Historians, cultural organizations, and individuals all are plugged into the World Wide Web. From mobile apps to publications, the ‘digital’ has complicated the ways in which individuals learn, access, and assess material. For historians, the rise of digital history brought with it opportunities, success, and new outlets to connect their research to others. Even in digital history’s successes, its continued growth spurts leave behind fundamental questions about the relationship between three groups: academic historians, public historians, and the public. This thesis explores these relationships and the ways in which digital history continues to shape the issues of authority, education, and scholarship. In doing so, this thesis suggests moving beyond the consideration of the digital humanities and digital history as academic disciplines, instead it considers digital history as research methodology that not only provides tools and methods to the scholar but also public history professionals and the public. Finally, the project includes not only a written portion but also a digital component. A website, *Meeting Jane and Emmett*, accessible at http://meetingjande.net, explored these issues in relation to undergraduates and history. Digital history’s ultimate success relies on academic historians, public historians, and the public coming together to develop a holistic environment for historical relevancy.
“WHOSE DIGITAL HISTORY:” CLOSING THE GAPS BETWEEN ACADEMIC
HISTORIANS, PUBLIC HISTORIANS, AND THE PUBLIC

A thesis submitted
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By

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INTRODUCTION

The introduction of new technologies often ushers in new developments that possess the potential to alter social, cultural, and economic standards. Some of the most obvious changes continue to occur within the realm of social communication, extending far beyond face to face interactions. Instead individuals’ usurped digital platforms to exercise their speech through digital means like Twitter and Facebook. While the development of mobile application by leading techno-electronic companies such as, Samsung and Apple perform various actions ranging from travel tips to health advice without the presence of specialist, technology maintains a steady hand in its reconstruction of society through digital and electronic means. Thus, it comes with little surprise that sectors that deal in the business of information like education, scholarship, entertainment, and tourism increasingly face greater scrutiny in the ways in which these areas communicate and disseminate information to individuals. Upon closer examination within education and scholarship, the historical community’s utilization of digital history faces ongoing negotiation of the digital space in communicating knowledge to the public.

Within this hyper technological world, sustainable connections with digital technology remain unbalanced. Digital readiness has become a benchmark for the skills individuals need to participate and make informed decisions utilizing technologies in the 21st century. In a report conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2016 examining digital readiness in adults, they determined it required the skills to physically utilize the technology particularly web based ones, the level of trust held by individuals in their capacity to “determine the trustworthiness of information online and to safeguard personal information,” and the ways in which individuals
use digital tools to carry out tasks online.\textsuperscript{1} With the increase in smartphones and mobile device access, one would assume that this type of access would empower individuals to develop these skills and be able to develop a digital relationship with educational centers and other areas of learning. However, the Pew Research Center team discovered that while greater digital readiness translated to a higher level of the use of technology in learning, sixty percent of all the adults surveyed felt they lacked the ability to understand what sites on the internet constituted trustworthy sources.\textsuperscript{2} Although the survey did not take into account what types of digital material individuals found trustworthy, the survey provides a startling view on not just the confidence of individuals in utilizing technology but also the establishment of trustworthy connections between digital technology producers and recipients. Where does digital history fit into this picture of digital readiness? Digital history inherently provides access to historical materials and information at the fingertips of its readership. If individuals, according to the Pew Research Center, already express skepticism towards online materials outside of historically based ones, then what prognosis can digital history expect in its digital lifetime?

Although its future and potential successes are not as doom and gloom as implied from the above statement, digital history’s growth and rise within and outside of academia is not only tied to technological developments, but also shifting notions within the historical community. As described by historian Sherman Dorn, like oral history, quantitative history, and public history, digital history has become one more approach that has “challenged the professional historians’ definition of scholarship.” Thus, the concepts of producing scholarship no longer deal solely in the premise of argumentation. Instead, as Dorn suggests, the notion that digital history like public history contests the “centrality of the researcher trained in academic history departments”

\textsuperscript{2} Ibid, 15, 19.
and authority. This master’s thesis explores and complicates the way in which digital history continues to refocus the boundaries of the historical community around these issues of authority, scholarship, and education.

The creation and utilization of digital tools to develop digital history projects continues to result in further clashes between three camps: the academic historian, the public historian, and the public. For some, digital history has provided the means to initiate bolder research questions as it helps to provide different means in which to investigate historical questions. At the same time, digital history offers the opportunity to create new bonds with the readers who participate and gain new modes to access information. However, digital history’s tale does not perform a simple long distance run with a clear finish line instead it runs more like in the fashion of an unequal zig zag with that finish line extending farther beyond one’s reach. To complicate the current narrative of digital history, this thesis aims not to pit these groups against each other but to examine the overall similarities between the three. More importantly, this thesis suggests that in order for these three groups to come together within this digital firestorm, digital history methodology must serve as a potential bridge between the three in order to achieve sustained success in relevancy and contingency by balancing the powers of authority and scholarship.

“Whose Digital History” is divided into three chapters: Chapter one will explore the meaning and the function of digital history as a research methodology; Chapter two will examine the target creators and audiences for these projects; and Chapter three will employ the use of a digital history project as a case study to examine the production and reception of digital history projects. The first chapter extensively focuses on not just the ‘genealogy’ of digital history, but its evolution within the historical community. Specifically, the chapter looks at digital history’s

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close ties with public history and the impact the public historians’ contributions developed in the genesis and sometimes the confusion of defining the purpose and need for digital history. Beyond the methodologies and theories of digital history, the second chapter will assess the close and sometimes murky relationships between academics, public historians, and the public in connection to digital history. Finally, as a practitioner and student of digital history, in order to understand the movement of digital history, one needs to complete the task of creating a digital history project. With collaboration from Kent State University’s Special Collection department, Jane Melchior Boyd Papers help to form the basis of the project. The Jane Melchior Boyd Papers consist of over three hundred letters between a husband and wife during World War II. Although this project is limited by its short completion date, the letters present the opportunity to create a digital project to not only bridge academic and public needs, but also provide readers a singular experience to examine closely the intimate and public issues of gender roles, sex, love, war, and society. Through its development stages, the project’s target audience is aimed at undergraduate students who would face limited exposure to these issues in either previous education or survey courses. The project also relies on a short trial phase with Kent State University students to facilitate the case study.

Whose digital history is it anyway? Does history only belong to the academic? How does the public historian transverse their place in both scholarship and public ventures? Where does the public ultimately fit into this equation? Recent digital history projects like The Oregon History Project proves that harvesting the power technologies can produce awe inspiring results that would make anyone have the desire to examine the site in greater context. With several other digital history projects under their belt, it is not surprising that their latest project continues that same success. Beyond the grant support of two foundations, the Oregon History Project garnered
the support of historical narratives written by Pacific West historians, while the Oregon Historical Society provides the digitized materials to accompany the content. Even so, digital history remains an enigma. Digital history at least appears to be something everyone wants to use but does not necessarily understand the implications. Thus, this thesis recognizes not necessarily scholarly gaps between these three groups but gaps nevertheless that have become entrenched within and outside of the academy. These gaps of communication, knowledge, and resources continue to fundamentally impact the manner in which the historical community will succeed and adapt itself for future audiences. These three chapters argue for digital history as a unique methodology like public history and not as a separate discipline that contributes to the overall historical conversation. To share and to pursue digital history that speaks to both arguments, audience, and interpretation, historians ensure a future of not just the ‘promises,’ but also the results of a cohesive discipline willing to enable their scholars in both traditional and nontraditional settings to continue discovering new interpretations of the past.

