

SOAR Research Proposal: Summer 2014

## **Part 2: Faculty Proposal**

### **The Lehigh Valley during the American Civil War: A Survey and Analysis of Primary Sources**

**Faculty:** Dr. Jamie Paxton, Associate Professor, Department of History

**Student:** David Gaspar, History Major.

**Dates:** May 12-August 1, 2014. Ten weeks covering a twelve-week period.

### **Project Description**

This proposal grows from discussions David and I have had about how we might turn his interest in the Civil War into a viable Honors project. Together we agreed a study of the Lehigh Valley would be intrinsically interesting but, more importantly, it could also provide a valuable case study to test historians' generalizations about the war. We soon realized, however, that, while the Civil War has received intense scrutiny, historians have ignored the Lehigh Valley's response to and participation in the conflict. This is a glaring omission given the region's dense population, political vitality, and economic significance. Moreover, the presence of a large body of pacifistic, anti-slavery Moravians gave the region a unique dynamic worthy of serious scholarly attention. Beginning such a study is complicated by the fact that no reliable bibliography of sources exists for the Lehigh Valley in the Civil War era. Sources pertaining to the region are scattered among a variety of national, state, and local institutions, and no one has compiled a comprehensive catalog.

With this SOAR project we propose to fill that void. Our main goal is to create a guide, or finding aid, to assist researchers, such as David, my students and other scholars interested in the subject, find and assess local sources easily. Finding aids are invaluable tools in the early stages of research because they direct scholars to specific sources on the topics they want to know about. At a minimum, a finding aid contains the bibliographic information (authorship, dates covered, place of origin, and where it is currently housed). Our finding aid will also include a brief narrative description of the item and its contents as well as subject terms that cover the contents for each item.

First, we will work together to identify potential repositories and use electronic sources and printed bibliographic material to compile a master list of institutions and the sources they house. The potential list of institutions to be consulted is quite long and includes the Moravian Church Archives, Easton Public Library, Bethlehem Area Public Library, Allentown Public Library, Moravian Historical Society, Northampton County Historical Society, and the Lehigh County Historical Society.

Once this is complete, David will visit each library, archive, and historical society, to assess first hand the scope and content the collections. Together we will devise the criteria for organizing the material and create short descriptions of each document/source. Finally, we will compile the finding aid and write a synthetic essay about researching the Civil in the Lehigh Valley.

Although identifying, compiling, and annotating documentary sources is our first and primary goal, depending on what we do find, we see this project as the first stage of a larger project. This project may lead to future SOAR projects that will expand our searches to local institutions we did not reach this time, to state and national institutions and ultimately to disseminating transcriptions or digitized copies of the originals to a larger audience perhaps via an online archives.

The proposed project will run ten weeks over a twelve-week time period from May 12 to August 1. The dates are different from the SOAR schedule because we are asking permission to begin the project two weeks early. David will be unavailable for two weeks in July and the earlier start date allows us to fulfill our obligation to SOAR.

### **Goals for Research and Dissemination**

The project, if approved, will meet several interrelated goals. David will be immersed in the real work of an historian and will produce findings that can be presented and used. Most immediately, the project will help David determine what sources are available and suitable for an Honors project. Only by assessing the quality and quantity of local sources, can he know what questions to ask. In so doing, he will refine and extend the skills he has been developing in his 100- and 200-level history classes. In particular, he will be critically analyzing primary sources and articulating how the sources can be used to address current historiographical debates. Our goal is that the project will potentially have a wide audience, as it will culminate with a finding aid to assist subsequent researchers. We would like to share our findings with the institutions that provided the source materials. David will present his findings at Moravian College's scholarship day and I will encourage him to present at NCUR, local historical societies, and the Pennsylvania Historical Association's annual meeting.

The project will also benefit me in several ways. I intend the project as a reconnaissance of local sources that I can utilize in class. My desire to incorporate more local sources stems partly from the conclusions of the history department's recent external review. The reviewers encouraged faculty to incorporate more local sources in their courses and research projects. My colleague, Jane Berger, has already made a good start on this, and I hope to follow her lead. While I cannot know what we will find, my hope is to be able to incorporate some of the material into assignments for my HIST 113 and HIST 243 classes. Once we have identified

and abstracted a number of sources, I would also like to develop a seminar on the Civil War era in which students use local sources to engage in broader historiographical debates.

