

Editor's Corner

Crossing Borders

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This issue begins with Jean-Pierre Morin's "Considering the Revolution: The Identities Created by the American Revolutionary War," the second in a five-part series that arc from the origins to the legacies of the American Revolution (see part 1, "Considering the Revolution: Indigenous Histories and Memory in Alaska, Hawai'i, and the Indigenous Plateau" and "Decolonizing Museums, Memorials, and Monuments" in the November 2021 issue). The articles build upon on the public plenaries of the annual meeting of the National Council on Public History (NCPH), co-hosted by the National Park Service (NPS) and NCPH. These conversations will, as Morin writes, "contribute to larger discussions during NPS's commemorations of the American Revolution's 250th anniversary about its changing interpretation and its continuing relevance to the American people."

The 2022 panel, hosted virtually at the May NCPH meeting, reflected on the role of the Revolution in creating identity both below and above the Canadian border. Panelists (Rebecca Brannon, associate professor at James Madison University; Michael Hattem, associate director of Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute; Patrick O'Brien, lecturer of history at Kennesaw State University; Taylor Stoermer, lecturer at Johns Hopkins University; and Seynabou Thiam-Pereira, PhD candidate in American Civilization at the Université de Paris 8), considered how the war created new political and social identities, often in messy and overlapping ways. Structuring their conversation around three themes: "Who did they think they were"; "Who do we think they were"; and "Who do we think we are," the panel considered how people in colonial America debated the meaning of loyalty and the sense of "Britishness." They further considered how historians have, in the past and today, understood the legacy of the Revolution in sustaining both American and Canadian identity. Ultimately, Morin writes, "the Revolutionary War/War of Independence created new identities, reinforced settler-colonialism, and established not one, but two countries, the United States of America and Canada." Beliefs born of these identities shape how the war is remembered, commemorated, and actualized in the present of both nations.

The issue's other contributions likewise engage with memory and identity. In her article, "People First': Interpreting and Commemorating Houselessness and Poverty," Kristin O'Brassill-Kulfan finds that very few historic sites, markers, or

museums document and interpret the history of poverty and homelessness, while those that do tend to emphasize the management of poverty rather than the poor themselves. As she writes, “on the existing landscape, we are presented with an answer to a question that hasn’t been asked: there are markers noting the provision of charitable aid, the existence of potter’s fields, and a few preserved poor farms, without an explanation of what brought them into existence, without a reference to the experience of destitution or houselessness.” This is especially remarkable considering how widespread poverty is in the United States; over 40 percent of Americans report living below or just over the poverty line. Citing the example of London’s Museum of Homelessness (see cover image), O’Brassill-Kulfan calls for public historians to “create and support spaces for people experiencing poverty to tell their own stories in the present and to argue for inclusion and recognition of homelessness in public historical interpretation.” In this way, public historians can “foreground larger histories of labor and inequality by historicizing poverty and subsistence in public history sites and scholarship.”

Next, Laura Pozzi, in “Going to the People: Visitors’ Responses to the Shanghai History Museum’s Representation of Colonial History,” explores how war and memory continue to shape national identity, if in unexpected ways, outside of the US. Pozzi examines how both Chinese and foreign visitors respond to the nationalist, anti-colonial interpretation of Shanghai’s recent history presented in the museum. By interviewing visitors, tracking their movements, and reading their comments in visitor books, Pozzi finds that visitors tended to ignore the museum’s vision of the city’s history endorsed by the Chinese Communist Party. Rather, they focused on objects they find aesthetically striking or personally relevant. Far from passive, museum audiences, Pozzi shows, can “renegotiate the meaning of exhibitions under an authoritarian regime.”

Two Reports from the Field in this issue examine projects that stressed outreach and offered opportunities for undergraduate participation. Laurie Mercier, Susan M.G. Tissot, and Bradley Richardson, in “Reaching into the Community to Interpret Labor History: A Museum-Labor-University Collaboration,” discuss a collaboration between museum staff, professors and students, librarians, and local unions in Vancouver, Washington, that highlights the labor and union history of the town. Noting that many small cities and towns have extensive, if overlooked, labor histories, the authors argue that greater attention to these histories can shed light on the importance of the labor movement in US history and bring in new visitors. As they point out, “as our students and residents face increasing uncertainties as workers and the US population at large witnesses historic inequalities in wealth—partly due to fewer opportunities for union jobs and wages—it is more important than ever for local historical institutions to find and share labor history.” They join O’Brassill-Kulfan in calling for greater attention to issues of economic inequality in the public history landscape.

The final piece, “Digital Editing Workshops for Building Campus Public History Communities and Developing Student Leaders” by Clayton McCarl, a professor of

Spanish, and Lyn Hemmingway, at the time an undergraduate, explores an innovative project at the University of North Florida. Editing the Eartha M. M. White Collection, based on the papers of local African American leader Eartha M. M. White, allows undergraduates to participate in workshops that publish documents from the collection. Students learn technical skills in the digital humanities as well as refine archival methodology and historical research methods. Aware of the importance of flexibility in approach, McCarl and Hemmingway “reflect on the implications of this model for engaging communities, on campus and potentially beyond, in the recovery of historical narratives and for providing formative experiences to the students who will chart the future course of digital public history.”

We would like to thank outgoing Editorial Board members Jeremy Moss, Kevin Murphy, and Kate Scott for their two terms of service. We welcome new members Catalina Muñoz Rojas and Jennifer Stevens. Additionally, we thank Jennifer Dickey for joining us as Book Review Editor after serving in the position in an interim basis.