Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media

2021 | 2022

ANNUAL REPORT

Onward

In his state of the union address in January 2011, President Barack Obama began by looking back at the worst recession most Americans had ever experienced, and yet he was optimistic. "We are poised for progress," he told the American people that day, and he urged Americans to do what we have done for two centuries—continue to reinvent ourselves. The past two years have posed a different kind of challenge, a challenge not only to our health care system, but to our entire way of learning, working, and living. Here at the Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media we've done what President Obama urged more than a decade ago: we've reinvented ourselves and, like America in 2011, we're poised for progress.

New Work, New Directions

It was just a year ago this month that we began the process of bringing to a close more than a decade of open source software development, work that produced several widely used software tools for scholars and students, including Zotero, Omeka, and Tropy. We are very proud of that work, but it was time to move in different directions in order to remain true to our mission of democratizing access to historical information and providing the best educational opportunities we can to our students.

The RRCHNM of 2022 is a very different place than it was just one year ago. In 2020 we were probably best known as a center that provided teachers and students with top quality educational resources, and as a place that produced some of the best open source software for scholars, public history sites, and museums. Educational projects are still at the forefront of our work, just as they were when Roy Rosenzweig and Mike O'Malley founded the Center in 1994. But as we continue to lead the field, we have become a powerhouse in computational humanities, and our new podcasting studio is already on track to be a major player in the world of historical podcasting.

Several new people have joined our team and some of our recent graduates have gone on to excellent jobs in the field. Despite the stresses of the pandemic, we've been very successful with our grant applications, and we've established a number of new and exciting partnerships that open some exciting new doors for our team. Read on to find out about all the exciting things that have happened in 2021 and what the future holds for RRCHNM.

NEW FUNDS & PARTNERS

11 NEW GRANTS

$2.52m NEW FUNDING

$29,000 IN DONATIONS FROM 62 DONORS

In 2021 we began projects with two new partners – the National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC) and the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA). Our partnership with NMAAHC is focused on making visible the riches of the special collections and archives at five HBCUs: Jackson State, Tuskegee, Florida A&M, Texas Southern, and Clark Atlanta Universities. Working closely with the museums and the HBCU partners we'll be building a website that showcases materials from their archives, including oral histories of life in the Jim Crow South, photographs of leaders of the Civil Rights Movement, maps used in fighting school desegregation, artifacts from slavery, and the work of many prominent African American artists. Our contract with the DPAA is supporting a new postdoc at the Center—Brandon Tachco—who is collaborating with the agency on a digital project related to the Korean War.

POST DOC GRANTS

We are thrilled and proud to note that our postdocs have received several grants for their groundbreaking work. Deepthi Murali was awarded the joint National Endowment for the Humanities and UK's Arts & Humanities Research Council grant for Subaltern Histories of Global Textiles: Connecting Collections, Expanding Engagement, a partnership with Cooper Hewitt, the University of Edinburgh, the Victoria and Albert Museum, and the University of Glasgow. Jessica Mack also received two grants this year, including funding from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to fund the development of Tropy 3 through 2023, as well as funding from the 4VA Consortium for her digital project Mapping the University: A Digital Resource for Studying Virginia Campus Histories.

HELLO R2 STUDIOS

With the very generous support of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation ($1 million), we launched R2 Studios in October 2021. The mission of R2 Studios is to produce narrative historical podcasts that will appeal to large and diverse audiences, thereby furthering our mission to democratize access to historical information—but through earbuds rather than a web browser. Building on the lessons learned the previous year with our first podcast, the diplomatic history show Consolation Prize, we have launched a second show, The Green Tunnel, that is a history of the Appalachian Trail.

Several new shows are already in various stages of production. As the new year dawned, we hired two new professional staff to help with the production of our shows. Like all our work here at RRCHNM, our podcasting efforts have an important educational component. Graduate and undergraduate students work on the shows as producers, and each episode is conceived and produced by one of our students. Our hope is that these shows will eventually begin generating a new stream of donations for the Center from our listeners.

The GREEN TUNNEL PODCAST

DIFFICULT SUBJECTS

Our Director of Educational Projects, Dr. Nate Sleeter recently received a grant from the Library of Congress for a project on "Teaching Difficult Subjects" in history. The first phase of this project, which builds on Sleeter's earlier collaboration with the educational work at the Library of Congress, will focus on providing K–12 teachers with sources and strategies for teaching the history of religion in America. At this moment when the teaching of history has become increasingly politicized (again), we are happy to be working with the Library to develop free and open digital resources that teachers, parents, and students can use for teaching and learning about religious history.

