, selected in 1978, faced. Over the past few months, our office has been interviewing some of the astronaut wives from the Apollo era. My book, *Making Space for Women: Stories from Trailblazing Women of NASA's Johnson Space Center*, is currently under review with Texas A&M Press.

### How did JSC help commemorate the recent Apollo 11 Anniversary?

Center resources for anniversaries are limited, so NASA linked many of its celebrations to community events: NASA

Nights at the Houston Dynamo and the Houston Astros, exhibits, and festivals. One event that received a great deal of attention was the unveiling of the newly restored Apollo Mission Control Center. A National Historic Landmark that had been neglected and fell into disrepair, the Apollo MCC has now come back to life; visitors can experience the first lunar landing from one of the viewing room seats overlooking the room where flight controllers sat.

### What online projects has the JSC History Office undertaken?

In 2000, our production coordinator, Sandra L. Johnson, created the JSC History Portal. You can access the portal here: <https://historycollection.jsc.nasa.gov/JSCHistoryPortal/history/>. Initially seen as a one-stop-shop for all things related to JSC History, the website includes a variety of documents, transcripts, and books. As of today, the portal hosts over 1,400 electronic transcripts from the Center's oral history project. We are currently in the midst of redesigning and upgrading the twenty-year-old portal. We look forward to unveiling the new site soon!

### Your office maintains an extensive and outstanding oral history program. How do you identify subjects for oral history interviews?

That depends on the project. If you look at our website you'll see a whole host of oral history projects, from the JSC Oral History Project to the STS Recordation Oral History Project. Different offices across the Center and Agency regularly request our office capture information through oral history interviews. They often determine who they would like interviewed, although we do make suggestions. For example, as the Space Shuttle Program closed out, our office set out to document the history of the program from design, development, and testing to retirement. More women and people of color came onboard during this program, but the original interview list was nearly all male, so I encouraged them to include women as well as people of color.

### What advice can you offer other oral history programs?

Really, it's simple—be on time, and do your homework. I once interviewed Moonwalker and artist Alan Bean. When we



arrived he insisted we had exactly one hour for our session. When he realized that I was prepared, our equipment worked, and we were genuinely interested in his history, he let us stay longer so we could ask more questions. As the interview wrapped up, he commented on our professionalism and ended up showing us around his art studio. We spent all morning with him, not just an hour!

A lot of interviewees are surprised by the amount of research we have done before we sit down to talk with them. We try and find out as much about their careers before meeting with them, and more than once people have asked, “How did you know about that?”

**News about your forthcoming book, *Making Space for Women*, is very exciting. What aspect of the history of women at NASA do you find most compelling?**

Thanks! It will be great to see the manuscript in print.

During the sixties NASA had a reputation, among feminists at least, for being hostile to women. But many female employees insist that they didn't face any discrimination. Some of the secretaries working for the Space Center described their offices as an extended family and that all were united behind a single cause, to land a man on the Moon by the end of the decade. One described how astronaut Alan Shepard looked out for her and insisted she could not visit the Cape—a rowdy place with lots of drinking and womanizing—until she turned 21.

**What lessons did you learn in providing historical support to filmmakers as they shot and edited the recently released motion picture, *First Man*?**

Our office's involvement began well before filming started. Screenwriter Josh Singer visited our office to talk about the script and the sources he needed about Neil A. Armstrong, Apollo 11, and crew training. I dug into the archives to find the materials he sought. Once the film moved into production, I regularly received requests, sometimes daily. More often than not researchers and other staff needed answers that day. The demands of the Apollo anniversary, not just *First Man*, emphasized the need for our office to create and follow a reference request

policy. Our office provides reference support for the public, but our office is small—there are only three of us, and we also have other tasks that require our attention.

**How does the history of space research and exploration inform the study of the history of the federal government?**

For years space travel and research has been solely financed and managed by the federal government, and historians and policy experts have mined presidential and congressional collections to explore how NASA programs reflect their views on the role of government or how and why administrations established certain programs and scrapped others. President Lyndon B. Johnson, for instance, saw the Apollo Program as an extension of his Great Society Programs. A southerner, he believed that federal dollars could help the South rise out of poverty. The decision over whether or not to build the Space Shuttle, which flew from 1981 to 2011, involved numerous players and sometimes heated debates between NASA, the Nixon Administration, Congress, the Department of Defense, and the Office of Management and Budget. To put it simply, NASA reflects federal decisions on a smaller scale.

**Finally, what is your favorite aspect of your duties?**

I like the variety in my job, so it's hard to pick just one. I'd say I have two: research and oral history interviews. I love combing the archives to track down answers to difficult questions. One of my favorite research projects involved a request from the Inspector General's Office to find information about a camera Apollo 14 astronaut Edgar Mitchell attempted to sell in 2011. NASA filed a lawsuit against Mitchell, stating that the item was not his personal property; instead, the item belonged to the space agency. To build the case, the Assistant United States Attorney asked for documents relating the transfer of artifacts (flight hardware) from the Apollo 14 mission to that flight crew or any other Apollo astronauts who flew. I also enjoy capturing people's stories and having a fuller appreciation of NASA's history. I've interviewed many members of the 1978 Space Shuttle class of astronauts, and it's interesting to hear their different recollections of the early program.

## Donate to SHFG

Support New SHFG Events

Please donate to SHFG's current efforts to organize and promote new events and workshops. These events will provide opportunities for professional development: to meet colleagues, exchange ideas, and learn more about the federal community. We urge you to contribute to our General Fund. You can donate the amount of your choice, either by check or online payment (at <http://shfg.wildapricot.org/Donate>).

Your donations also support all activities of the Society, including publication of *The Federalist* newsletter, *Federal History* journal, and stories and news for our website; our annual conference, the Richard G. Hewlett Lecture; and programming such as occasional tours, workshops, and social events that help students and historians develop in their careers.

## COVID-19 Changes Work Processes and Priorities

By *Mattea V. Sanders*

In March 2020, I had just completed my 2019 Annual Command History and was preparing for three upcoming conferences. Like so many others, these plans in addition to the rest of my typical daily schedule evaporated in a matter of a couple of weeks. Instead, I spent the months of March, April, and May entirely differently than planned.