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CHAPTER ONE
“UNDER THE BIG TENT:” ACKNOWLEDGING DIGITAL HISTORY AS A HISTORICAL METHODOLOGY

Historian and co-founder of one of the earliest scholarly centers devoted to the study and implementation of digital tools and history together, the Virginia Center for Digital History, Edward Ayers declared in 1999 “that history may be better suited to digital technologies than any other humanistic discipline.”\(^5\) Ayers’ statement about digital technologies is still largely up for debate. History and digital technologies over the years developed a unique but not a cemented bond. From the printing press to computers, technology has continued to impact the ways in which historians “do” history. Books long held the standard by which historians published and presented historical scholarship. A visit to the archives often prompted the first part of the historian’s research to dig and search for that ephemeral primary source. Enter the digital revolution. Computers, the Internet, mobile applications, and smartphones are just some of the many digital tools and devices birthed by the growth of the “digital.” With these devices, people no longer necessarily needed the historian to give them their history. No scholar’s authority was needed to ask permission to create or view a website. One, in a sense, could just “put it out there.” (Trump and fake news makes this even more real)

The 1990s brought with it the growth and the expansion of Web 2.0. These digital

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technologies slowly became a “new” phenomenon for historians exploring and researching about the past. Historians did not fall victim to an apocalyptic world in the wake of the digital change. Roy Rosenzweig and Daniel Cohen wrote in 2006 that “neither utopia nor dystopia beckons should not lead to the comfortable conclusion that nothing has changed or will change.” Historians should not find comfort in the notion that digital technologies have not changed the historical discipline. Almost a decade after this publication, no one can doubt that the way in which historians and individuals “do” history changed. Mass digitization of archival materials has allowed historians to get an instantaneous connection to primary documents. Historians no longer necessarily have to leave the comfort of their home and spend hours in the archives searching for that historical nugget. Sweatpants and a laptop are now acceptable tools for historical research. With the rise of the digital, more than ever, historians possess instantaneous access to archival and other materials. However, as historian Lara Putnam warns in the April 2016 issue of the American Historical Review, “technology is not destiny” nor in the long run does the growth of this knowledge mean that new “superficiality and new blind spots” will emerge. Within the midst of all of the “new” ways in which historians can “do” history, digital history and the digital humanities exploded from this emerging digital space.

Today, our society operates in a world of abundance. Technology is just one small part of a culture that always has information at its hands. Changes and the formation of new disciplines reflect this multiplicity. For example, public history, as a field, emerged in the 1980s at a time when an excess of PhDs entered a struggling job market. Digital humanities represents one the biggest disciplines to form out of this atmosphere. Practitioners and scholars describe the digital

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humanities as various things. For some scholars, digital humanities represent the “big tent” where the humanities including history come together by using various digital tools. At the same time, other scholars define digital humanities as social, broad, and even a discipline where you have to “make” things in order to be a digital humanist.\(^8\)

The debates appear endless and it does not look like that they will end anytime soon on the questions of the “who’s,” the “what’s,” the “where’s,” the “how’s,” and the “why’s” about the digital humanities. One thing for certain about the digital humanities is that it has become a buzzword synonymous with potential funding and new possibilities for the humanities which is often remarked by those outside of it as a dying breed of the academy. Digital humanities are the buzz on campuses and institutions across the United States. From institutions like George Mason University to the University of Nebraska, digital humanities laboratories act as playgrounds for scholars to reinvent the humanities.

Like the digital humanities, digital history continues to be an unknown entity that “everyone” wants to harness. Scholars and others frequently attempt to define the premise of digital history. For example, the American Association for History and Computing in 2002, could not settle on a definition of digital history because it “is difficult” with all the technologies in constant change.\(^9\) Several years later Douglas Seefedlt and William G. Thomas attempted their own definition for the American Historical Review. They stated digital history “might be” a broad examination and representation of the past through “new communication technologies of the computer, the internet network, and software systems” but digital history is also an “open

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arena of scholarly production” and a “methodological approach” framed by technologies. Others still have claimed it as a branch of public history or digital public history.

So whose digital history is it anyway then? Is it a discipline or to use Thomas’s and Seefeldt’s term an “open arena,” or is it a methodological approach? Does digital history distinguish itself from its stepparent, digital humanities? Although some scholars see digital history as its own field or discipline, this chapter will argue that digital history is a unique methodology that not only contributes to the larger field of historical inquiry through digital methods and tools but also serves as an ambassador in bridging the gap between the public and academy. For the purpose of this chapter, in the context of the historical discipline, methodologies serve as processes by which historians gather and interpret primary source materials in order to frame sources within historical questions and presentation. Digital history, ultimately, represents a methodology as it outlines the ways in which historical scholarship in the digital age can take place through the use of digital methods and tools in quantitative and qualitative means.

To position digital history as a methodology, the paper will explore digital history through its development and relationships to other methodologies. First, the chapter will briefly outline the chronology of digital history’s genealogy, in particular paying close attention to the rise of other humanity-based fields at the same time, digital humanities and public history. Second, the chapter will shift gears to examine what methodology means and how it functions within the historical discipline with an emphasis on different forms of methodologies in history such as oral history. Building upon the methodological framework, the chapter will then explore the complicated relationships between digital history, digital humanities, and public history as a

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methodological approach that critically engages with broad audiences. Finally, the chapter will conclude with a discussion on the importance of framing digital history as a methodology and its impact on the historical discipline. Only in appearance does digital history question the fundamentals of historical scholarship and the ways in which historical research takes place.

**Methodology: Digital History, Research, Methods, and Tool**

In order to place digital history within the historical discipline as a methodology, one needs to examine the historical discipline. For historians, methodology seems to represent an elusive term and concept inside of historical research and the historian’s craft. Most historians today probably found themselves introduced to the concept of the historian’s craft and the discipline in undergraduate introductory history courses. The premise of the historian’s craft should seem simple enough to address in relation to the historian’s methodology. As described by Robert C. Williams in his guide for students learning history, history distinguishes itself from other humanities and disciplines as it “is not really an art, nor a science, but a craft.”\(^{11}\) The term “craft” implies a number of concepts concerning the historical discipline and the historian. For starters, defining the historian and their work is not easy. One of the earliest and seminal works to deal with defining the historian came in the form of *The Historian’s Craft* by French historian Marc Bloch. While his work opens simply with the question “what is the use of history,” Bloch reminds his readers that history “is neither watchmaking nor cabinet construction” instead history should be thought of as a “thing in movement.”\(^{12}\) With history in constant movement, it comes with little surprise that the historian’s craft also does not stay frozen.

In a greater sense, the historian’s craft shapes itself on past philosophies of historians and

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the mechanics of historical research. Even in its complexities, the historian’s craft maintains important elements that ultimately define how the historian “does” their work compared to other disciplines. For one, history relies on primary sources as evidence in the historian’s examination of the past. These items whether letters, speeches, or other objects are truly the capstone of historical engagement. Secondly, the historian’s craft employs the use of secondary sources written by other historians and scholarly based documents to help in the conversational, background, and argumentation of the ultimate narrative. History does not just involve searching for evidence, but researching the evidence further to formulate interpretations and arguments about past. The fluidity of the historian’s craft ultimately allows historians to continue to articulate new and refined historical arguments and interpretations.

If one briefly contemplates methodology outside of history, the term seems much simpler and easier to implement. History and the social sciences such as sociology and archaeology often get compared to one another. Particularly the idea of history as a social science arose in the 19th century from Leopold von Ranke who declared that history could operate as an empirical science. The social sciences, though, like any science utilize scientific methodologies that employ the use of hypotheses and tests or experiments to arrive at certain conclusions. For the sciences, their methodologies and methods provide a sense of certainty in their results that confirm or deny the initial hypothesis. If various hypotheses in the sciences by definition have the possibility to become falsifiable then history remains quite the opposite. History, though, unlike other subjects does not have one “correct” answer. Methodology in history in many ways still remains an elusive term. The greatest difficulty in defining methodology in history

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14 Williams, *The Historian’s Toolbox*, xiii-xv.
comes from the way in which history arrives through its interpretations of the past through primary and secondary source materials.

In order to create a greater sense of how methodology operates in history one needs to move further beyond the “doing” aspect of the historian. While one can agree that methodology in history certainly does include the investigation of primary and secondary sources, the historian’s methodology extends much further beyond these typical parameters of history. However, in the attempt to outline these ideas many gaps still exist. In recent years, the American Historical Association created a vast, multifaceted network to attempt to address these problems of comprehending the finer nuances of history. Developed in 2012 with a three year grant from the Lumina Foundation, the Tuning Project served as a platform for educators to revise and clarify the content of a discipline of study for students to achieve certain outcomes for learning. The Tuning Project, at its essence, attempts to make historical research relevant in educational institutions and beyond. One of the main goals of the Tuning Project intends to hone the discipline’s core and implement a singular core for students. Updated for 2016, the heart of this discipline core presents the following outcomes that students should critically engage with in historical study:

1. “Build historical knowledge”
2. Develop historical methods,”
3. “Recognize the provisional nature of knowledge, the disciplinary preference for complexity, and the comfort with ambiguity that history requires,”
4. “Generate significant, open ended questions about the past and devise research strategies to answer them”

5. “Apply the range of skills it takes to decode the historical record because of its incomplete, complex, and contradictory nature,”

6. “Create historical arguments and narratives,”

7. “Use historical perspective as central to active citizenship.”

