



GEORGE TYLER MOORE
CENTER FOR THE
STUDY OF THE CIVIL WAR
At Shepherd University



GEORGE TYLER MOORE CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF THE CIVIL WAR *Newsletter*

First Quarter, 2020 | www.shepherd.edu/civilwar

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Sam Levitan

Online Programming

While COVID-19 caused postponement and cancellation of several events this spring and summer, the George Tyler Moore Center adapted quickly to the changing environment, shifting to online programming. Drawing speakers from across the history community, we have been able to offer weekly programs on a wide range of historical topics ranging from Civil War photography to Transcendentalism to World War I. On a lighter note, we have enjoyed screening “Virtual Vintage Happy Hour” programs, using cocktails from a particular place and time as a starting point to delve into historical discussions.

Programming will continue throughout the summer. We encourage our friends to join us online at www.facebook.com/georgetylermoorecenter for our weekly history programs, or to watch them afterward on YouTube at <https://bit.ly/GTMCivilWar>. You can also follow us on Instagram @gtmcivilwarcenter.

Throughout the summer, we anticipate offering programs from the field, bringing the historic sites you love (and perhaps some you’ve yet to meet) to the comfort and safety of your own home. Here is a sampling of the topics offered so far.

- **A New Spin on the Minié Ball.** Public historian and *Civil War Times* editor Dana Shoaf led a discussion with Dr. James Broomall about the technology behind and changing role of the minié ball. Shoaf discussed small arms fire on the battlefield as well as exhibited a series of artifacts.
- **“Many a Vacant Chair”: Influenza in Jefferson County.** What can we learn from our own past

to guide us through the present? Dr. Broomall and his assistant, Catherine Mägi Oliver, chatted about her research into how local professors, students, farmers, shopkeepers, doctors, journalists, and other community members—people who walked our same streets—grappled with the “Spanish Influenza” pandemic of 1918-1919.

- **World War I Film Discussion.** Dr. Broomall hosted James Taub, Matt Borders, and Ernie Dollars to talk about how the Great War has been portrayed in films such as Peter Jackson’s *They Shall Not Grow Old* and the recent award-winning *1917*.
- **Walden Pond Paradox: How Could Authors of Peace Support John Brown?** Catherine Mägi Oliver, joined by Concord literary historians Dr. Kristi Martin and Richard Smith, explored the seemingly contradictory writings and politics of Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Bronson and Louisa Alcott.
- **Picturing the Civil War.** Drs. Broomall and Jimmy Brookes examined a series of images from the Civil War era with a particular focus on soldier-artists.
- **Civil War Photography.** Melissa Winn and Dana Shoaf of *Civil War Times* chatted with Dr. Broomall about photography during the Civil War period.
- **Loyalists during the American Revolution.** Drs. James Broomall and Ben Bankhurst, along with Travis Shaw of the Mosby Heritage Area, spoke with Shepherd history students Michael Mastrianni and Claire Tyron about their research into the loyalist experience. ■



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From the Director

I write from my basement. Books surround me; prints and paintings cover my walls. It has become a comfortable space in an uncomfortable time. Indeed, the circumstances that prompted my temporary departure from the beloved Conrad Shindler House signal the profound changes that we are experiencing. The world is, simply put, a different place. I write this note knowing that the novel coronavirus has both directly and indirectly affected many of you. This disease has prompted vast changes and created great loss. I can only hope that this note receives my audience safely and, most importantly, in good health.

Even as I write under the most unusual of circumstances, though, a familiar normalcy is returning. In my microcosm of Shepherdstown, the streets are getting busier, many businesses are opened, and Shepherd University is bustling with current work and future planning. I awake each morning to chirping birds and my daily walk or run affords spectacular scenes of spring. I trust that all of this is a positive harbinger.