I began my position with the U.S. Air Force in May 2019. In the first year, I worked to learn the mission of my unit and the different facets of being a Wing Historian. I worked to support my unit whether through processing emblems, providing historical color for commanders' speeches, or designing small historical exhibits for conference rooms and offices. I had yet to really demonstrate the usefulness of history within the decision and policy making realm of the unit.

In a recent end of command interview, a commander within my unit reflected that there was no playbook when it came to how the Air Force would respond to a pandemic on as large a scale as COVID-19. As unit historians we are trained to use the lessons learned in the past to help support our current commanders. While this was successful on an enterprise level utilizing the military's response to the 1918 and 1968 pandemics, it was harder on a unit level. I could not offer background to the 1st Helicopter Squadron how to continue their mission in the face of a pandemic based on information from 1918. I was heartened that the lack of information did not prevent commanders from seeing the importance of the

History Office but instead gave them motivation to double down on preserving lessons learned from this crisis for future decision makers.

Another facet of this pandemic that enhanced my role as a Unit Historian was the constantly changing guidance, information, and data from both Public Health experts, the Department of Defense, and the U.S. Air Force. This created a need in my unit for up to date tracking and maintaining of a chronology, a database of documents, and an analysis of the unit's response to the crisis as it changed day to day. The need became even greater in June when my unit had a change of command and the new commander needed immediate historic information to be able to continue previous policy and establish new guidance.

COVID-19 altered the way I conduct my work, it meant convincing unit leadership that I needed to be on conference calls just as much as I previously needed to be in a physical room. It meant moving oral histories to virtual formats and altering deadlines for work unable to be completed outside of a secure environment or without access to an archive. However, I believe that COVID-19 created opportunities for Federal Historians, and I look forward to trading stories in the future about how the crisis altered your work.

*Mattea V. Sanders is a U.S. Air Force historian for the 316th Wing at Joint Base Andrews.*

### CALL FOR ARTICLES: *Marine Corps History Journal*

*Marine Corps History* journal is accepting submissions of scholarly articles focused on **new and unique research** into the Marine Corps' history, from its earliest actions to the Cold War and beyond, including cultural history. The editors also are interested in book reviews.

Articles should be 4,000 – 10,000 words long, properly footnoted, and formatted according to Chicago Manual of Style (17th edition). Junior faculty and advanced graduate students are encouraged to submit.

The editors are currently accepting article and book review submissions for the **Summer 2021, and Winter 2021 issues**.

#### **Deadlines are:**

1 January 2021 (Summer 2021)

1 June 2021 (Winter 2021)

*Marine Corps History* is a double-blind peer-reviewed journal published twice each year by MCU Press. To receive a print copy of the journal, article submission requirements, a list of books available for review, or to discuss the submission and selection process, contact the managing editor: [stephani.miller@usmcu.edu](mailto:stephani.miller@usmcu.edu).

Current and past issues may be downloaded at <https://www.usmcu.edu/HDPublishing/MCH/>

## Establishment of the VA History Office

By Michael D. Visconage

A large bronze plaque is affixed to the century-old U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) headquarters building at 810 Vermont Avenue, NW, in Washington, DC. The words inscribed on the plaque, taken from President Abraham Lincoln's second inaugural address, announce a guiding purpose: "To care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan." For the last 90 years, since President Herbert Hoover created the Veterans Administration, VA has served as the primary steward of the *unique relationship* between America and its Veterans. Historically, that relationship between nations and their former soldiers was not always one of mutual regard.

The idea of a democratic form of government represented a revolutionary concept in 1776. That idea of self-governance by the people also dramatically altered the relationship between soldiers and their society. In the European model, fighting men were held in low regard, in part because they were frequently mercenaries, opportunists, or conscripts. In America, the new nation relied on the willingness of *citizen-soldiers* to fight for a cause. The story of that unique relationship between American and its Veterans has not been officially told.

On April 10, 2020, VA released a memorandum establishing its VA History Office. The announcement capped a nine-month process to define and formalize a first-ever program for the second-largest agency, responsible for Veterans' benefits, health, and memorial programs. It is the fruition at least 20 years of incremental efforts to establish a staffed office to capture its rich heritage.

### A VA History Office Start-Up

Secretary of Veterans Affairs Robert L. Wilkie, a confessed history aficionado, earns due credit for launching the VA History Office.

"The new office will allow the department to document the special relationship between the nation and our Veterans," Wilkie said, adding a nod to the overdue nature of the project, "VA is one of the few cabinet-level agencies without an official history office."<sup>1</sup>

The near-term effort of the last 10 months began with the hire of a civil service position to act as the Director of the History Program and to serve as the Chief Historian.<sup>2</sup> Assigned to the Office of the Secretary, Michael D. Visconage joined VA in early July 2019 to lead the nascent VA History Office.



Bronze plaque at the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs headquarters building in Washington, DC.

The outline for the initiative had few pre-determined requirements. The only critical existing decision was to establish a centralized exhibit and archive space in Dayton, OH. Beyond collecting VA artifacts and archives in one place, the remaining elements of the project were an acknowledged blank slate.

An agreed-on initial discovery period ensued. The rare opportunity to build a new program from scratch meant treating the project as a start-up. The long list of early project questions included:

- Who are the key stakeholders in the initiative?
- What resources have been earmarked or are available?
- What artifacts and archives does VA have and where are they located?
- What is the intended scope of a VA museum and archive?
- What best practices are other organizations using?
- How do things get done in the organization?

The answers to these questions were explored in the ensuing months.

### The long road to a VA History Office

As the second-largest federal agency, VA had no central history office or overarching collection process for preserving historic artifacts or archival documents (apart from records retention compliance per National Archives and Records Administration requirements).

VA assumed the legacy of state and federal predecessor organizations dating to the American colonies. Since the founding of the modern VA in 1930, the department has evolved to include three administrations: Veterans Health Administration (VHA), Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA), and National Cemetery Administration (NCA). Each approached historical programs differently. NCA and VHA moved forward with the addition of

<sup>1</sup> "VA Establishes the Department's First History Office," VA press release, April 29, 2020, <https://www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=5432> accessed May 1, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> "Director of the History Program/Department with the office of the Chief of Staff for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)," USAJobs Posting, April 17, 2019.



professional historians in the 2000s, while no historian position existed at VBA until the spring 2020 hiring of Jeffrey Seiken, Ph.D.