### **Schedule Including Roles and Responsibilities**

**Weeks 1-2: Review of Scholarship.** Together David and I will identify, compile and review the small but growing scholarly literature on Northern communities during the American Civil War. The historiographical review (a history of writing history) will provide the context necessary to understand the questions historians ask about communities in wartime and to assess the range of scholarly interpretations. The literature review will help David exercise and refine the skills he acquired in the historical methods and interpretation class. Upon completion, David will be able to understand how representative was the Lehigh Valley, how it diverged from patterns found elsewhere and why? In the first two weeks, we will meet two to three times per week to discuss the works he has been reading, how they fit together, the sources historians employ, and what sort of questions is it possible to ask of the sources.

**Week 3: Identifying Local Sources Using Online Databases and Secondary Sources.** David will then turn his attention to identify primary sources held in local institutions. He will search the institutions' websites for catalogs and archival descriptions. He will also scour the footnotes and bibliographies of published sources for locally available sources. At this point, David will compile a tentative bibliography of primary and secondary sources. As catalog searching is a relatively solitary endeavor and one that does not require a great deal of active guidance, we will meet only once or twice this week to discuss progress and to connect what he has been finding to the historiographical review.

**Weeks 4-8: On Site Research.** At the beginning of this, the longest phase of the project, David will prioritize the sources he will acquire and the institutions he will visit. Then David will visit the libraries, archives, and museums and begin to catalog the sources he has identified using a laptop computer. He will begin to create the finding aid. I will accompany David to the first institution, and we will have several short meetings during the first couple of weeks. Once we have a system in place, we will reduce our meeting to once a week to give David uninterrupted time in the libraries and archives.

**Weeks 9-10: Compilation and Synthesis.** In the last two weeks David and I will create a finding aid organized by both institution and subject matter. David will also write an accompanying essay of 10-12 pages synthesizing the sources available and how they might be used to address current historiographical debates.

### Part 3: Student Statement of Purpose

#### The Lehigh Valley and the American Civil War: A Survey and Analysis of Primary Sources

Name: David Gaspar

Major: History and Political Science

Expected Graduation: May 2016

Faculty Mentor: Jamie Paxton

On-Campus Housing: No

The American Civil War transformed all aspects of American society. As a resident of the Lehigh Valley I am interested in how the region's politics, economy, and society would have been affected by the Civil War. The Civil War produced many records that have survived. A lot has been written about the Civil War, yet little work exists on the Lehigh Valley. This story is one that should be told and since there is very little work on the subject I must go back to the beginning. Another interesting aspect is that the Moravians were pacifist as well as being anti-slavery. This is an interesting paradox to study. So what needs to be done is documents from a variety of institutions will have to be reviewed, analyzed, and summarized and made available for future researchers. This project would allow for the Valley's story to be told for the first time. This can then be used to tell a larger story of the Civil War.

My goal is to identify the number and kind of primary sources available. For this research I will go to the Bethlehem Public Library, the Allentown Public Library, The Easton Public Library, the Northampton County Historical Society, and the Moravian Archives, and look at and critically assess the documents they have. I will also visit the Moravian College Archive. The records I would be looking at would be newspaper articles from the time period, business records, letters written from soldiers to home and vice versa. Records from the Moravian Church will also be looked at for they may also be very vital in finding out how the Moravians reacted to the war. I will then make sure that these records come together to form one complete archive of the Civil War in the Lehigh Valley. I will have learned the methods for critically analyzing documents. This will entail reading through each document and summarizing its scope and contents so I and other researchers can see how useful it is in the future. When such a document is found it can be added to a list of documents that relate to the Lehigh Valley and the War.

The outcomes I expect from this research opportunity are to be able to look at primary documents and to be able to critically analyze them in order to determine

which documents are important and to be able to grasp how research with primary documents is conducted. Another outcome would be to compile a list of all the primary sources related to the Civil War in the Lehigh Valley is created. A third goal will be to create a finding aid so that these primary sources can be located by others interested in the same or a similar subject. A third outcome would be to present my research at the Moravian's Student Scholarship Day and the Lehigh High Valley History Expo.

## **Part 4: Expense Proposal**

### **The Lehigh Valley during the American Civil War: A Survey and Analysis of Primary Sources**

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**Student:** David Gaspar, History Major.

We are requesting that SOAR defray the costs of David's travel expenses. David will spend approximately twenty-five days traveling to and from various institutions in the Lehigh Valley. Conservatively, we estimate he will travel 10 miles a day. At the standard rate of \$0.56/mile, we estimate David will require \$140 to meet his expenses.