During the pandemic the GTM Center has rededicated itself to a core mission of promoting education and scholarship, and fostering partnerships with historic sites and academic institutions. Indeed, we have been extraordinarily busy. In mid-March, all in-person programming throughout the spring and summer was canceled or postponed. This, in turn, prompted a systematic shift in our methods of delivering and maintaining an active agenda. We have, to date, worked

primarily through social media (Facebook and Instagram) and YouTube but will continue to explore modes of contact. Catherine Mägi Oliver, my assistant whom many of you know, has been integral to our operations and proven herself absolutely essential to our success. To date, we have conducted over a dozen livestream programs directly through the GTM Center or in partnership with other organizations, written scores of social media posts, and participated in a steady march of Zoom meetings. I have called upon some very good friends in the field who have appeared in our programs and many of them have called upon me. This challenging period has ultimately revealed the profound sense of community shared by those in the history field. I have, quite paradoxically, never felt more connected to my colleagues and friends.

If you have not seen our livestream programs or read our social media posts, I invite you to visit the GTM Center's Facebook and Instagram pages and YouTube channel. Please enjoy what we have created. I am extremely proud of the body of this work. It is also with a huge debt of gratitude that I recognize the scores of partners who have made this programming possible. We promise a robust summer schedule as the GTM Center continues to innovate and adapt. With that said, please rest assured that we will resume in-person programming once we can safely do so, while still embracing our augmented online role.

In closing, I wish to express my continued



Cecelia Mason

James J. Broomall, Ph.D.

Director of the George Tyler Moore Center for the Study of the Civil War and Assistant Professor of History

gratitude. I so deeply value both the job I have and the place where I live. I have spent the past several months in isolation with my incredible family who have made difficult days easy and continually demonstrate what is most important in life. I have, moreover, been fortunate to continue practicing a profession that is not only my life's work but also one of my deepest passions. I sincerely offer each of you the warmest wishes and can only hope you share similar good fortune.

Be well,
Dr. James J. Broomall

Recent Events

In early March, Dr. Bruce Ragsdale joined us at Happy Retreat, an 18th-century Washington family estate, to deliver a lecture titled "George Washington: America's First Farmer." The program explored Washington's role as farmer and his many innovations in agriculture, an aspect of his national leadership sometimes overlooked by the roles of General and President. Moreover, Dr. Ragsdale offered an insightful discussion about life among the enslaved. It was an incredible evening co-sponsored by the Friends of Happy Retreat and underpinned by the generosity of Dr. Marianne Alexander and her late husband Dr. Duane Alexander. ■



Quarantine in a Civil War House

By Catherine Mägi Oliver, George Tyler Moore
Center Administrative Assistant

The highest honor of any structure is to serve as shelter in a time of fear. Thick walls stand sturdily in quiet pride, knowing they have protected lives within.

My Harpers Ferry house has played this role on more than one occasion. During John Brown's raid, it heard church bells peal in warning—and held its occupants safe. On the night the arsenals burned, it caught the unnatural glow, the tearing of a country in two—and held its occupants safe. Throughout four years of bitter war and occupation, it housed soldiers far from their homes, awaiting fates uncertain—and held its occupants safe. These humble walls stood firm against attack in 1861 and rattled through the Battle of Harpers Ferry in 1862. And in 1864, when shells flew through the heart of the village, my brave little bastion stood fast in the line of fire, unmoving. It held. It has always held.

Most recently, during global pandemic, it has held me.

Dear Old Houses

My particular old house was built in the 1840s for employees of the U.S. Armory at Harpers Ferry. These humble walls have witnessed, for better or worse, significant movements in time. It is always something of a game to stand on the weathered threshold and imagine the characters who have passed us, from Stonewall Jackson to W.E.B. DuBois.

I feel the oldness of my house these days more than ever. I must, for there is nowhere to go and nothing else to feel. There is a comfort in it, a solid "I've got this" as I shut the door, and leave it shut, and set away the car keys for days, and then weeks, and then months. Shelter is needed. Shelter is what an old house knows well. Shelter shall be given.