NCA (smallest of the three VA administrations with approximately 2,000 employees), began a formal history program in 2001, hiring the first designated historian anywhere within VA and incrementally adding two more permanent historian positions. Senior Historian Sara Amy Leach was the first; Jennifer Perunko joined NCA in 2008, and Richard Hulver, Ph.D., filled a vacancy in April 2020. NCA is responsible for 142 national cemeteries (with more on the horizon) and 31 miscellaneous soldiers' lots and monument sites, beginning with properties transferred to VA from the U.S. Army in 1973. The NCA History Program focuses the historic resources in national cemeteries (most are listed on the National Register of Historic Places), accountability for monuments, responses to internal and external queries related to burial benefits, and developing interpretive materials.

VHA established its first historian position in 2006. Darlene Richardson accepted an offer to move from an NCA historian position to stand up a new program at VHA. At the largest VA administration (more than 300,000 employees and 170 VA Medical Centers), Richardson was a seminal figure pushing for a broader historical program. In addition to an ongoing stream of responses to historical queries from the field, research, reports, articles, blogs, and book projects, she lobbied the Under Secretary of Veterans Health Administration for a broader program, and a repository to preserve artifacts and archives. Captured in a Departmental Executive Decision Memorandum, Richardson's efforts were rewarded with the adoption of her recommendation, not at the VHA level, but ultimately at the department level by Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki.<sup>3</sup>

With Shinseki's endorsement—and direction to assess how to best establish an “agency history office and historical archives”—VA awarded a contract to History Associates, Inc. to conduct a study.<sup>4</sup> The findings, detailed in a report (August 29, 2014), recapped shortfalls in VA's limited historical efforts, highlighted examples from other federal programs, and outlined preliminary steps for a VA History initiative.<sup>5</sup> Regrettably, the report was never formally reviewed and accepted, presumably because of the transition from Secretary Shinseki (who left on May 30, 2014)<sup>6</sup> to Robert A. McDonald, who was confirmed on July 29, 2014.<sup>7</sup>

As priorities realigned and leadership recalibrated, a more



*Old headquarters building at the VA Medical Center campus in Dayton, OH, and future home of the National VA History Center.*

detailed discussion was happening behind the scenes about potential locations for a National VA History Center (NVAHC) to preserve VA artifacts and archives—a key element of the VA History Office proposal. A VA museum had been an on-again, off-again interest at VA. In 2001 a working committee was exploring a VA Central Office museum until the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks shut down that concept.

Several years later, the historic Dayton VA Medical Center (VAMC) campus emerged as a possible NVAHC location. The campus had ample space, a legacy of being one of the first National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers sites (1867), and offered several historic buildings in need of preservation and repurposing. Elected officials in Dayton were early proponents of this location in cooperation with Dayton VAMC.<sup>8</sup>

Ongoing interest led to VA's first formal acknowledgment that Dayton would be the home of the NVAHC. A Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) signed by Secretary David J. Shulkin on March 21, 2017, specified the Old Headquarters (1871) and the Clubhouse (1881) as the buildings to be used for the project. Local Dayton stakeholders and MOA co-signers included the mayor, county commissioners, development advocates, historical organizations, and Veterans advocacy groups. While VA had committed to providing the real estate, Dayton representatives committed to establishing a VA History Foundation “to raise funds for donations to help with the renovation of historic buildings associated with the VA History Center.”<sup>9</sup> This public-private partnership would continue pushing the initiative forward.

8 John Nolan, “Consolidating records here would bring new jobs, Ohio delegation said” *Dayton Daily News*, July 24, 2010, <https://www.daytondailynews.com/news/local/dayton-could-become-home-archives-lawmakers-say/p3n5JyCf0yUKRO9xblfrFJ/>, accessed October 17, 2019.

9 “Memorandum of Agreement... for the Establishment and Operations of the Department of Veterans Affairs History, Research, and National Heritage Center”, unpublished memorandum of agreement between the Department of Veterans Affairs and Dayton partners, March 21, 2017.

3 Darlene Richardson, “Establish the VA History Office and Archives,” VA internal Executive Decision Memorandum, May 1, 2012.

4 Contract VA119A-14-C-0131, History Associates, Inc. and Russell Drake, Contracting Officer, signed March 10, 2014.

5 “Happenstance History,” unpublished consulting report, History Associates, Inc., August 29, 2014.

6 “Secretary Shinseki's Farewell Message to VA Employees,” VA press release, May 30, 2014, <https://www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=2547>, accessed 05/19/2020.

7 Ben Kesling, “Senate Confirms McDonald as VA Secretary,” *Wall Street Journal*, July 29, 2014, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/senate-confirms-robert-mcdonald-as-va-secretary-1406660890>, accessed May 21, 2020.

### Next Steps

With the majority of discovery completed, Secretary Wilkie endorsed a phased plan for the VA History initiative in early December 2019. The key aspects identified two critical elements of the VA History Office; a VA History *program* and the previously outlined *NVAHC*. The plan solidifies the focus and interdependence of these functions. The official declaration was an internal memorandum of April 10, 2020 (Establishment of the VA History Office), and it was publicly announced on April 29, 2020.

For 2020, VA History Office has focused on continued long-range planning and modest near-term goals—an oral history program, academic internships, internal historian collaboration, and the first hires to form a core VA History Office team.

The road ahead undoubtedly includes many additional steps and challenges, but the mission is a noble one. The VA story spans the history of the United States and the special relationship between a free nation and its citizen-soldiers. A long-awaited VA History Office will take the first steps to collect the archives and artifacts that document that *unique relationship* and speak to the care and rehabilitation of battle wounds, the benefits provided by a grateful nation, and ultimately the honors rendered to Veterans upon their passing.

*Michael D. Visconage is the Chief Historian of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.*

## The National Postal Museum Awards for Scholarship in Postal History

The National Postal Museum sponsors three biennial prizes for recent scholarship on the history of the postal system in the United States and its territories, and their antecedents. The US Postal Service started these awards in 2007 to honor its first historian, Rita Lloyd Moroney. These prizes—now, the National Postal Museum Awards for Scholarship in Postal History—are designed to recognize scholarship on the history of the American postal system and to raise awareness of the significance of the postal system in American life. Scholarship by graduate students is eligible for a \$1,000 award; work by scholars and professionals (faculty members, independent scholars, and public historians) is eligible for a \$2,000 award; and public history scholarship presented online is eligible for a \$1,000 award.