Although the Tuning Project obviously makes a conscious effort to impact the relationship between history and students, the results and its benefits are less than a sure thing. The Tuning Project raises a number of questions about educational equity, the ultimate goals of the project, and how this will impact historians both inside and outside of the academy. All of the initiatives with the Tuning Project seem to point to a larger attempt to contextualize history’s place within a society that values scientific engagement and innovation over historical inquiry. The core goals of the Tuning Project are admirable assets for all historians to consider. Yet, the Tuning Project fails to provide a sufficient definition of methodology within history and remains an insulated project within the academy. Inadvertently, the Tuning Project provided more fuel to an already complex debate taking place on immediate pedagogical goals versus taking a holistic assessment of the field.18

While this chapter does not concern itself on the ultimate learning outcomes for students, the Tuning process does provide valuable insight into the complicated command of historical methodology. In many ways, it remains too simple to say that the historian’s methodology only involves the engagement with primary and secondary sources to develop critical interpretations and arguments about the past. Historical methodology should be considered in the most comprehensive sense as a process in which historians utilize these sources to engage in historical


inquiry that produces open ended questions to further facilitate research in the search of acknowledging the complex historical past. Thus, while the Tuning Project needs not to develop the exact definition of methodology of history, the project remains a cautionary tale on issues of historical ownership and the dissemination of scholarship. With or without the Tuning Project, history will continue to revise methodology and the discipline. Digital history represents one of many research methodologies within the larger framework of the historical methodology that impacts the ways in which historians do history.

If history possesses broad methodology, then certainly the discipline also employs the uses of other research methodologies, methods, and tools. The terms fields, methodologies, methods, and tools often seem interchangeable with each other. However, this chapter makes the case that these terms cannot be interchanged with one another. Instead the historical discipline can and should recognize a far-reaching methodology that highlights the important contributions of historical research methodologies within the discipline. Research, in this case, implies ideas that not only contribute to a fluidity of a subset of methods and tools within the larger methodology but it also makes further room to move away from “how something is done” to how it impacts the larger function of the historian’s craft. In 2008, *The Journal of American History* facilitated a roundtable discussion between various scholars on the “promise” of digital history. Michael Frisch opened his discussion about what digital history “is” by examining another closely related research methodology, oral history. In his discussion, Frisch points out his frustration with oral historians who spend too much time on “narrow” ideas of methodology or “abstracted, theorized reflection on meaning.”19 Ultimately, digital history proponents fall into familiar traps as they search for ways to elevate the status of digital history. How does digital

history differentiate itself from the historical discipline? Answering this question with digital technologies does not make digital history exclusively different from the historical discipline. Questions about how digital history as a research methodology contributes to facilitating new discussions, interpretations, and historical inquiries remain on the fringes of digital history debates.

Oral history represents one of the best examples of a research methodology that has attempted to turn into a field within the historical discipline. If digital history has a sibling in the historical field, then oral history certainly fits into that representation. Unlike some other research methodologies, oral history and digital history share similar positions that allow them to straddle both the line of the academy and the public. Ironically, the Oral History Association describes oral history as both a “field of study and a method of gathering, preserving and interpreting the voices and memories of people, communities, and participants in past events.”  

The obvious issue raised by this definition points to the use of the terms of field and method. How can something act as both a field of study and a method at the same time? Postsecondary education probably provides the best opportunity to engage with these terms. Simply put, field of study represents what an individual studies. For example, graduate programs at a university may offer programs in history, English, computer science, and biology. Thus, the various listings for degree programs across the country label degree obtaining programs as a field of study. As an illustration, Kent State University alone offers more than 200 degree programs considered fields of study throughout their various colleges. Methodology, on the other hand, exists within a field of study that devises a general strategy for research to take place. Digital history, though, while easily labeled by some as field, outlines more unspecific ways in which historical inquiry can

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21 See Kent State University’s, “Explore Program & Degree,” page for further information, https://www.kent.edu/gps.
take place through digital tools and methods. Even in their vagueness, though, field of study and methodology persist as different ideas.

For the sake of argument, oral history in its expansion over the years has turned into a field with many methods in appearance only. Digital history, however, is not at that point to be able to claim itself as a field within history. Critically, oral history, unlike digital history, established guidelines for best practice and the use of oral histories. Still further, oral history’s methods involve gathering of personal or anecdotal history through the use recording tools to capture the reflection of open ended questions and answers based upon interview. Some of these tools include basic laptops, smartphones, or the application of digital platforms like the Oral History Metadata Synchronizer to facilitate open discussions on the principles of oral history. Oral traditions are not limited to just oral historians. As a research methodology, oral histories allow historians to engage with those “stories formed by memory and performed in narrative either resonate and engage, are possibly preserved and imprinted in memory, or they go unremembered and are lost to time.” Truly, oral history over the years continues to evolve into a vehicle for historians to explore the fragility of the human condition. In the end, though, oral history successfully turned itself into a larger field due to its ability to professionalize. As noted by a number of scholars, this professionalization happened over several years particularly during the 1990s. Although professionalization likely does not exist as the only route for those that persist in the recognition of digital history as its own field of study, it is worth noting the growth of fields like oral history that found ways to develop a common partnership of goals amongst a

cohort of scholars and non-scholars alike. Ultimately, the status and future growth of oral history will no doubt reflectively affect the premise of digital history.

As a research methodology, digital history possesses a number of methods and tools to further the research of history. Methodology does not automatically set out to provide solutions. As mentioned earlier, methodology like a writer developing a storyboard for a new tale creates the basic outline to follow in research. The methods and tools utilized by the methodology do help to provide solutions to particular research questions or at least to facilitate them. Some of the many methods in digital history include the following: text mining, topic modeling, mapping points, textual analysis, and others. Each one of these methods poses a particular solution in the attempt to understand the larger human condition by for example mapping the locations of emancipation or mining text for particular reflections on events in history. Tools then are those that allow the methods to succeed within the digital history methodology. These tools include those outlined by the Center for New Media and History such as Voyant for text analysis and Neatline for mapping a georectified map or layering maps in spatial points. While all these terms generate confusing boundary lines, methodology provides fluidity to the state of research that a field cannot provide. As technologies continue to expand, digital history’s methods and tools will expand to meet those needs.

Much like oral history, digital history deals with the issue of expertise. In particular, digital history requires particular skills to perform the “doing” part of digital history. However, if the growth of the web has taught anyone anything a number of individuals utilize digital history without necessarily learning all the skills and training that should go along with it. A familiar discussion concerning the issue of field versus methodology occurs frequently on blogs. In 2015,
Sara Collini, a PhD candidate at George Mason University, made the claim that digital history “is a field of study, as numerous undergraduate and graduate programs offer majors, minors, and certificates in some form of “digital humanities.”” While Collini undeniably confirms the ballooning of digital history through universities across the United States, does that statement necessarily define expertise or its purpose? Later in the post, Collini describes how George Mason University requires doctoral students to take two courses dealing with the digital in methodology and theory. She also further elaborates that digital history itself naturally lends itself to collaboration. Although this chapter does not diminish the training efforts of universities with digital history, this chapter does posit the suggestion that expertise and knowledge does not happen behind the closed university doors. Digital history in the broader sense truly does utilize interdisciplinary practices, but whether or not that actually makes it so different than the historical discipline remains to be seen. From its genealogy to its complex relationships to the digital humanities and public history, digital history as a research methodology continues to operate between academic and public worlds.

**In the Beginning: Digital History’s Not So Long Ago Past**

The use of the digital within history began not all that long ago following World War II. In fact, one can say that historians computing have taken place for quite some time. Some of the earliest beginnings of computation began in the 1960s with the use of applied social science methods added to history to study it quantitatively. Out of these quantitative studies cliometrics rose to prominence amongst some historians, primarily economic historians. Essentially, cliometrics means to measure history and in this case through mathematical and computational

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28 Ibid.
approaches. Cliometrics, though, in its popularity in crunching numbers reduced the human condition as minute and measurable.\textsuperscript{30} If anything, cliometric scholarship came to symbolize everything “that was wrong with quantitative history.”\textsuperscript{31} It comes without little surprise that digital history attempts to find ways to distance itself from quantitative history and reducing the human experience to pure computed numbers. Quantitative history in any form did not hold a bright future for historians, but the rise and growth of public history became a perfect vehicle for digital history to attempt to distance itself away from quantitative history.