But what is this; do old houses talk? Not as you and I, certainly, but it is common among those of us who care for old houses to speak of them as if they are alive. When we were young in this relationship, first flirting with the idea of purchase, we considered the house's bones. The windows which inevitably crack and must be replaced, are spectacles, or even eyes. Paint is never chosen according to our own tastes, but what we feel our house most desires and deserves. Is it true? we ask, not knowing exactly whom we are asking, Is it right? Our furnishings are sometimes spoken of as presents; look what we have got you today, o House. The most



Many Harpers Ferry homes, like the one captured in the background of this Civil War-era drawing by Alfred Waud, have been front-seat witnesses to history. Image provided courtesy of the Library of Congress.

romantic among us have anniversaries with our houses. These must be celebrated. We set fresh flowers in a vase and play music for our houses, and promise to fix any one of the dozens of things on the ever-expanding list of old house needs.

Quarantine Projects

Pandemic has isolated some of us within small circles; my steadfast companion, however, has been the house itself. Our "quarantine projects" have been unique, as one might imagine.

Gardening has grown common among the newly homebound, but gardening here is more akin to an archaeology expedition. One cannot simply dig a pond or plant a tree or clear a flower bed with an old house. We must, first, have a bit of evidence to go on: we have hunted out some period sketch or photograph of how things used to be here, or discovered remnants of garden elements, or simply spent many an afternoon squinting at the yard awaiting some eureka moment. In my case I had a little of all of this to testify for my secret garden, and so for days went out to fight for it, battling a forest of vines that had consumed the space decades before my arrival. Shovel dove into the earth, eventually, but gently—for I was pausing every other moment to drop to my knees and sort tenderly through each scoop, examining fragments of brick and dish and square-topped nails and the charcoal of long-ago fires.

Are there bullets? Sometimes. My house has gifted up bullets and bayonets and flint and a number of other treasures. But I treasure toy marbles just as dearly.

Cookery as a pastime has also seen an uptick in quarantine. It is no different in my old house on

the battlefield, but I think we have our own rare spin on it. My house has its own recipes.

During the Civil War, some bored soldier—whom I know to be for the Union from the rest of his writings—determined to leave me a number of helpful advices on the wall. Some intervening caretakers cloaked these beneath layers of wallpaper, but some years ago I uncovered the original plaster and all it contained. Today I enjoy this soldier's preserved artwork, as well as his illustrated cooking guide to common Civil War cuisine.

One example: Toward the bottom of a wall in what is now a closet, a man sits on the ground, clearly in uniform, holding what is labeled as hard tack in one hand and a pan in the other. He has positioned the latter over a little fire. "Pork fat helps," the soldier advises in his little speech bubble on the wall, and illustrates how to soften and season the infamous hardened biscuit by cooking it some bacon grease.

Am I telling you I cooked hard tack in bacon grease?

Well: With the grocery stores emptied of bread, and even yeast a scarcity, and a whole lot of extra time on my hands—yes.

My old kitchen is an 1850s addition to the original structure, with a ceiling much too short to pass code today and a floor as rolling as the hills of Harpers Ferry. To reach the kitchen one must step up and through the hefty frame of what was once a back door; the 180-year-old hinge-prints are still visible, as are the scars of untold comings and goings that accumulate in well-loved houses over time. One rainy afternoon at the height of quarantine, I entered this funny old room, put a skillet on my modern glass cooktop and dropped

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some bacon grease in to melt, followed by my own homemade hard tack. It wasn't perhaps as dry or mealy or dentally-endangering as my soldier upstairs would have experienced, but I still smiled as it sizzled in the pan and the house filled with rich, savory smells. I imagined the house smiled, too, perhaps remembering.

I will not write a review nor recommendation of this recipe, other than to say it was an entertaining experience. I think if one's house ever comes with a recipe on the wall, it ought to be given a fair testing. Cooking together has ever been a way of bonding, even if the bonding is with a house.

Isolation in Good Company

Quarantine in this house brimming with history has indeed been a bonding experience. I appreciate its story, and the stories of those who have passed through this place, more than ever.

