
INTERIM PERFORMANCE REPORT
“Object of History” [Grant LG-23-05-0061-05]
Oct 31, 2007

During the past six months the staff at the Center for History and New Media (CHNM) <<http://chnm.gmu.edu>> has made significant progress on *The Object of History* (OOH) project <<http://objectofhistory.org/>>. We have successfully launched two new modules and are making excellent progress on a third. As a staff we are mourning the loss of -our director, Roy Rosenzweig, but we are prepared to move ahead with all of our grant obligations. We have significant and continuing support from the Department of History and Art History and George Mason University as a whole. Sharon Leon and Tom Scheinfeldt’s combined total of 10 years of experience in digital and public history make them well suited to carry on Rosenzweig’s work as the Primary Investigator for OOH. All work will be completed as scheduled.

Fall Modules

The staff at CHNM has completed work in conjunction with NMAH curators on the content for two of the three objects that will be featured in Fall 2007: *Thomas Jefferson’s Desk*; *1848 Gold Nugget*. Content development for the *Mary Todd Lincoln’s Dress* module is near completion, and will launch later in November. Finally, we will complete the launch of the modules by opening the material for the *1898 Standard Voting Machine* in January 2008.

Since participation for the Curator and Historian Forums, in the form of question submission, was low in the Spring, the CHNM staff created a significant number of the questions for the curator and historian conversations. This had the positive effect of allowing us to make sure that the curators and historians covered material that students needed to know for their History assessment tests, but it made us rethink the Forum segment of the project design. As a mid-course correction, we have decided to reduce the number of audiocasts to two per module in the Fall. Additionally, our assessment of the website traffic statistics showed that teachers were not listening to the audiocasts with their students when they were broadcast live. Teachers were listening to the archived mp3 versions. Thus, we are less committed in the fall to doing live broadcasts, but we will continue to launch audio recordings of the featured curators and historians regularly, and to provide archived versions of those recordings for teachers to use in their classroom as their schedules allow.

Thomas Jefferson’s Desk: <<http://objectofhistory.org/objects/intro/desk/>> In 1776, Thomas Jefferson drafted the Declaration of Independence on this portable lap desk of his own design. Featuring a hinged writing board, a locking drawer for papers and pens, and an inkwell, the desk was Jefferson’s companion as a Revolutionary patriot, American diplomat, and president of the United States. The content for this module introduces students to the intellectual roots of the Declaration, the drafting committee and its role in the process, and the history of the colonial move toward Revolution.

Launched at the beginning of the Fall semester, the Jefferson Desk module was available to students and teachers in time to correspond with their work on Early American History in the

general education curriculum. In September, Curator Barbara Clark Smith was joined by George Mason University Historian, Rosemarie Zagarri for two audiocasts about the revolutionary era, the documentary antecedents of the Declaration, and the Declaration's legacy in American democracy. Smith is a Curator in the Division of Politics and Reform, where she has done extensive work on 18th Century social and political history, especially popular participation in the Revolution. Zagarri is Professor of History at GMU, and she is well-known for her work on representative government and gender issues in Early America. Her most recent book, *Revolutionary Backlash: Women and Politics in the Early American Republic*, was released by the University of Pennsylvania Press in October.

1848 Gold Nugget: <<http://objectofhistory.org/objects/intro/goldnugget/>> James Marshall found this gold nugget at Sutter's Mill, California on January 24, 1848. The nugget bears evidence that Marshall bit it to determine if it was actually gold. And, there is significant evidence that its discovery was the impetus for the Gold Rush of 1849. In focusing attention on the West during this time period, the gold nugget opens a window up on issues of foreign relations and the concept of Manifest Destiny, not the least because at the point of its discovery, California still belonged to Mexico.

Launched in October, the Gold Nugget module provides students and teachers with access to artifacts and documents that support their work on Westward Expansion. In November, Curator David Shayt and George Mason University Historian Paula Petrik will participate in two audiocasts, in which they will discuss the discovery of gold at Sutter's Mill, the wide variety of migrants who came to California to join in the search for gold, the life and culture of mining towns, and the development and industries that sprang up around the mines. Shayt is a Associate Curator in the Division of Work and Industry, where he has worked on Hand tools, mechanical and civil engineering, construction trades, and specialized manufacturing, as well as exhibits on Hurricane Katrina, and September 11, 2001. Petrik is Professor of History at GMU, and she is the author of *No Step Backward: Women and Family on the Rocky Mountain Mining Frontier*.

Mary Todd Lincoln's Dress: This dress belonged to First Lady Mary Todd Lincoln, who wore it at a White House event in 1862. It was probably made by Elizabeth Keckley, Mrs. Lincoln's favorite dressmaker. The dress reflects the history of fashion and a First Lady's life in the social limelight. Behind the scenes, it tells the story of two nineteenth-century women who formed a close, unequal, and important relationship across the lines of race and class. This module will launch later in November, with audiocasts with Curators Barbara Clark Smith and Lisa Kathleen Graddy to follow in December.

Publicity

In addition to making presentations at professional gatherings, the staff at CHNM and NMAH continue to work to publicize the project through a host of newsletters and organizations. Each month since the launch of the website, OOH has been a feature in the NMAH newsletter for educators. OOH is also the featured site on the educator's page of the NMAH website <<http://americanhistory.si.edu/educators/index.cfm>>. Additionally, the staff at CHNM has made arrangements with both the National Council for the Social Studies and the National Council for History Education to publicize OOH through their websites. Finally, the staff at CHNM made contact with the newsletter editors and council officers for all of state Councils for the Social

Studies and state Councils for History Education. These local representatives have also agreed to publicize OOH through their websites and newsletters.

Website Statistics

Since the initial launch in February 2007, we have seen a considerable increase in use of the OOH site. During the Spring semester (February – April), the site averaged 865 unique visitors. This was a respectable audience share for a site that launched it's first round of content in February. However, with a few months of publicity and targeted teacher outreach, the statistics for the Fall have increased significantly. Between August and October, the site averaged 1136 unique visitors a month. Overall for 2007 through the end of October, the site has a total of 8,079 unique visitors and 513,216 hits. The sharp increase in users in the Fall suggests that as teachers become more familiar with OOH, and have time to integrate the material into their lesson planning, we will continue to see user statistics improve. Additionally, during these periods, our monitoring of site traffic during the live audio events suggests that the audience is quite small. But, those archived files are being accessed more frequently at later dates. This information has lead us to revamp the audio events in the ways described above. We will continue to monitor the website traffic and include those findings in our evaluation of the site.

Since May 2007, the staff at CHNM and the staff at NMAH have made tremendous progress on *Object of History*. We are poised to move ahead with the launch of the final two modules in the coming months. In the spring of 2008, we will continue our outreach and dissemination of the OOH model. We will distribute an Object Lesson software package and guide that will allow small museums and libraries to produce their own object lessons. We are very excited about this phase of the project and we welcome further input from and discussion with the IMLS staff as our work continues.

Sincerely,

Sharon Leon
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Center for History and New Media
George Mason University