Although quantitative history would wax and wane much like various other subsets in history, public history would act as another predecessor to the digital history movement. By the 1970s, the historical discipline found itself in a crisis. With an oversaturated market for hiring PhD students, the historical discipline looked to redefine itself and provide opportunities for their graduating historians. Thus, within this murky environment public history “arose,” at least in name only not necessarily in practice. Historian Robert Kelly coined the term public history in 1975 when he and his colleague G. Wesley Johnson developed the public history program at the University of California, Santa Barbara. The courses designed for graduate students served as an attempt to “demonstrate their [students’] value by their work.”\textsuperscript{32}

Public history of course, though, existed much earlier than the 1970s. In fact, early traces of it in the United States stretch as far back to the 19th century if not earlier. However, a discipline in crisis can create a movement and change very quickly. As noted by Patricia Mooney-Melvin, the historical profession’s ignorance occurred by dismissing specific categories of people which included those individuals who “possessed the appropriate educational

\textsuperscript{30} Robert Fogel and Stanley Engerman’s \textit{Time on the Cross: the Economics of American Negro Slavery} (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1995) is the most recognized as one of the most prominent and controversial of the pieces published using cliometric methods and tools.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid.
credential” but worked in archives and historically based organizations, pre-collegiate educators, general reading public, and visitors to historic sites. Thus, the rise of public history as majors and tracks in universities across the United States became part of the larger discussion in attempting to discover the practical value of history for a wide audience. Public history transformed into a larger medium for digital history to latch on to the desire to reach audiences and draw these audiences together.

Digital history would rise on public history’s heels beginning in earnest in the 1990s. The 1990s did not only bring change to the historical discipline again but also to technologies that continued to morph even more rapidly. By the 1990s email and the internet continued to rise as popular electronic forms of communication and information based virtual places. Digital history in its earliest stages did not focus on online connections but took root in fixed media products “like laserdiscs and CD-ROMs” particularly within libraries and archives. Digital history would branch out and become further entwined in historical based organizations and used by historians alike. The first center dedicated to digital history began in earnest with the Center for New Media and History in 1994. Roy Rosenzweig’s center and research essentially became the blueprint for other historians and scholars alike to utilize digital technologies to “democratize” history, in other words, to make history accessible to all those outside of the academy. For the greater part of historian’s utilizing digital technologies in history, the public aspect of digital history continues to influence the debate between its recognition or as a research methodology that contributes to historical discussions. The following sections will explore how digital history

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35 The democratization essentially serves as the platform for the Center for New Media and History. This page explains their mission to democratize history for the widest audiences possible, http://rrchnm.org/our-story/
as a research methodology responds to and interacts with the digital humanities and public history.

**Finding the Middle Ground: Connecting Digital History, Digital Humanities, and Public History Together**

In the scope of the development of digital history, the digital humanities and digital history compete for space. The digital humanities remain the closest connection in terms of advancement. Digital humanities often trace back to the use of the computer in the humanities. Scholars often refer to the plight of Father Busa in 1949 as a significant cornerstone in the foundations of humanities computing in what would become the digital humanities of the 21st century. Father Busa, an Italian Jesuit priest, approached IBM to help him create an index of St. Thomas Aquinas’ writings, which would total over eleven million words in Medieval Latin. A monumental task for anyone let alone a machine. It took IBM over three decades to create the index of the words. However, Busa’s story is just the tip of the iceberg. The shaping of digital history has been influenced by many forces. Much like digital history’s rise in the 1980s and the 1990s, digital humanities experienced much of the same growth and development. For example, in a 2012 MIT publication on the digital humanities, the authors name several projects which digital historians claim as part of the digital history virtual-o-sphere: the Women Writers Project and The Valley of the Shadow. Why the differentiation between the digital humanities and digital history?

As an umbrella term, the digital humanities appear and operate much in the same fashion as digital history. The competing voices between the digital humanities and digital history

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represent fissures between both camps. For example, in the most recent 2016 publication on *Debates in the Digital Humanities*, historian Stephen Robertson takes up the claim that digital humanities and digital history are starkly different from one another. Robertson points to several areas where digital history remains distinct from the digital humanities: such as audience and the use of computational tools, particularly mapping software. Specifically, Robertson notes that digital humanities should in all reality not exist as a tent but a house with many rooms which will allow other scholars not just historians to notice what makes their “discipline distinctive within the digital humanities.”

Unfortunately, Robertson falls into a familiar trap of drawing lines between the two. What is distinctive about digital history that makes it a discipline within the digital humanities?

Certainly, if one thinks of the broader picture of the humanities, history does represent a distinctive discipline within the humanities. Scott Paul McGinis in his rebuttal to Robertson probably explains it the best, “Historians don’t have to fight to get into anything.” Historians have consistently ensured the existence of their voices within the humanities. If historians are fighting to get into the digital humanities, then who is at fault? Both historians and humanities scholars have allowed these issues of scholarship and definition to continue and Robertson’s discussion proves this at best. Historians’ use of digital history methods and tools often continue to crossover in other areas employed by other humanities scholars. This includes text mining, topic modeling, and others. As McGinis rightly recognizes, all of these various tools shared across the humanities utilize similar computational language programming such as XML and SQL. The differences are minute at best. Some historians will use technologies and others will

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40 Ibid.
not use technologies. Does that mean that digital history remains fundamentally different from the digital humanities?

Digital history takes on greater meaning when considered a research methodology that can contribute not just to the historical scholarship but also to broader humanities. This does not diminish the fact that digital history provides a unique contribution to the digital humanities. If part of digital history’s and digital humanities’ networks look to broaden social connections, then in the attempt to point out the differences seems to take a step back in bridging the gaps between humanities scholars, which ultimately could bridge the gaps between the academy and the public. The relationship between public history and digital history helps to fuel this possibility of uniting these seemingly different groups together.

Public history and digital history have a strong connection that helps to distinguish digital history as a research methodology. Like digital history, public history in many ways is no stranger to the many controversies concerning purpose, relevancy, and the development of scholarship. The National Council on Public History attempts to unify this disunity by addressing the “theory and methodology of public history remain firmly in the discipline of history, all good public history rests on sound scholarship.” While it would be easy to say that digital history does the same as public history, the difference with digital history lies in its broad impact on the field of history. In other words, besides public history, many other historians can draw upon the theoretical underpinnings of digital history to inform the ways in which methods and tools will be useful to their research.

With audience and collaboration at the center of public history, digital history has adapted to and absorbed much of public history’s ideas. It comes with little surprise that digital

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history has taken up public history’s platform of collaboration and developing platforms to interact with the public. Digital history, like public history, requires collaboration and expertise. After all, the internet and the use of technologies open up the possibilities to inherently connect the public to the digital. If historians were at odds with their audience before the introduction of digital technologies, then these technologies only accelerated this process. As Meg Foster notes, digital technologies continues to make public history both stronger and weaker as individuals engage with their own forms of created historical interpretations.42 Thus, it comes with little surprise that other scholars have called upon public historians to help usher technologies and methodologies like digital history within the digital humanities. Mary Rizzo in a 2012 blog post for the National Council on Public History’s History@Work addressed these issues. Rizzo remarked that “we expect technology to be our obedient tool.”43 However, historians know better than anyone that tools do not swear allegiance or obedience to anyone. Rizzo goes on to further say that public history challenges the “structures of traditional history” through tools, methods, theories, and questions.44 Rizzo, like Robertson, falls into the trap again of alienating public historians from historians in other historical fields. Where does digital history fit into this murky relationship? Digital history as a research methodology provides a model to demonstrate how academic history and those outside of the academy can come together to develop research and engagement that combines all of the important attributes of history.

Removing the Digital: Final Thoughts on Digital History as a Research Methodology

44 Ibid.
With the rising literature on digital history, the debates on the purpose, relevancy, and contribution will not die or go away; nor should they. That being said, though, some fundamental issues exist with digital history and its lasting impact on the historical field. Especially, as a number of scholars still see the “promises,” “potential,” and “future” of digital history. Cameron Blevins’s rightly points out that “digital history’s methodological sun is no longer lurking over the horizon, it has already come up.”45 Some of the trepidation in recognizing this may stem from the rapidity in which digital history implanted itself in history, but also the ways in which historical discipline seem at odds with itself in understanding truly what history is representative of as a field. Blevins’ asserts further that digital history “has largely overpromised and undelivered” on its promises, especially in the form of argumentation, in which Blevins calls upon the academic historian to bring this back into digital history.46 Again like Robertson and Rizzo, Blevins seems to distance all those “other” historians who do not fit under that category of academic. While he makes some key points in his discussion on what digital history needs to do to further the research, Blevins makes the assumption that digital history does not already make arguments. Digital history with its methods and tools should not ultimately have all the responsibility of “making” the argument that task falls on the shoulders of the historian.