The museum is pleased to announce that the winners in 2020 are:

#### Professional prize:

David Johnson. *Buying Gay: How Physique Entrepreneurs Sparked a Movement*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2019.

#### Graduate student prizes:

L. Bao Bui. “*I Feel Impelled To Write’: Male Intimacy, Epistolary Privacy, and the Culture of Letter Writing during the American Civil War.*” PhD diss., University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, 2016.

Alicia Maggard. “*One Nation, under Steam: Technopolitics, Steam Navigation, and the Rise of American Industrial Power.*” PhD diss., Brown University, 2019.

Dr. David Johnson is a Professor in the Department of History at the University of South Florida. Dr. Bao Bui teaches at the University of Illinois, Chicago, and Dr. Alicia Maggard teaches at Williams-Mystic, the Ocean and Coastal Studies Semester of Williams College and Mystic Seaport Museum.

“It is remarkable in how many ways mail delivery has shaped the United States,” noted Dr. Susan Smith, the Winton M. Blount Research Chair at the museum and the chair of the award review committee. “I learned so much from these works. The winners address such wide-ranging topics as the influence of the Post Office as a contracting authority in the development of transportation routes and the binding of the new American states in the West to the more established states in the East; as a public service whose availability and promise of privacy encouraged improved literacy and intimacy shaping familial correspondence during the Civil War; and as a key component of a market economy filling public demand, while simultaneously serving as a law enforcement agency policing the morality of the mail. Indeed, gay consumer culture and understandings of community developed as they did through entrepreneurs’ use of, and struggles with, the postal service.”

The National Postal Museum congratulates the three winners and thanks all those who submitted material. Their diverse work advances postal history scholarship in new directions and exciting ways that demonstrate the centrality of the postal service and the mail it carries to American history.

The museum will begin accepting submissions for the next Awards for Scholarship in Postal History on December 3, 2021. For more information on the prizes and the eligibility years, please see <https://postalmuseum.si.edu/the-national-postal-museum-awards-for-scholarship-in-postal-history>.

### GET INVOLVED!

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<http://shfg.wildapricot.org/Volunteer>

## A Thriving Public-Private Partnership for History at Ford's Theatre

By David McKenzie

In 1968, the restored Ford's Theatre opened to the public as a historic site and working theatre. For the 40 years thereafter, the lines between Ford's Theatre Society (FTS) and the National Park Service (NPS) were stark. NPS ran the historic site functions and FTS produced live theatre. But since 2007, the lines have blurred, leading to a thriving public-private partnership that makes the site of Lincoln's assassination more relevant to visitors.

After John Wilkes Booth assassinated President Abraham Lincoln on April 14, 1865, debate ensued over what to do with the site. Owner John T. Ford first attempted to sell the building to the YMCA as a "Lincoln Institute"; when that fizzled, he then attempted to resume performances. Following a near-riot, Ford rented the building to the War Department, finally agreeing to sell it to the government in early 1866. Ford's Theatre then housed a succession of War Department medical offices. In 1926, Congressman Henry Riggs Rathbone, son of the couple who accompanied the Lincolns to the theatre on April 14, 1865, successfully pushed a plan to relocate the Lincoln Museum, then housed in the Petersen House (House Where Lincoln Died), into the theatre building. Ford's Theatre reopened six years later and, as part of a governmental reorganization, became a National Park Service site in 1933. Over the next three decades, momentum built to restore the theatre's interior to its 1865 appearance. After a feasibility study, restoration began in 1965.

As soon as news broke of the plan, representatives of the Actors Equity Association lobbied Interior Secretary Stewart Udall to include live theatre in the restored space, suggesting that not doing so would make the site a monument to Booth's action. Udall agreed; when the theatre reopened in 1968, it featured live performances produced by FTS managed by founding Executive Director Frankie Hewitt. Hewitt was a former lobbyist who had also promoted the live theatre idea. She led FTS as a theatrical production company until her death in 2003.

Under Executive Director Paul R. Tetreault, FTS has expanded the scope of its partnership with NPS while continuing to produce live theatre. Together, FTS and NPS seek to engage broad audiences in the histories that the site explores and shed light on that history's present-day relevance. FTS's staff is a mix of theatre professionals, educators, communicators, public historians and fundraisers.

In collaboration with NPS, FTS runs on-site and online education programs. A local field trip program brings roughly 5,000 students from the Washington metropolitan area to the site each year. The experience often begins with a classroom visit from an NPS ranger. When they arrive—usually on an FTS-provided bus—students examine Civil War Washington and Lincoln's assassination through a guided tour with FTS education staff.

FTS oratory programs send teaching artists into local

classrooms, preparing students for the annual Lincoln Oratory Festival in February, where they perform Lincoln speeches on the Ford's Theatre stage.

FTS has offered distance learning versions of these programs for students around the country since the early 2010s. FTS expanded distance learning options during the COVID-19 pandemic.

FTS offers teacher professional development programs, including two week-long summer teacher institutes. The Civil War Washington program brings teachers from around the country to a consortium of historic sites around the city, including Tudor Place, Frederick Douglass National Historic Site, President Lincoln's Cottage, the National Mall, Fort Stevens and Ford's Theatre. *Set In Stone*, started in 2015, examines contested legacies of the Civil War and memorialization. Additionally, FTS education hosts the multi-year National Oratory Fellows program for educators around the country, training them to incorporate oratory into their classroom practices and becoming ambassadors for Ford's Theatre in the process. As of 2020, there are 40 Fellows around the country who have been working together for up to nine years.

In addition to on-site and online programs, FTS produces an array of digital history resources. FTS is expanding a set of pages on its website, [www.fords.org](http://www.fords.org), that seek to engage viewers in interrogating eyewitness statements and historical images to learn about events surrounding the Lincoln assassination. FTS is also building a new set of webpages about the public debates surrounding the site's purpose since 1865. FTS created and maintains a microsite, [www.rememberinglincoln.fords.org](http://www.rememberinglincoln.fords.org), that features around 850 primary source reactions to the Lincoln assassination, drawn from approximately 40 different libraries, archives, and museums. We are continuing to seek more, and to engage people in transcription of these resources.