COMPUTATIONAL HISTORY

The past year was one of success and change in the field of computational history. Dr. Lincoln Mullen spent the fall semester at the Library of Congress as a member of a cohort of scholars working on what the Library called "Computing Cultural Heritage in the Cloud." Lincoln's project, "America's Public Bible: Machine-Learning Detection of Biblical Quotations Across LOC Collections via Cloud Computing," extends some of his earlier scholarship to the much larger collections of the Library and will provide scholars with models for using machine learning on large text corpuses. In the fall of 2021, Dr. Jessica Otis received a large grant from the National Science Foundation ($443,000) for her computational history project, "Death By Numbers," which will result in an online database of information from the 17th- and 18th-century London Bills of Mortality. She and a team of graduate and undergraduate research assistants are quantitatively analyzing over 150 years' worth of early modern mortality data, exploring questions such as the different patterns of disease spread in epidemic and endemic plague years or the changing frequencies in types of accidental death over time.

Dr. Amanda Madden (see more below) joined our faculty in September 2021 as Director of Geospatial History. She is a historian of early modern Italy who specializes in geospatial history and the scholarship of teaching and learning (SOTL). Amanda's computational work currently centers on a project she co-directs called "Mapping Violence in Early Modern Italy." Together, these three colleagues give RRCHNM tremendous strength in computational history.

ENGAGING OUR COMMUNITIES

A critical part of our $1 million grant from the Mellon Foundation is a focus on greater engagement with our various communities of supporters, users, and friends. Throughout our history we have always had many close friends and dedicated supporters, but frankly we've been guilty of sometimes being so focused on creating new projects for our users that we've let engagement with our communities lag. With Mellon's support we've hired our first-ever community engagement coordinator, Bridget Bukovich, to help us take a much more proactive approach to marketing, community engagement, and fundraising. Bridget is an experienced marketing professional and a recent graduate of Mason's MA program in history (and our digital public history certificate). Expect to hear from Bridget in the months ahead.

GRADUATE AFFILIATE PROGRAM

Educating graduate students in digital history has always been central to our mission. To expand the number of graduate students who take part in the life of the Center and the work we are doing, we created a graduate affiliate program in 2021. We invited MA and PhD students to begin attending meetings, workshops, and to just hang out in our space with our graduate research assistants.

The new program began in September and we now have more than a dozen graduate affiliates, including two who are studying history-related topics in the graduate school of education. This growing cohort of graduate students brings a lot of new positive energy to the Center.

NEW FACES

Dr. Amanda Madden is our new Director of Geospatial History. Amanda comes to us from Georgia Institute of Technology where she held a postdoc in digital pedagogy and worked as a lecturer and research scientist in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. She has several geospatial projects including Mapping Violence in Early Modern Italy and an interactive tour of civil rights era Atlanta.

Dr. Jason Heppler joined RRCHNM in June 2021 as our senior web developer. He comes to the Center having worked on many digital history, public history, and community engagement projects at Stanford University and the University of Nebraska. He's also completing a book on the environmental history of Silicon Valley with the University of Oklahoma Press.

Jeanette Patrick is R2 Studio's new producer. She joined RRCHNM from the Washington Library at George Washington's Mount Vernon where she played a pivotal role in many of the organization's digital public history projects. Most recently she co-created and co-wrote a podcast miniseries entitled Intertwined: The Enslaved Community at George Washington's Mount Vernon.

Timmia King is a first year Ph.D. student and a Graduate Research Assistant at RRCHNM for the HBCU History & Culture Access Consortium project. Timmia received her bachelor's degree in African American Studies from Howard University, and a dual master degree in African American and African Diaspora Studies and Library Sciences from Indiana University. Her research interests include African American memory work, specifically their self-documenting practices and generally twentieth-century military history of Africans apart of the diaspora and on the continent.

Hayley Madl is a Ph.D. student and a Graduate Research Assistant at RRCHNM for World History Commons and also works on The Green Tunnel Podcast. Hayley received her bachelor's degree in History and Political Science from the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford. Her research interests include early American history, focusing on 17th and 18th century indigenous history of the eastern woodlands.