The American Historical Association recently published guidelines for accepting digital scholarship as scholarship for tenure within universities. The guidelines call upon academic committees to recognize that digital scholarship needs evaluation for “their overall ability to use sustained, expressive, substantive, and institutional innovation to advance scholarship.”47 However, this is not the first time that the American Historical Association attempted to

45 Blevins, “Digital History’s Perpetual Future Tense.”
46 Ibid.
implement guidelines for digital scholarship. As Robert Townsend noted in his 2016 oral history interview, the American Historical Association tried to implement guidelines like these back in late 1999 to 2003 with little success due to the recession and the difficulty to translate it to the larger community. \(^{48}\) What remains to be seen with these new guidelines are how digital history will continue to function within the historical discipline. With the current published guidelines, there exists the hope that digital scholarship and digital history can successfully find a place within the academy and beyond. Michael Frisch, however, adds this skeptical caveat to digital history. The term digital history holds questionable value. For historians in “twenty years will anyone do professional work in history” without utilizing digital history?\(^{49}\) Although one could argue that there will always exist some historians who will not participate in the digital, those who do not risk the chance of being left behind and losing connections to a wider audience. Digital history, though, still seems lost. Now is the time to remove the digital and consider the larger purpose and relevancy of history.

Historians study change but are not always good at changing when it comes to their discipline. Whether or not historians want to entertain the idea, the digital world is upon us. It is not the future. It is now. Digital history as a methodology has a valuable place within the historical scholarship and the digital humanities as it allows for new avenues in conversations about the past. It is already evident that a great deal of digital work already exists out there in the digital universe. However, it is a mistake to consider that digital history and the digital humanities are so radically different from each other or that one or the other has not let the other in. It is also a mistake to consider digital history completely different from history. In fact by creating these divisions by stating that one is so different than the other defeats the purpose of a


multidisciplinary field of the humanities. By considering digital history as methodology this breaks down the barriers between history and digital history. Ultimately, if you remove “digital” from digital history, then digital history is simply history utilizing digital methodologies, methods, and tools to contribute to our ongoing conversations in history. Digital history’s challenges are not outward forces but more inward.

The difficulty for digital history is not necessarily in defining itself but finding its way in between the academic historian and the many publics. As stated by in *Advancing Digital Humanities*, humanities including digital historians do the wonderful act of distancing themselves from “everyone else” outside the academy. However, digital history if not the digital humanities as a whole present an opportunity to allow these groups to come together. Scholars and others need to use caution as doing more digital history does not necessarily mean good results. Now it is easy as academic historians to claim that the academic has nothing in common with the public. However, this is the ultimate downfall of the scholar. To not acknowledge the public and the contributions they have made to the ways in which the discipline functions is foolhardy.

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CHAPTER TWO
FOR WHOM DOES DIGITAL HISTORY WORK?:
THE MUDDLED RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN ACADEMICS, PUBLIC HISTORIANS,
AND THE PUBLIC

Imagine, for a moment, that you have just walked into your favorite museum. Like any frequent museum visitor, you know exactly which galleries to enter and which ones to avoid. On this occasion, though, you decided to skip all the other galleries and immediately head to find that one exhibit that always captures your attention. As you walk into the space, you find that the museum recently installed some new digital media devices in order to give visitors a ‘different’ experience. You decide to pick up one of the devices and see what it could possibly show you about the exhibit that you do not already know. After all, you are the expert of this exhibit. Who else besides perhaps the curator knows this space and these objects better than you do? You pick up the device. Upon touching the welcome screen, the device asks you to select if you would like to learn about the exhibit from an expert scholar, the local museum curator, or a fellow museum enthusiast, like yourself. Before making your choice, though, you have the option of hearing a short clip from each of your potential guides to decide which one will give you the best experience. After listening to what each one of the guides offer, who do you choose to lead you on your tour?

With much help from growing new technologies and Web 2.0, individuals constantly possess information at their fingertips. So much so, that individuals in various parts of the globe are able to access, share, and download information at warp speed. From libraries to personal
media devices, individuals are able to consume, digest, and then redistribute this information across interconnected networks and spaces. However, the ‘publics’ are not the only consumers of these digital tools and technologies. Scholars implement them into their everyday research in accessing archival materials. While at the same time, museums and other institutions utilize technologies to create exhibit spaces and to maintain the infrastructure of the building.

The coexistence of digital history and these three groups has not been widely analyzed or discussed together by scholars. For the many studies and discussion between scholars and professionals, often these three are treated as separate entities from each other. That being said, though, some scholars have attempted to initiate important discussions on these three groups. Roy Rosenzweig and Daniel J. Cohen, respectively, introduced viewpoints about the responsibility of the historian and their work for the public. These initial publications formulated the language and created an open forum about the struggles faced by historians and their many ‘publics.’ For example, in *Clio Wired*, Rosenzweig presents eleven optimistic essays that grapple with the digital humanities, history, and the access to knowledge. Roy Rosenzweig and his principles still stand as important foundational blocks to digital history pedagogy.

Cohen takes Rosenzweig’s ideas a step further in *Hacking the Academy*, which crowd sources academics, librarians, archivists, and others to comment on the state of the academy and how digital technologies continue to impact the academic infrastructure. Unlike other similar publications, *Hacking the Academy* offers a poignant section on the “cautions” or the criticisms on the dialogue produced in the book. Tim Carmody remarks that “digital culture far exceeds” the internet and any other digital media one can get their hands on. In fact, Carmody further points out that digital humanists’ attempt to “hack the academy” are “not” efforts to change

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established institutions and practices but a battle from within the culture itself.\textsuperscript{52} Although a possible reduction that he recognizes himself, Carmody’s assessment highlights this broader internal and external tug-of-war occurring between academics, institutions, and the public. Other recent publications such as \textit{Writing History in the Digital Age} continue to demonstrate this disconnect.\textsuperscript{53} Although each of the writers in the various publications attempt to offer their best assessment of the field and its interaction with the public and digital borne historical material, the equation, though, still remains largely unbalanced.

With three seemingly unequal partners vying for similar needs and desires, it comes with little surprise that each side often seems to out power the other. Unlike the previous chapter that looked closely at tracing digital history as a historical methodology, this chapter expands beyond the methodologies and theories of digital history to focus on the individuals who use and create within these spaces as important cogs that fuel the digital machine. As most historians and educators would agree, history, learning, sharing knowledge, and digital media do not happen within a sealed vacuum. By exploring the complicated relationship between academics, public historians, and the public to digital history, one can better comprehend the challenges to the historical community and where common grounds exists to bring these actors together. The overall goal is to not draw lines between the three, but to connect them holistically together.

In order to successfully connect these three groups together, the chapter will use three broad themes to dissect these relationships. First, an overview of the mission or use of digital history for each of the groups will lay out critical ideas and connectors on how each one utilizes the medium. With relevancy finding its way into nearly every conversation about museums,


academic work, and historical based learning, the chapter will step back to assess the ability of these three groups to develop a balance for both relevancy and participatory need. Finally, the chapter will end by asking the reader to consider the implications of the flashy, bold digital media tools in establishing and maintaining an open conversation between the three groups. To strengthen these sections and the discussions, examples of digital history projects will be assessed in relation to each. Moreover, the chapter will rely on the oral and written testimonies from historians, museum officials, and others to discuss the complex future of history, the humanities, and digital history. To continue the building upon and ensuring not just the future of digital history, but history in general, academics, public historians, and the public will need to bridge the gaps in order to create a functional space of growth for continued relevancy.

**Mission: Purpose and Use of Digital History by Academics, Public Historians, and the Public**

Since the late 19th century, America’s history profession has undergone immense changes to its structure. In his book, *History’s Babel*, Robert Townsend traces the history of what he labels as the, “historical enterprise.” Townsend’s research does not only provide pertinent research about the state and future of the historical field but also the impact of these changes on the success of digital history. From the late nineteenth century to the early 20th century, the historical enterprise becomes a tale of how broad ideas about historical activities transformed and splintered in the course of social and professional ideological constraints. Historians in their attempt to understand the historical profession and where it is moving often seem “trapped in a paradigm of professionalization”. In other words, Townsend points to a larger dilemma of the many actors in these debates, academics, public historians, and the public, that there are distinct

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binaries between these groups that directly reflect current ideas and imaginings of how the historical community engages with scholarship, education, and the dissemination of knowledge. More than ever, these ideas continue to define the historian’s role on the web and on mobile platforms. These characteristics continue to impact the ways in which the academic and scholarly sectors respond to the other sections within the historical community.