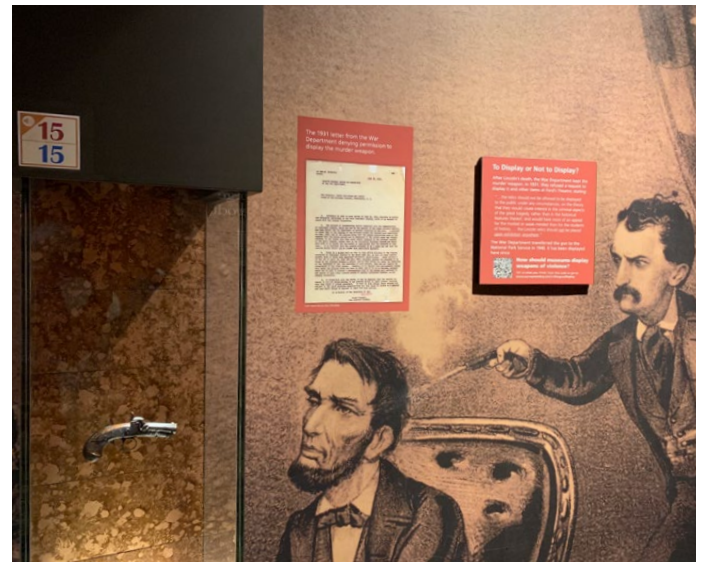
FTS and NPS jointly created the current iteration of on-site exhibitions, including those in the Ford's Theatre Museum underneath the theatre itself (building owned and maintained by NPS) and the Center for Education and Leadership (building owned and maintained by FTS). In 2011, FTS developed exhibit audio guides for the entire site. FTS operates and manages the site's timed-ticketing system and employs several visitor services associates who provide guided tours after hours, while NPS rangers offer interpretive talks. We joke that visitors only learn of the property lines that run through the four-part "campus" during a government shutdown, as the goal is for visitors to have a unified experience.

During the spring and summer, FTS combines its history and theatre strengths by producing a one-act play, *One Destiny*, that recounts (but does not reenact) the Lincoln assassination from the viewpoint of two eyewitnesses. FTS also produces walking





*Eric M. Messner as Detective James McDevitt in the Ford's Theatre History on Foot walking tour; Investigation: Detective McDevitt. This is among the different Ford's programs that combine history with theatre. Photo by Gary Erskine.*



*Ford's Theatre recently installed new interpretive signs raising questions about displaying the pistol John Wilkes Booth used to assassinate President Abraham Lincoln. Photo by David McKenzie.*

tours led by an actor playing an actual 1865 Washington police detective.

FTS also works with NPS to determine future iterations of on-site historical interpretation, seeking to engage visitors in dialogue and discussions about Ford's as a site of white supremacist political violence.

In early 2018, FTS and NPS prototyped ideas to further engage student groups on site—accounting for roughly one-third of the site's annual (pre-pandemic) visitorship. Currently, the Ford's Theatre Museum exhibits mostly focus on the Lincoln presidency and the conspiracy to assassinate him. As a result of that process, funded through the federal Institute of Museum and Library Services, FTS commissioned a set of interactive kiosks, each showcasing stories of young people who lived through the Civil War and Lincoln assassination in the Washington area. These add personal experiences to historical context to which younger visitors could relate. The stories of the four young people—the formerly enslaved Mary Dines, Cabinet daughter Fanny Seward, assassination conspirator's daughter Anna Surratt, and U.S. Army veteran turned clerk James Tanner—offer lenses through which younger visitors can see the events the current exhibition showcases.

FTS and NPS together worked with independent strategist Kate Haley Goldman and the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience, to create the site's first comprehensive interpretive plan to guide future exhibitions, programs and online resources. The interpretive plan focuses on five key themes:

- Booth's conspiracy
- Lincoln's legacy
- Importance of theatre
- Civil War Washington
- Memorialization

Underlying those five themes are “foundational truths,” historically grounded statements that represent institutional stances. These include statements that the Lincoln assassination was an act of political violence motivated by white supremacy, not the “true crime” by a madman often portrayed; and that Lincoln was a fallible, complex human being, rather than a martyred demigod.

Moving into the future, FTS and NPS plan to continue updating the site's exhibitions, programming, and in-person interpretation. Building from the kiosks, we seek to broaden the stories the site tells. More importantly, we hope to shape Ford's Theatre into a place where people can make connections between the past and the present. For example, just before the pandemic shutdown in March 2020, a new interpretive sign was installed showcasing a 1931 War Department letter denying permission to display John Wilkes Booth's gun in the then-new Lincoln Museum. Adjutant General C.H. Bridges explained that the pistol and other similar artifacts would “create interest in the criminal aspects of the great tragedy, rather than the historical features thereof, and would have more of an appeal for the morbid or weak-minded than for students of history.” This new sign includes a question about the appropriateness of displaying a murder weapon, along with a link to an online poll.

Over the last several years, staff members of Ford's Theatre Society and the National Park Service have built mutual trust in working together on educational and interpretive projects. We look forward to working together in the future to engage broad audiences in understanding the Lincoln presidency, Lincoln assassination, its present-day relevance, Lincoln's legacy, and memorialization of this era.

*David McKenzie is the Associate Director for Interpretive Resources at Ford's Theatre.*

## Making History

### Advisory Council on Historic Preservation

Arlington National Cemetery (ANC) is proud to announce its new Education Program (<https://www.arlingtoncemetery.mil/Education>), developed for virtual and in-person learning. Audiences of all ages may now discover the diverse history of the United States through this unique lens. Arlington National Cemetery is the resting place of nearly 400,000 individuals, including service members and their families from every American military conflict. With so many fascinating stories to tell, the cemetery is a microcosm of the American experience. Our Education Program offers unique opportunities to engage with the cemetery's rich history and the experiences of people from the past.

