2018 Upstate Institute Summer Field School Fellowship

Title: The Mohawk Valley in the Great War: Looking Back After 100 Years
Community Partner: Oneida County History Center

An opportunity to research and develop a new exhibit at a history museum in Utica, which will provide an excellent experience for students interested in history and museum studies.

Project Description:
Each summer, the Oneida County History Center in Utica, New York, gives a Field School Fellow the opportunity to research a topic of historic significance to the region, and develop an exhibit from the work. This summer, the Fellow will look at the Great War (1914-1918)—the first ‘industrialized’ war in human history—and how it affected life in Oneida County and the greater Mohawk Valley. The Fellow will create an exhibit that will consider the fundamental changes that occurred to local society as a result of this conflict, which largely took place overseas.

The Oneida County History Center has amassed a substantial amount of material relating to the war. The many ways to which it is referred—the Great War, the ‘war to end all wars’, World War I, the First World War—speaks to its influence and to the multiple perspectives from which it is seen.

As a community of immigrants, Oneida County experienced the strife between the combatant nations on a local level. Issues of American neutrality, along with pro- and anti-German fervor, resonated in the conversations of the day. After the U.S. entry, area industries adapted to produce weapons and other materials necessary to fight. Citizens volunteered or were drafted into service. Women joined the American Red Cross as nurses. Rationing went into effect. And multiple war bond drives were held to raise funds for the conflict.

The History Center’s collections can be used to tell the story of the Great War like no other source can. To do so, these disparate materials—uniforms, gear, weapons, images, documents and publications—need to be identified and organized. From this project should spring ample material to design and build a major new exhibit in the History Center’s main gallery. The timing is not coincidental—2018 marks the last year of the war’s centennial, and 1918 was the year of greatest direct American involvement. External source material to provide context for this project exists at the Colgate University library, and the Fellow may also consider liaison with other cultural organizations such as the New York State Museum in Albany and the National World War I Museum in Liberal, Kansas in the course of this project. Local organizations, like some of the two dozen town and village historical societies in Oneida County, may also be valuable sources of artifacts and archival material.

Completion of this project will provide the History Center with a unique database of its World War I materials that can be used to advance scholarship of this era. This is in keeping with the History Center’s mission to preserve and promote the history of the greater Mohawk Valley. Internally, future exhibits and publications will benefit from the enhanced access the Fellow will bring to the collection. The long-term preservation and care of these materials may also be improved. Externally, the History Center’s World War I collections will comprise a valuable tool for students, historians, and descendants to access. Interest in this period is expected to remain high due to the immense impact that the war brought to the country.
About the Community Partner:
The mission of the Oneida County History Center is to preserve and promote the rich heritage of Oneida County and the greater Mohawk Valley region. The Center makes this heritage available via collections, publications, and public programming activities designed to reach students, local citizens, and all other interested constituents.

Required Skills:
The Fellow should have a specific interest in the social history of the First World War, and a basic understanding of the United States’ role in the conflict. Detailed knowledge of the actual fighting (key battles & events, technologies, other combatant nations) may be helpful. This experience is structured to be a ‘real world’ introduction into the museum field.

The Fellow should also be interested in history and/or museum work as a potential career choice; course concentrations in History and Museum Studies may be advantageous. This Fellowship will provide an experience along a broad range of museum-specific activities, including collections management, interpretation, digital media, and basic exhibits development. The Fellow should be comfortable with computers, especially Microsoft Office; possess effective written and verbal communication skills; well-versed in social media with an ability to provide regular updates and/or interesting information to the public via a platform of their choice; and a ‘self starter’, requiring basic guidance, but who can work without supervision once given a direction. Experience with the collections management program used by the History Center (PastPerfect) is preferred, but is not mandatory.

Logistics:
This is a full-time paid research position (35 hours per week) to last approximately 10 weeks, conducted under the joint supervision of the Upstate Institute and the Oneida County History Center. A majority of this work will take place at the History Center, with supervision from executive director Brian Howard. Brian is responsible for all aspects of the History Center’s operation, and will assess, with input from staff and project volunteers, the Fellow’s progress. Interaction with the center’s small but motivated volunteer pool is also expected.

Field School Fellows receive a research stipend of $4500 plus reimbursement for any costs associated with transportation for this project. A car is not required for this project, but may be helpful. A Fellow will need a U.S. drivers’ license to complete this work.

Contact:
Julie Dudrick, Upstate Institute
109 Lathrop Hall
jdudrick@colgate.edu
http://upstate.colgate.edu