Before the advent of specific technologies like the web and mobile platforms, historians acted as the gatekeepers to historical knowledge. The professional historian considered by some represented the individual who moved from an amateur status to that of a “gentleman” figurehead. In retrospect, as that figurehead, the historian’s responsibility bestowed on that individual by the status of professional gave them the power to act as the keepers of knowledge who then disseminated that outward to the public. Anyone who uses the web or other mobile technologies today can testify that these fluid spaces do not require the skills of a gatekeeper to approve of the knowledge or the dissemination of material on the web. Dr. Seth Denbo, Director of Scholarly Communication and Digital Initiatives from the American Historical Association, stated it best in an oral history that historians have been “doing digital history” for more than twenty years now but at the same time “need to acknowledge that you know the world is changing and change with it.” Denbo’s remarks strike a clear imbalance between practice, purpose, and recognition. Digital technologies, in many ways, are continuing to rock these relationships. If there exists an obvious weight to the type of and how academic historians’ produce scholarship, then digital technologies likely have made issues within the historic community more apparent.

For academic historians, the mission of digital technologies within the academic space

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provides both areas for development and conflict. The pioneering research and publications from Roy Rosenzweig and Daniel J. Cohen essentially gave credence to use of digital technologies, specifically web and mobile based platforms, within the historians’ arsenal. Their 2006 joint publication of *Digital History: A Guide to Gathering, Preserving, and Presenting History on the Web*, opened the doors for more fruitful and needed discussions on the purpose and effect of digital technologies on the historical community.\(^5\) Rosenzweig’s and Cohen’s publication created a how-to guide for historians to tackle these issues of technology and implementation head on. Other publications would mirror and attempt to develop further some of the thoughts expressed by Rosenzweig and Cohen. These publications include Toni Weller’s *History in the Digital Age* and *Writing History in the Digital Age* edited by Jack Dougherty and Kristen Nawrotzoki highlighted the need for historians to understand their larger role in writing historical scholarship and education in the growing click, share, and skim society. In some ways, Dougherty’s and Nawrotzok’s deviated from earlier publications on history and digital media as it took advantage of the open web to collaborate and curate the information within the book. In the introduction, Dougherty and Nawrotzoki remark that historians “tend to research and write in isolation” essentially “hiding behind our respective curtains” to finish a monograph and send it off to the presses.\(^6\) Although a harsh generalization of the historian’s scholarship, Dougherty’s and Nawrotzoki’s statement provides that typical example of the academic historian who is removed from the task of collaboration and is perceived in a constant state of isolation. The historian and their craft represent much more than this overgeneralized sentiment.

The historians’ employment of digital technologies reflects a broad purpose for digital history methodologies within the historical community. Historian William Thomas III attempted

\(^6\) Nawrotzki and Dougherty, “Introduction,” *Writing History in the Digital Age*. 
to alter this conversation by providing a “typology” to the digital scholarship produced by historians. Thomas utilized the following three categories: “interactive scholarly works,” “digital projects or thematic research collections,” and “digital narratives” to help to provide more clarity to the role of digital scholarship.\(^\text{59}\) If one applies Thomas’ categories to digital history projects, the results are less than satisfactory. In three recent examples of digital history projects, the projects are diverse digital productions that demonstrate a high level of scholarship, care, and attention. For example, the lauded *Mapping Inequality* on racial economic disparity during the New Deal in American would at first glance fall into interactive scholarly works.\(^\text{60}\) While a site such as *9/11 Living Memorial Archive* and *#Black Lives Matter Syllabus* each get placed into the categories of digital projects or thematic research collections and digital narratives, respectively.\(^\text{61}\) Thomas’ ideas are not new ones as they have been echoed by other historians and digital humanists attempting to discern exactly what digital scholarship entails and how it should occur.

In creating these dynamics, Thomas and other scholars create a greater disservice to the richness and fluidity of these sites and to historical scholarship in general. Although it is simple to analyze each of these sites to see how they function in terms of technology, components, and the function of the website, it fails to acknowledge the site’s fundamental purposes: to provide interpretation, to argue a viewpoint, and to introduce a different level of interaction for the viewers of the site. Thomas rightly points out that most of the digital history projects have been


created by individuals and teams at large research universities.\textsuperscript{62} In the end, it becomes a tossed salad of what larger institutions and their researchers set as the mission for digital history and what it should ultimately accomplish. It then becomes those gatekeepers behind digital curtains who decide who are a part of these interconnected circles and who ultimately will face roadblocks on the road to successful meaningful digital historical scholarship.

However, as historian Matthew Delmont makes clear in the November 2016 issue of \textit{Perspectives}, the mission for digital history and historians still remains murky. Delmont pleads and hopes that “tenure does not remain the only horizon” in order to count digital projects as scholarship.\textsuperscript{63} Advice from over a decade ago no longer seems feasible or warranted for the history community which continues to grow, change, and expand. For the academic historian, the greater questions about the need of oversight and the gatekeeper mentality have long outlasted their welcome. The overall goal of any historian should reflect an attitude of contributing to the profession, providing students with the support and tools they need, and developing an open dialogue with the public in establishing a familiar sense of trust and mutual respect.

Public historians’ use of digital history seeks to broadly reach out to audiences to interact with collections, ideas, and the mission of their institution. One of the consistent numbers of ideas that continues to separate the public history institution and the academic environment comes from the simple idea of audience. How does one define audience? Who are these individuals and what purpose do they serve in the public historian’s arsenal? Historian Sheila A. Brennan describes from the Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media that in their capacity, public historians whether by digital or analog means “place communities, or other

\textsuperscript{62} Thomas, “The Promise of the Digital Humanities and the Contested Nature of Digital Scholarship,” 529-530.
public audiences at their core” in research and projects.\textsuperscript{64} For example, out of the several public history institutions interviewed for this project, each one remarked about the importance of community, audience, and the individual within the scope of the projects undertaken by their respective sites. Kerri Young from HistoryPin stated that the organization values projects and initiatives that “incorporate elements of community engagement and especially you know if they’re projects that use archival sources.”\textsuperscript{65} Jacob Masters from the Dennison Railroad Depot echoed ideas similar to Young as he described the ability of the Depot to digitize and make their collections publicly available. Although they do not have the complex equipment and devices like other institutions, Masters explained by having the capability to share these items through social media opened new doors and interest within the museum.\textsuperscript{66} Digital history projects, then, do not necessarily have to conform to the strict contours of the \textit{scholarship model}.

The idea of community engagement extends much further as the cultural heritage organizations not only compete for funding but continue to demonstrate how critically important their function remains within both the historical community and the larger society. Digital technologies crafted a new space for users with institutions. The need for transparency increases daily. The user of museums and other cultural organizations are no longer just the physical users but now the “virtual tourists.” These are the individual who solely communicate and develop relationship with institutions through a virtual interface.\textsuperscript{67} The public historian’s job becomes equally more difficult to assess how to transfer the same type of community engagement to the web or by digital technology means. Research Officer Alun Edward, from Oxford’s Digital


\textsuperscript{65} Kerri Young, interview with Megan Smeznik, “Finding Meaning in Digital History and Public History,” August 9, 2016.


Humanities, described this scenario that they undertook with collecting the memories of World War I:

In the U.K. we did not have any funds so we basically set up a website and developed some contribution software and we you know we did the sort of local radio and try to get sells on the television and articles in the newspapers. And the idea was that they would contribute stuff to our website and we knew that's not all the people who have memories and photographs and grass. They wouldn't all be the internet users especially not in 2006 and 2008. So you may have seen a BBC program called the antiques roadshow. So we did the antiques roadshows around the country. Rather than getting out evaluation what we did was talk to people about what brought in. So gave them a little bit of knowledge. They told us about what that got and then we digitized it. So if it was a diary or say a photo album that's very simple. We had cameras set up like a copy stands or glorified photocopy basically. Glorified scanner. For the more complex or 3 dimensional objects which could be a uniform or say a propeller from a plane, whatever you want. Then that was bit more of a challenge, but we did our best to photograph these. It was very much on the principle of the best effort will do on the day. It wasn't archival quality metadata it wasn't professional quality photography. It was the best we could do but it was good enough.  