### Center for Land Use Interpretation

In addition to the 50 US states, the USA has 14 official territories—all islands of some kind or other, on land that is officially part of the United States, but is in many ways still treated as foreign terrain. Although collectively the 14 Territories of the USA are home to a total of 3.6 million people, with most of that population living in Puerto Rico, nine of these territories are technically unoccupied, even if they are inhabited, though most are not, anymore. A new exhibit explores these unoccupied territories, known as the Minor Outlying Islands, and how they all have been transformed in curious and dramatic ways. *Unoccupied Territories: The Outlying Islands of America's Realm*, is on view starting April 24, 2020. Visit [www.clui.org](http://www.clui.org) for an online version of the exhibit, and for future CLUI Los Angeles open hours.

### Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum

Did you miss our popular 2018 exhibit *The Art of War: American Poster Art 1941-1945*? Now you can experience it online! <https://www.fdrlibrary.org/art-of-war-online-exhibit>.

### Historical Society of Washington, DC

The Historical Society is pleased to announce our new Executive Director is Laura Brower Hagood. Many of you will have known her as the National Building Museum's Vice President for Development. But what you may not know is that she brings to the Historical Society 25 years of experience as a nonprofit executive and cultural entrepreneur—plus a well-established track record in development, marketing, and community building. The Historical Society has reached a moment of great opportunity. With the opening of our new DC History Center, we are perfectly poised for growth under Laura's leadership.

The Historical Society is also proud to launch a new initiative, In Real Time, that responds to this present moment. We have asked the public to document its experiences through writing and journaling, and through videos, photographs, and

recordings. What we are living now, on a day-to-day basis, is the stuff of history and we want to know your experience. For more information, visit [dchistory.org/in-real-time](http://dchistory.org/in-real-time).

### Information Security Oversight Office

The Information Security Oversight Office has announced the launch of The ISOO Overview Blog. The blog is a new way to engage with you—the public, and all ISOO stakeholders across the Federal Government; our partners in state, local, and tribal governments, and in private-sector industry; and all who have interest in information security. Our blog will include posts from all three components of the ISOO staff: Classification Management, Controlled Unclassified Information, and Operations, and we hope that you will join the conversations in each post.

### Library of Congress

To celebrate the 220th anniversary of its founding, the Library of Congress announced the release of the *LOC Collections* app, the premiere mobile app that puts the national library's digital collections in the hands of users everywhere. In addition to providing an easy, accessible way to search and explore the Library's growing digital collections, *LOC Collections* allows users to curate personal galleries of items in the Library's collections for their own reference and for sharing with others. Items currently featured on the app include audio recordings, books, videos, manuscripts, maps, newspapers, notated music, periodicals, photos, prints, and drawings. Users can currently find the app for iPhone and iPad at the Library's website or the iTunes store. An Android version of the app is slated for release later in 2020.

### Living New Deal

The launch of the Living New Deal's pocket map of New Deal Washington DC, planned for June, has been postponed due to the current epidemic. We will reschedule the launch with our partners at the Department of Interior and the Greenbelt Museum when that becomes possible again. Until then, we are working to complete the map and continue to improve our online database, which presently includes more than 380 New Deal sites in DC and many more in greater Washington. Like our New Deal maps of San Francisco and New York City, the Washington DC map will be of use to a wide array of visitors, tour guides, historians, teachers, students, and preservationists. The project has already attracted considerable interest around the nation's capital, and a hard-working group of local volunteers is helping ensure its success.

Our exhibit, *Art and Activism: From the New Deal to the Green New Deal*, at the Canessa Gallery in San Francisco, was cut short due to the shelter-in-place order in the city. However,

thanks to our partners at the Creative Action Network, the public can view the exhibit highlights online. The exhibit features over 100 contemporary Green New Deal posters alongside vintage WPA Federal Art Project prints. During these difficult times, we hope these images will bring inspiration and hope for a path forward. The exhibit highlights can be viewed at <https://creativeaction.network/blogs/news/posters-for-social-change-green-new-deal-art-popup-show>, and some of the art at <https://creativeaction.network/collections/green-new-deal/wall-art>, and <https://creativeaction.network/collections/wpa-federal-art-project>.

### National Archives and Records Administration

In March, the National Archives transferred supplies of N-95 masks, nitrile gloves, gowns, and Tyvek suits to Washington, DC's Emergency Management Response Team, which in turn worked with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to distribute and reallocate the donated supplies. These supplies were in high demand across the United States as hospital teams struggled to provide adequate protection for their staff responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.



The National Archives, in partnership with the Women's Suffrage Centennial Commission (WSCC), is providing 2,500 free *Rightfully Hers* popup displays to cultural institutions nationwide in honor of the 100th anniversary of the 19th Amendment and women's constitutional right to vote. While many of our institutions remain closed due to COVID-19, we are grateful for the opportunity to share these displays, making them available to you when our communities begin to reopen. *Rightfully Hers* explores the history of the ratification of the 19th Amendment and the state of voting rights before and after the women's suffrage movement.

There are few silver linings to living through a pandemic. For more than 5,000 records held by National Archives related to Black history, though, the burst of teleworking time has translated to a project that is making it easier for researchers to find resources, and for the public to contribute to improving access to those documents. The idea to mine the records for documents related to Black history wasn't new to archives specialist Netisha Currie or supervisory archivist Tina Ligon. They had worked on earlier pushes to make African American records more accessible in recent years. What changed, though, was the availability of staff members. With the COVID-19 pandemic shuttering Federal facilities, Currie and Ligon could offer a project to employees whose usual work involves being physically on site:

unable to do their usual duties of pulling and refiling records in the stacks, they shifted to a new mission of finding and tagging records. The process makes the documents in the National Archives Catalog more easily accessible and searchable. Read about the project at <https://www.archives.gov/news/telework-black-history>.

The National Archives and Records Administration is releasing its Digital Preservation Framework, following the release of drafts for public comment in September 2019, which consists of our approach to determining risks faced by electronic record files and our plans for preserving different types of file formats. The framework is a set of documents that describe how we identify risks to digital files and prioritize them for action, identify the essential preservation characteristics for 16 different categories of electronic records, and plan for the preservation of over 500 file formats. The framework documents the National Archives' current capabilities and practices, which will evolve over time. The documents are available at: <https://github.com/usnationalarchives/digital-preservation>.

