

SEPCHE

Nurturing Student Scholars in the Humanities and Social Sciences Faculty-Student Undergraduate Research Project

Research Project: THE CIVIL WAR LETTERS OF MAJOR GRIFFITH JONES, 9TH PA CAVALRY

Discipline: HISTORY

Faculty Mentor: WAYNE A. HUSS, Ph.D., Gwynedd-Mercy College (huss.w@gmc.edu)

Project Description: Dr. Huss has access to about 375 original and unpublished letters of Griffith Jones, a well-to-do master miller from Perry County, Pennsylvania, who enlisted in the Union Army at the advanced age of 49 (more than twice the average), leaving behind a loving wife and daughter. These letters are exceptionally intelligent and perceptive accounts that detail camp life, military campaigns and battles, leadership, and motivations for supporting the Union cause at great personal physical and emotional sacrifice to the writer. The letters are especially significant because they cover events in the Western Theatre, which are often eclipsed by extensive study of the Eastern Theatre, and they offer valuable insights into both the inner life of combatants at the front and those waiting at home, as well as exploring little-known, specific incidents occurring during the most critical period in American history when the nation was at war with itself.

Dr. Huss plans to transcribe and edit these letters, and supplement this work by additional archival research, with an interest toward future conference presentation and publication for which there is substantial popular and scholarly interest. Student assistance would be invaluable to help move along this important project, which has lain dormant and unexplored for 145 years.

Student Task(s): The student's work for this project will encompass several phases, as follows:

1. The student will visit a number of local historical archives (Civil War and Underground Railroad Museum of Philadelphia; Union League of Philadelphia; GAR Civil War Museum and Library; Historical Society of Pennsylvania; National Archives [Mid-Atlantic Region in Philadelphia and the main branch in Washington, D.C.]; United States Military History Institute in Carlisle, Pa.; as well as private collections) to examine, document and copy the original Civil War letters of Major Griffith Jones, as well as to gather biographical information about him and to obtain copies of photographs, documents, memorabilia, and historical accounts pertaining to him and to his regiment, the 9th PA Cavalry. The student also will be expected to conduct Internet research appropriate to the project.

2. If time and resources permit, the student, accompanied by the professor, will visit, document, and photograph the historical sites where the events and military actions described in the letters and documents took place.

3. The student, in conjunction with the professor, will then collate and arrange the letters, documents, photographs, and memorabilia chronologically and digitally scan them.

4. The student, along with the professor, will then transcribe the letters and documents and prepare typescripts of same and also digitize the results.

5. The student will then work with the professor to edit the written material by adding explanatory notes and supplemental information drawn from both primary and secondary sources,

including appropriate historiography, to place them into historical context. They will then work together to assess the historical importance of the collection and develop one or more presentations that highlight its significance.

Student Time Commitment: 10 to 15 hours per week for 6-8 weeks until the project is complete.

Student Learning Outcome: The student will experience the work of an historian first-hand by obtaining direct access to actual primary sources and learning to exercise critical thinking and problem-solving skills in analyzing historical information. In addition, he/she will develop critical and competent use of technology, exhibit professional competency, and enhance his/her written and oral communication skills

Expected Student Product: Several intellectual products are anticipated from this project, as follows:

1. A CD containing images of the complete collection of letters, documents, photographs, memorabilia, biographical information on the soldier, and historical records of the 9th PA Cavalry;
2. Oral and/or written presentations on the research that would be appropriate for inclusion on the programs of various historical societies, and conferences and symposia of various types at various venues;
3. Eventual publication of the whole collection in book format and/or on the Internet

Other Expected Outcomes: The student will develop a love for historical research and share in the excitement of historical discovery by working with letters, documents, photographs, artifacts, and memorabilia from the period being studied. He/she will experience what life and military service was like from the perspective of an individual soldier who volunteered at an advanced age, leaving a loving family at home, and suffering physically and psychologically for the cause of the Union. He/she will also gain valuable insights into both the inner life of combatants at the front and those waiting at home, as well as exploring little-known events occurring in the Western Theatre of the Civil War. The student will be able to understand history “from the bottom-up” in a vivid way that no classroom lecture alone could ever convey and thus become motivated to share with others an infectious enthusiasm for this dramatic and tragic period of American history when the nation was violently torn apart and painfully put back together again.