Preserving those memories and establishing a level of trust with the community extended far beyond the need to assert a sense of institutional authority or scholarly need.

With audience being the focus of the public historian’s work, it comes with little surprise that what is produced by public historians does not always necessarily fit the bill for digital history scholarship. It is easy for those removed from the space of public history either through an institution such as a university or well established museum to miss the bigger picture of those local historical sites and museums that are trying to use technology to just stay afloat. The broad idea of audience takes on a different meaning for those sites that run on small budgets or volunteers. Rick Booth, the director of the Guernsey County Historical Society in Cambridge, Ohio explained the lack of recognition of these audiences in these terms. There exists a new type of digital divide, one that is silent and focused on bureaucratic checklists of how to do

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In his own attempts to reach out to other museums and cultural heritage groups for feedback, Booth hit an impenetrable wall of red tape and tradition. This wall continues to do harm to the historical community. For Booth, digital history takes a different genre of digitization, film, and interactive prezi to examine photographs carefully. Although, his techniques may not sit pleasantly on archivists, museum professionals, and academics tongues, how can the community judge when Booth successfully bridged the gaps between community and authority? As suggested by Dr. J. Mark Souther, professor and director of Center for Public History + Digital Humanities at Cleveland State, “not everyone can or should do that or whatever else is doing” because without sustainability what ultimate purpose will digital history provide.

Digital history should serves its purpose for the public as means of not only providing access to materials but connecting individuals to the creator and the physical space of the museum.

**Striking a Balance for Relevancy: Participatory Digital History and its Consequences**

For all the misgivings between traditional academics and public historians and institutions, they share a common need to make history relevant for a growing, diverse population. Beyond the tower or even the battleground of the museum gallery, the historical community continues to search to find ways to prove their worth. The campaign for historical relevancy has taken on various forms in recent years with digital components taking a new role front center. The coalition of individuals and institutions within the History Relevancy Campaign kick-started an attempt to find a path to make history more relevant for growing audiences.

Beginning in 2013 as a grassroots campaign without any particular affiliation to one single

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69 Rick Booth, e-mail message to author, October 8, 2016.
70 To see some of the work being undertaken by Booth, please reference “Guernsey County History Museum,” https://www.flickr.com/photos/gchistorymuseum/albums.
institution, the History Relevancy Campaign strives to bring all those partners within the historical community together in addressing the issues facing history in the long term. The members of the campaign successfully created toolkits to be utilized by communities and individuals to ensure the relevancy of history. Their value statement encompasses the broad sort of understanding of what history means and provides in the long run: cultivating personal identity, developing critical skills, creating vital places to live and work, stimulating economic development, growing engaged citizens, crafting leadership, and preserving a long lasting legacy.  

Thus, the goal of the History Relevancy Campaign has begun a long harbored journey in advocating for the need of history within in cities, communities, classrooms, and centers of learning.

Of course finding the relevance of history seems much more tedious when policymakers and institutions present dismal reports about the health status of history. In searching for historical relevancy, academics and history museum officials have missed the larger point of the historical community and digital history. John Dichtl, president of the AASLH and a member of the Executive and Steering Committee, shared his thoughts in a recent blog about the efforts of the campaign. Dichtl highlighted some of the upcoming projects of the group including researching the gap between “how historians and how the public talk about history and history institutions.” However, the conversations extends much further beyond how each groups talk about history, but also how each group interacts with each other and facilitates a collective

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understanding of the greater purpose of history particularly through digital means. Although this thesis applauds the vigorous work undertaken by those to ensure the future of history, questions remain on who actually put the historical community on life support: the public or those who make up the historical community? This chapter suggests that a broader more holistic approach to the historical community and digital history will only benefit all parties in the end. In other words, to borrow terms, the historical community needs to let go of some of their shared historical authority. What does this mean especially in terms of digital history?

Digital history will have to take a bold stance in centering itself within the historical community as not something separate but an area rich for exploration that can help to mend the gaps between these three groups. In the greatest sense, digital history would provide the benefit of aiding the participatory institutions and individuals in connecting and developing meaningful relationships with the public. The participatory institution is one that acts “comprehensively responsive to visitors and community members” without sacrificing all control but finding ways “to convert their [the public] contributions into action.” Thus, digital history projects that inherently create participatory media need to convert the public’s digital contributions into action. More importantly, though, it becomes imperative to recognize that embracing this complex challenge is much more than creating a new app. Institutions and its members whether academic base or not, must ask the tough questions of whether or not the creation of bigger, bolder, and better technology democratizes history more or alienates more users.

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Let us reimagine the earlier scenario except with a new caveat. You are still given the option of experiencing the collection through digital means with the tour guides. The tour guides still include the academic, the curator, and a museum buff. However, in this case, the tour has been customized to include the voices from all three together. Here, all three viewpoints are brought together to create a dialogue. Instead of a debate to decide which ideas or knowledge serve better than the other this type of guide makes the visitor an active participant within the museum space. Although crafted from this author’s imagination, it is not hard to believe that public history institutions and others have already begun to create this type of discussion.

Some of Ohio’s local museums offer a glimpse into developing these types of relationships. For example, the Massillon Museum in Massillon, Ohio best demonstrates these efforts through their many programs and dedication to the community. Receiving the bulk of its operational funds through property taxes granted through an Ohio provision since the early 2000s, the Massillon Museum has been held within the public trust. With this level of trust between community members and the museum, the Massillon Museum developed programming that included the voices of the scholar, the museum expert, and the public.78 Massillon does not represent the only institution working to close these gaps. In a recent article published by The Daily News in Greensburg, Indiana, the Delaware County Historical Society took a leap of faith in reshaping their historical society through the help of graduate students at Ball State University. The students embarked on a journey with their professor to discover ways in which the Delaware County Historical Society can revitalize not just themselves but also the surrounding community.79 Recently, the students from the project published their report through

the American Association for State and Local History’s many blogging platforms. The student’s report, overall, suggests the historical redefine its mission and while working to betterment of the community.\textsuperscript{80} Although the Delaware County Historical Society has not directly published how these recommendations have been utilized by the society, the society’s website provides some evidence to the ‘reshaping’ of the Historical Society. Their most recent event in February garnered over seven thousand dollars in donations to the museum.\textsuperscript{81} On top of that, the Historical Society has been active in cosponsoring a report on the property conditions of Muncie, Indiana which will ultimately lead to further developments to help revitalize the historic city through economic and social stimulus.\textsuperscript{82} While it appears that the Historical Society Institutions like the Massillon Museum and the Delaware County Historical Society provide hope that there are greater possibilities in achieving a balance between institution and public ideology. Even with museums and academics working on bridging the gap between, the results are still pending.

If the academy and museums, specifically historically based ones, seek to continue to push for the relevancy of history, then they will have to confront the need to reach out to community members and smaller partners. In thinking about this broadly in relation to digital history, it calls upon academic and museum officials to consider the benefits and consequences of digital media. Not just implying cost or the ease of use; it goes much deeper in asking one to examine the purpose of the technology in promoting educational opportunities and success for not just the institution at stake but also the community as well.


CONCLUSION

MEETING JANE AND EMMETT: A LESSON IN EDUCATION, LEARNING, AND INTERPRETATION

In 2016, Oxford Dictionary prepped for their annual release of the word of the year. Like most years before 2016, I usually did not pay much attention to this annual ritual. It often seemed like a new car commercial or store advertisement being flashed before an eager audience with a large appetite for the unusual and the mundane. The year of 2016, though, brought with it a different flavor. The year 2016 seemed ripe for the Oxford Dictionary to bestow upon it a prestigious, worthy word for this annual honor. To the horror of any historian, The Washington Post rang in the annual word with this official proclamation, “It’s official: Truth is dead. Facts are passe.” Welcome to the era of post-truth.

The Oxford Dictionary’s official proclamation to ‘herald’ in the era of post-truth started a domino effect of sorts. Barely a month into the new year, American citizens and individuals across the globe were treated to the newest companion to the post-truth era, ‘alternative facts.’ To the bewilderment of journalists, scholars, and others alike, fiction just took on a life much larger than fact. Philosopher Kathleen Higgins recently waded into this discussion and wondered how truth became “passee.” She also suggested, though, it is up to the scientists to provide the “best information possible as the basis for public policy” in order to insure critical thinking,

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“sustained inquiry,” and revisions based on evidence.”