The National Archives also announced the launch of the Presidential Library Explorer — NARA's second next-generation finding aid, defined as a digital path into the record using data from the National Archives Catalog. This Explorer provides a visualization of NARA's Presidential Libraries organized by size of textual records in their holdings. The Libraries, which all have scans available in the Catalog, are colored blue with a darker blue box within each record group box that indicates the amount of digital copies available for that record group. Access it at <https://www.archives.gov/findingaid/presidential-library-explorer>.

### National Endowment for the Humanities

On June 22, the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) announced \$40.3 million in new Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act economic stabilization grants to support essential operations at more than 300 cultural institutions across the country. NEH CARES grants, awarded across all 50 states and the District of Columbia, will allow the National World War II Museum in New Orleans to augment digital programming around its collections, will help the historic site of the Tulsa Race Massacre prepare a new exhibition and tours in preparation for the upcoming centennial, and will digitally document the history and daily life of Connecticut's tribal communities in the early nineteenth century. In March, NEH received \$75 million in supplemental grant funding through the \$2.2 trillion CARES Act. The agency has already distributed \$30 million of that funding to the 56 state and jurisdictional humanities councils to support local cultural nonprofits and educational programming. Through the regranting of federal support, the councils reach an estimated annual audience of 137 million people. Visit <https://www.neh.gov/news/neh-announces-40-million-cares-act-grants> for more information.

On July 29, the NEH announced \$30 million in grants for



238 humanities projects across the country. These grants make possible a national traveling exhibition and public programs at 20 libraries commemorating the 20th anniversary of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attack. NEH also supported continued editorial work on the collected papers of presidents George Washington, John Adams and John Quincy Adams, and James Monroe, as well as the papers of Mark Twain, Thomas Edison, and Jane Addams, and the multivolume *Freedom, A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861–1867*. Visit <https://www.neh.gov/news/neh-announces-30-million-238-humanities-projects-nationwide> for more information and a full list of grant awardees.

### National Historical Publications and Records Commission

Archivist of the United States David S. Ferriero will award 27 grants totaling \$2,877,730 to projects in 17 states, under the National Archives grants program, carried out with the advice and recommendations of the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC). A complete list of grants from its May meeting is at <http://www.archives.gov/nhprc/awards/awards-5-20>. Publishing grants will go to 14 projects, including grants for Documentary editions of the papers of five U.S. presidents: Washington, Jefferson, Jackson, van Buren, and Lincoln. Other projects will publish editions of South Carolina's Pinckney family important in the early days of the country, abolitionist Frederick Douglass, social reformer Jane Addams, civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr., poet Walt Whitman, inventor Thomas Edison, and the history of Emancipation. Two projects were funded for the first time: the papers of the Civil War and Reconstruction Governors of Mississippi and "Last Seen: Finding Family After Slavery," which is collecting post-Civil War "Information Wanted" ads from ex-slaves searching for lost family members.

### National Park Service

U.S. Secretary of the Interior David L. Bernhardt has designated the John Hope Franklin Reconciliation Park as an official member of the African American Civil Rights Network (AACRN), formally recognizing the historical and national significance of the tragic Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921 and Dr. John Hope Franklin's work to advance the African American civil rights movement. The African American Civil Rights Network Act, signed into law by President Trump in January 2018, authorizes the National Park Service to coordinate and facilitate Federal and non-Federal activities to commemorate, honor, and interpret the history of the African American Civil Rights movement; the significance of the civil rights movement as a crucial element in the evolution of the Civil Rights Act of 1964; and the relevance of the African American Civil Rights movement in fostering the spirit of social justice and national reconciliation.

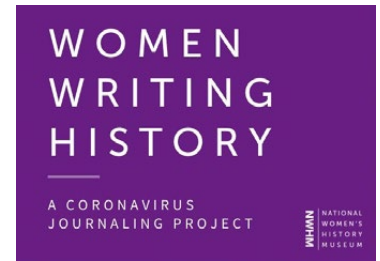
### National Preservation Institute

National Preservation Institute is celebrating our 40th anniversary! One way we are acknowledging this milestone is by

producing our own podcast series, *Preservation POV* (Point of View). The first series of six podcasts will begin in July 2020, with a new episode posting every two weeks.

### National Women's History Museum

The National Women's History Museum is pleased to announce the launch of Women Writing History: A Coronavirus Journaling Project, an initiative designed to ensure that women's and girls' unique voices and experiences are not left out of the telling of the COVID-19 story. The Museum invites women and gender non-binary individuals of all ages, backgrounds, cultures, and socio-economic circumstances to be a part of living history by keeping a journal in 30, 60, 90, 120-day, or any longer or shorter increments, and contributing their journalistic efforts to the National Women's History Museum. Journals can be written, orally recorded, video recorded, a series of photographs, or original artworks; the primary goal of this project is to capture the female voice and how the pandemic has impacted daily lives and perspectives. Those interested in participating in Women Writing History: A Coronavirus Journaling Project should begin by filling out the participation form on the Museum's website <https://www.women-shistory.org>.



### Organization of American Historians

The OAH Executive Board is pleased to announce that the Executive Board has appointed Beth English, past president of the Southern Labor Studies Association and currently a project director and lecturer at Princeton University, as the new OAH Executive Director. English will begin her term September 1, 2020. She takes over the role from Katherine Finley, who retired on June 30, 2020, after serving as OAH Executive Director since 2010.

### Public Interest Declassification Board

The Public Interest Declassification Board (PIDB) submitted its report to the President, *A Vision for the Digital Age: Modernization of the U.S. National Security Classification and Declassification System* and published it on its website. This report focuses on the critical need to bring classification and declassification into the digital age by deploying advanced technology and by upgrading outdated paper-based policies and practices. Our recommendations align with the President's Information Technology reform efforts and Management Agenda. If implemented, our recommendations will cut costs, increase Government efficiency and effectiveness, reinforce the protection of critical Government information, and improve our nation's security. Modernization will reduce over-classification, make the protection of secrets more precise, and will improve

declassification. Read more and access the report at the PIDB blog: <https://transforming-classification.blogs.archives.gov>.

The PIDB is also joined by a new member. On August 24, 2020, House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-CA) appointed former Congressman Harold W. “Trey” Gowdy, III as a member of the Public Interest Declassification Board. Mr. Gowdy served four terms in Congress, representing his hometown of Spartansburg in South Carolina’s 4th congressional district. The Board members and staff welcome Mr. Gowdy and look forward to working with him in continuing efforts to modernize and improve how the Federal Government classifies and declassifies sensitive information.