At sunset I sit beside the window with my pencil; three feet and 150+ years away, sits my soldier with his. I am writing in my book and he is writing on the wall. I can see his faded notes—graffiti, we call it; can he catch a glimpse of mine? Perhaps we are one another's ghosts, but I like better to think of us as friends.

A draft strikes, and I pull my blanket closer about

me; he does the same.

I imagine each of us glancing up from time to time, across time, to consider this same window, to watch the last lowering brilliance of sun across the fields; each of us thinking of those we miss most dreadfully, and wondering after them. We long, together, for the touch of a dear child's lock of hair, for the sound of our sweethearts' footfalls, for the warmth of old familiar laughter. We are each afraid, together; each uncertain, together; each alone, together. Yet the house holds us, gathers us as one. There is a comfort in that. ■

Scenes of Social Distancing

The director and staff of the George Tyler Moore Center have turned often during this time of physical distancing to the majestic and historic scenery of our neighborhood. The C & O Canal, Harpers Ferry, and South Mountain have all provided healthy opportunities for responsible, essential exercise and safe space for peaceful contemplation. We hope you enjoy some of the views that have been so dear to us in these past months. ■



Loudoun Hts Ridge from Bolivar Heights, Harpers Ferry NHP



Potomac River at Harpers Ferry



South Mountain, View of Pleasant Valley, battlefields of South Mountain and Elk Ridge, Maryland Heights



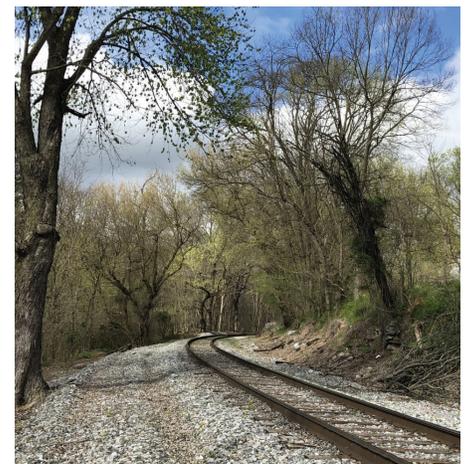
Along the C&O Canal



Bluebells at Short Hill, Harpers Ferry NHP



C&O Canal near Harpers Ferry



Historic railroad crossing at Millville, Jefferson County



Civil War pontoon bridge anchor at Harpers Ferry



Melanie Garvey

Archivist at the Clarke County Historical Association
2016 Graduate, History Major, Concentration in The Civil War and 19th Century America, Appalachian Studies Minor

What have you been doing since graduation?

After graduation my fiancé and I moved to Texas! There I was a volunteer coordinator and living history interpreter at the George Ranch Historical Park, in Richmond, Texas (just outside Houston). After we moved towns, I worked at the Lake Jackson Historical Association, in Lake Jackson, Texas (on the gulf coast) as the volunteer coordinator, but I also got to explore digital exhibits, and I built an app for the Plantation site we owned. We moved back last year (2019) and I started my job in Clarke County, where I am today. I've also expanded my side job as a historic seamstress, and have made historic clothes for several parks in Texas, as well as individual clients. I'm potentially looking at doing some work for parks in Loudoun after COVID-19 clears.

What do you enjoy most about your job? I love the freedom to explore. In Texas I was mostly in museum education, which was fabulous, but it limited my ability to dig around and explore the regional histories the way I wanted to. Here, I'm finding new things everyday and constantly chasing rabbit holes, and I love it.

How did our program help you prepare for your career path? I've always preferred an academic path to a public history path, and having a program that was set up and run a bit like a grad program helped hone my focus. I'm not afraid of the academic challenges that face me as the sole archivist in Clarke County, and I feel I can confidently meet colleagues on an equal footing.

Why does history matter? History is the collective story of a culture, and in order to understand who we are, we have to understand who and where we came from. Without history, we'd have no worldly context, and no understanding of who we are as a culture/nation/people. ■



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