Higgins’ assessment, while practical in its suggestions of creating an environment ripe for critical thinking, misses out on the greater opportunity of including individuals like herself and humanists into this conversation.

The task of ensuring and sustaining intellectual creativity does not fall to only scientists. Ellen McGirt for *Fortune Magazine* recently attempted to address these issues in her article exploring the alternative histories created by alternative facts. McGirt simply stated,

“What is history for? Like so many people, I've been haunted by some of our ugliest historical moments: The images of grinning picnickers standing near lynched bodies, the grim scenes inside of internment camps, the dead at Wounded Knee. Nobody wants to be on the wrong side of that. But history is nothing if not personal, which is why restoring big parts of our collective story is a noble exercise in inclusion -- especially since we're all on the wrong side of something. To survive the rough spots, we'll also need a strong dose of courage and forgiveness. Maybe that's something we can all teach each other.”

While her notions possibly signal tones of naivety, McGirt rightly acknowledges history’s personal attributes and how misinformation can easily become part of a collective historical narrative.

Long before the Oxford Dictionary or any political officials decided on declaring ‘post-truthisms’, *Meeting Jane and Emmett* was conceived out of the desire to provide students and others with the tools they desperately needed in their arsenal. As a museum educator, I recognized that students not only lacked a sense of digital literacy but also failed to comprehend how volatile the arm moves between truth and fiction. Adults and students alike are both caught up in the technological movements experienced in society but often do not know how to utilize, to implement, and to understand the benefits and dangers of digital technologies. How can one effectively engage students with historical materials? What types of engagement resources


provide students the opportunity to develop critical thinking skills? How can educators, particularly in colleges and universities across the United States, move beyond lectures and interact with primary and secondary materials? The website became an extension of the many issues explored in this thesis, in particular the challenges of engagement and learning.

The project *Meeting Jane and Emmett* began over a year ago in the attempt to contextualize digital history in respect to academic historians, public historians, and the public. Unlike other digital histories projects that take place at large research universities or endowed institutions, I was tasked with embodying all the responsibilities of researcher, web designer, programmer, and evaluator. Much like those colleagues of mine involved in small museums or other local institutions, wearing many hats and collaboration was the key in making the project successful. However, I do not wish to elaborate on finer points and necessity of collaboration, instead, I want to turn my attention to the critical need of evaluation, engagement, interpretation, and education.

The project utilized Omeka to create and develop the interface for the letters. Omeka bills itself as “serious web publishing” for scholars, museums, libraries, and other cultural institutions that desire an open and flexible web publishing source to build collections, content, and other types of projects.86 For individuals that are unfamiliar with web development, Omeka does offer the novice an ability to create web pages without feeling constrained to learn advanced web coding in HTML5, CSS, PHP, and other coding languages. That being said, though, Omeka did not necessarily live up to this potential in utilizing it in this project. While I appreciated the diverse settings and plugins, the interface did not always provide for me to have the ability to focus on content and interpretation. For example, the transcriptions of the letters proved difficulty with the two classes participating in the user testing of the website. Omeka, Scripto

plugin, and MediaWiki all did not function cohesively together in the ways described in the user manuals. The manuals and how-to steps/guides, in many instances, appeared to be written for technology specialists versus individuals just starting with this materials. I often turned to the support through my web hosting server, Reclaim Hosting, to figure out the inner workings of Omeka. With a solid foundation in web design, Omeka often left me with more frustrations than successes. That being said, it is critical to see Omeka as just one step in moving forward in digital history. In order for digital history to continue to succeed, large research institutions like George Mason University cannot be the only locations in which a digital program like Omeka finds its development. As discussed in the previous chapter, digital history will find success in those technological programs that provide connections developed between academic historians, public historians, the public, and, in this context, web developers. By allowing academic institutions, public history organizations, and the public to meet on a common ground programs like Omeka can succeed and change in the long term.

Beyond the technical difficulties, though, the most critical lessons of this project came from the user testability. Eight undergraduate students from a Women’s Studies and Historical Methods courses tested the website. They participated in a number of activities including examining the website, transcribing, and recording their ideas in a survey. While the number is too small to produce any type of generalizable ideas, the responses do provide important feedback for moving forward in working towards a greater understanding of the use and creation of digital history for the public. The survey asked students to answer basic demographic questions before moving on to the questions that would analyze the website. In particular, two questions were asked to gauge the effectiveness of learning from the website and the credibility of the website. All students, except for two, responded to this question by saying that the website
challenged their basic notions that they held about WWII, gender, and personal relationships. In fact, the students that replied that the website complicated their understanding of these ideas utilized similar phrases to note that the website provided a personal interface that allowed for them to see past the “heroic battles” and think more critically about the “banality” of life and the “humanity” of relationships. The students echoed similar responses in deciding on the credibility of the sources. Furthermore, the students felt that the website could be trusted because these were primary sources that allowed for them to formulate their own interpretations.  

This survey, though, only touches the tip of the iceberg when it comes to digital history effectively engaging and facilitating educational opportunities for students and others.

Connecting students and others to the past will remain something that needs to be further explored with digital history. Sam Wineburg at Stanford University in the School of Education, for years has led pioneering research in examining the ways in which historical thinking occurs and how individuals, particularly students connect with these ideologies. Wineburg remarks that “paradoxically, the relevance of the past may live precisely in what strikes us as its initial irrelevance.”

History at its most superficial level does not always seem to provide the relevance that individuals seek in comprehending the relevance of the past on a larger scale. The consequences of history as irrelevant have become more apparent. Recently, Wineburg and his colleagues conducted a study in 2016 to examine whether or not students can understand and correctly identify credible information. The team surveyed over seven thousand students. Overall, Wineburg and his team concluded that while individuals assume that just because students and young adults are fluent in social media in which they are “equally perceptive about

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what they find there,” students often fail to distinguish between credible and false sources. What do historians and digital history have to do with these results? Everything. Historians whether they work in digital history or not, provide some of the first line defenses to help guide students and others to comprehend the credibility of sources. Furthermore, Wineburg’s study should make digital historians want to explore the ways in which digital history has helped in digital literacy or continues to add to this confusing swath of information. It means taking a small survey as mine and expanding it out to extensively look at these relationships. Students and others need the resources and tools to become informed citizens through digital literacy which will provide them with the best resources to navigate the misinformation in the various corridors of the World Wide Web.

Like other projects that have come before it, this thesis has neglected to address the issues of women participating within digital history. The first chapter of this thesis demonstrates how much of the history and the recognition of methodology within digital history consistently rely on the research of men for digital history. Thus, the contributions by women in the development of this digital history research methodology continue to be neglected by researchers and others. Recently, historian Sharon Leon attempted to begin to set the course straight on women’s involvement in the historical community particularly within digital history. In an early draft published on her blog about feminism and digital history, Leon traces the historical community through those female actors often neglected and ignored even with their fundamental contributions to digital history. For example, Leon highlights the work of the founding editors of Common-Place: The Interactive Journal of Early American History, Jane Kamensky’s and Jill Leopore’s attempts to utilize the web “for creating community and conversation around history.”

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Leon’s examination extends far beyond the plight of merely including women within the digital history conversation. Instead Leon asserts that historians must look beyond the academy as “digital history continues to be represented in very narrow ways” that ignore the efforts of cultural institutions which often leads to ignoring the collaboration and contributions of individuals, especially women. Leon’s statements highlight an important lesson about not just recognition of women and their endeavors but also what the historical community ultimately represents. If historians are able to look beyond the academy as Leon suggests, then the possibility of a more holistic understanding of not just the historical community, but also the role and useful meaning of digital history within this context becomes even greater.

As it seems our society turns to become more hostile towards the humanities, the arts, and even the sciences, historians’ jobs continue to become more vital. Perhaps in the need to connect all of these dots it is best that historians remove the misnomer of “digital” from history. Instead efforts should focus on the historian’s efforts to ensure that citizens have the ability to recognize the relevance of the past and comprehend information through digital literacy. Meeting Jane and Emmett provides, for this researcher, the one of many firsts to come to continue to bridge and manage these gaps between academic historians, public historians, and the public. Furthermore, digital history must not only include sites like Meeting Jane and Emmett but also the social media and various companion social sites produced by historians, scholars, museums, and even the local scholar. These social sites have become the means in which individuals engage with and learn their knowledge. Digital history extends far beyond the grips of the academy’s walls. Digital history’s greatest contribution possibly lies in its ability to give individuals a different way to explore the complexities of knowledge.

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