### Smithsonian Institution

The Smithsonian announced the launch of its new “Race, Community and Our Shared Future” initiative, which will explore how Americans currently understand, experience and confront race, its impact on communities and how that impact is shaping the nation’s future. The launch of the initiative is made possible through a \$25 million commitment from founding partner, Bank of America. “Race, Community and Our Shared Future” will encompass resources from across the Smithsonian’s museum, education and research complex to examine the historical context of the challenges facing the nation today. The initiative will frame conversations around the country to seek solutions to building a more inclusive, sustainable future. Leaders, collections and programming from the National Museum of African American History and Culture, the National Museum of the American Indian, the Smithsonian Latino Center, the Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Center, the National Museum of American History, other Smithsonian museums and centers, and the Smithsonian American Women’s History Initiative will be engaged in this unprecedented project.

### Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations

The SHAFR-sponsored Archival Records Discussion Group is up and running! Individuals interested in sharing or requesting specific archival records can join by visiting the following link: <https://groups.google.com/a/shafr.org/forum/#!forum/archival-docs/join>. We hope that this group will provide a space for scholars to connect with each other and access archival sources currently unavailable due to archival closures and travel restrictions.

### Society of American Archivists

A is for access, advocacy, and appraisal. B is for bit rot and bone folder. C is for cataloging. And D is for Dictionary of Archives Terminology, SAA’s fabulous new online resource at [dictionary.archivists.org](http://dictionary.archivists.org)! Compiled by SAA’s Dictionary Working Group, it includes hundreds of new terms, thousands of citations from more than 600 sources, and a brand-new online platform. Read more about the new dictionary at <https://www2.archivists.org/news/2020/new-dictionary-of-archives-terminology-launched>.

### White House Historical Association

A special issue of *White House History Quarterly* focuses on the history of how and when the president of the United States is protected and of who is responsible. Order today to read the multiple perspectives of an agent, historian, archivist, educator, and a witness to history. *White House History Quarterly* is the award-winning journal of the White House Historical Association. Visit <https://www.whitehousehistory.org/subscribe> to subscribe and receive more than 200 years of history of the “People’s House” delivered to your door.

## CALL FOR PAPERS

### Federal History

*Federal History*, journal of the Society for History in the Federal Government, seeks submissions for its April 2021 issue.

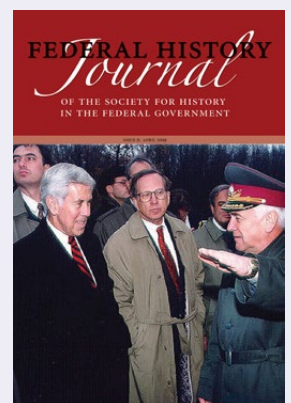
The journal promotes an interdisciplinary approach in its efforts to advance knowledge of the history of the federal government as well as of the professionals who produce historical work in government offices. It features scholarship on all aspects of the history and operations of the U.S. federal government, and of critical historical interactions between American society and the U.S. government, including the U.S. military, 1776 to the present.

It also publishes articles investigating contemporary issues and challenges in federal history work, including the areas of institutional history, interpretive work, museum work,

records management, oral history, digital history, education, and library science. The journal highlights the research of historians working in or for federal agencies, in academia, and as independent scholars.

Federal History is an annual, peer-reviewed academic journal published both in print and online. It is indexed by Ebscohost. Read current and past issues at <http://shfg.wildapricot.org/page-18340>, and submission guidelines at <http://shfg.wildapricot.org/Submission-Guidelines>.

Send a draft and CV to the editors at [federalhistory@gmail.com](mailto:federalhistory@gmail.com) for prompt consideration.





# The FEDERALIST

Society for History in the Federal Government Newsletter

Box 14139 • Ben Franklin Station  
Washington, DC 20044

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## Federalist Calendar

**Oct. 21–24, 2020. Oral History Association.** Annual Meeting. “The Quest for Democracy: One Hundred Years of Struggle.” Virtual. Visit <http://www.oralhistory.org/annual-meeting/>

**Nov. 12–13, 2020. Historical Society of Washington, D.C.** 47th Annual D.C. History Conference. “Echoes.” Virtual. Visit <http://www.dchistory.org/programs/d-c-history-conference/>

**Mar. 18–21, 2021. Society for Military History.** 88th Annual Meeting. “Turning the Tide: Revolutionary Moments in Military History.” Norfolk, VA. Visit <https://www.smh-hq.org/smh2021/index.html>

**Mar. 24–27, 2021. National Council on Public History.** Annual Meeting. “The Presence and Persistence of Stories.” Salt Lake City, UT. Visit <https://ncph.org/conference/2021-annual-meeting/>

**Apr. 15–18, 2021. Organization of American Historians.** Annual Meeting. “Pathways to Democracy.” Chicago, IL. Visit <https://www.oah.org/meetings-events/oah21/>

**July 15–18, 2021. Society for Historians of the Early American Republic (SHEAR).** 42nd Annual Meeting. Philadelphia, PA. Visit <https://www.shear.org/annual-meeting/>

**July 31–Aug. 7, 2021. Society of American Archivists.** 85th Annual Meeting. Anaheim, CA. Visit <https://www2.archivists.org/conference/>

**Sep. 22–25, 2021. Northern Great Plains History Conference.** Annual Meeting. Eau Claire, WI. Visit <https://www.ngphconference.org/>

**Oct. 13–17, 2021. Oral History Association.** Annual Meeting. Cincinnati, OH. Visit <https://www.oralhistory.org/annual-meeting/>

**Jan. 6–9, 2022. American Historical Association.** 136th Annual Meeting. New Orleans, LA. Visit <https://www.historians.org/annual-meeting/>

**Mar. 23–26, 2022. National Council on Public History.** Annual Meeting. Montreal, Quebec.

**Mar. 28–Apr. 1, 2022. Society for Military History.** 89th Annual Meeting. Fort Worth, TX.

**Mar. 31–Apr. 3, 2022. Organization of American Historians.** Annual Meeting. Boston, MA.

**July 21–24, 2022. Society for Historians of the Early American Republic (SHEAR).** 43rd Annual Meeting. New Orleans, LA.