October 2006 marks the 225th anniversary of the battle of Yorktown, Virginia, the decisive military victory that virtually ended the American Revolution. In the summer of 1781, hoping to outwit the British, French Admiral François J. P. De Grasse took his main naval force to North America, sending the annual French treasure fleet across the Atlantic almost unprotected. Generals Washington and Rochambeau seized the opportunity created by De Grasse’s unexpected presence in the Chesapeake Bay, rushing some ten thousand French and American soldiers south from New England, passing straight through the Mid-Atlantic. At Yorktown, besieged by the combined armies on land and trapped by the French fleet in the harbor, British General Lord Cornwallis surrendered his whole force, effectively snuffing out British resistance to American independence.

Research on individual states has identified the army’s routes and campgrounds, farmers who fed them, taverns that entertained them, hospitals that nursed them, and places they lie buried. Thanks to a collaboration of interested groups, the 225th anniversary will tell some fresh stories about Yorktown, not just of the battle but also of the immense labor of soldiers, sailors, and ordinary citizens that hurried the army on its way south. Highlighting the critical role of the French alliance and the way small American towns and villages experienced the war, the march offers rich programming, preservation, and research opportunities for every state and hundreds of sites across the region.

At the root of this expansive approach lies Public Law No. 106-473, signed into law by President Clinton in 2000, which requires studies of extant resources along the route in Connecticut, Delaware, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Virginia. The resource studies and commemorative efforts have drawn support from the National Park Service (NPS), private foundations, state historical organizations, the Daughters of the American Revolution and the Society of the Cincinnati. The Sons of the American Revolution supported research in Delaware, while the separate Sons of the Revolution supported crucial financial assistance in Pennsylvania. The Gould Foundation supported New York’s resource inventory. State studies contain the rich textural details of where, what, when, who, and how. Research has also identified sites, like the Shannon Hotel in Christiana, Delaware, in need of preservation. Several French generals, and probably George Washington

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www.march.rutgers.edu
himself, stayed overnight there, a history that could help attract essential investment in its future.

Advocates ultimately hope to create a National Heritage Trail within the National Park Service, to mark and interpret both the routes taken south to Yorktown in 1781 and back north to Boston on the victory march in 1782. The involvement of historic sites and other organizational partners along the route helps to demonstrate the degree of public interest, an all-important factor for members of Congress who will vote on the creation of a National Heritage Trail.

Organizations can offer the public new understandings of how the Revolution touched life at every barnyard, roadstead, and dockside. An army nearly one-third the size of Philadelphia, the largest city in the colonies, and almost one-half the size of New York, passed in columns up to nine miles long through villages of 1000 inhabitants or fewer, attracting goods from miles in every direction to meet its basic daily needs. By serving as wagoners, sheltering soldiers, offering butter, eggs, fruit, or meat, providing pasturage for animals, or entertainment and cheers by the roadside, Americans of all sorts made a national effort to ensure that the soldiers arrived at Yorktown in time and in condition to win the battle. And because the French paid for everything in gold coin, the march doubled the amount of gold in the American economy in a stroke.

Audiences will be interested in the social impacts of the march. This great army was an integrated unit, mixing races, nationalities, and religions and speaking several languages. It included men enslaved, indentured, and free. French soldiers marching by gave many Americans their first glimpse of Roman Catholics. White farmers saw African Americans in the Rhode Island regiments, men whose battlefield courage had worn down General Washington’s resistance. French troops from Haiti marched alongside New England African Americans, nurturing an important Atlantic cultural nexus. When men died, townspeople buried them honorably in local cemeteries. When the troops returned victorious, prejudices generations old cracked or fell away. Many French troops, intrigued by the possibilities they saw in America, slipped away from the army and remained as settlers in the newly-independent country.

Huge historic campsites mark where the army crossed the Hudson, Delaware, Susquehanna, and Potomac rivers, some sites located just where tourism promoters are trying to create interest in local waterfronts. Churches and taverns that survive from the 18th century also have stories to tell, as do mills, farms, and house museums. Wharves and dockside areas hosted the maritime side of the saga. Government buildings were involved, including Independence Hall, and barracks in Trenton, Burlington and Philadelphia, which even hosted dances for the officers. Archaeological remains exist at an important dig at Fordham University in Manhattan, and while most of the route has been taken over by paved roads, a few original sections of marching routes still survive.

Inventories of sites to support telling these and other stories are available for several states along the route at www.w3r-us.org. Organizations interested in pursuing local programming options should contact Robert Selig, at bobselig@juno.com for further information. The effort to locate, commemorate, and preserve the Washington Rochambeau Revolutionary Route challenges the regional humanities community to work together in new ways. The effort can serve as an example of how seemingly divergent interests can come together to develop a wide new audience and how local history can enrich our understanding of events of national, even global, importance.

Dr. Robert Selig is a historian with special interest in the role of Germans in the American Revolutionary War. He is a contributing editor for German Life and as the historian on the Washington Rochambeau Revolutionary Route steering committee, has spent years researching the locations and state-level resources for interpreting the march.

**EXPLORING THE MID@LANTIC**

**Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route**

www.w3r-us.org/

This project involves organizations in France and the United States. You can find scheduled activities in the US, books in English and access to Robert Selig’s state-level research on this site.

For details about the effort to create a National Heritage Trail under the jurisdiction of the National Park Service, see www.nps.gov/boxo/w-t/ .

For history of the 1781-1782 march, the Revolutionary context, and biographies of principal participants, see www.rsr.org/current/w3r/default.htm

**American Revolution online**

www.amrevonline.org/museum/main_page.cgi?rm=intro

AmRevOnline.org is a digital resource learning and new media initiative produced by the New-York Historical Society. The Web-based program aims to enrich teaching and learning in K-12 classroom history curricula. Teachers, students, and lifelong learners can use the Society’s rich museum and library collections. The site includes a digital library of 8,000 items, sample age- and grade-appropriate lesson plans, audio recordings, and historical essays by prominent historians that will help beginning researchers understand that process.

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First-person Interpretation of Mid-Atlantic History

First-person interpretations of historical figures, if they are done well, can anchor powerfully-attractive public programs. Humanities organizations in western and southern states have embraced first-person programs more eagerly than the Mid-Atlantic, fostering a growing tradition there of excellent and varied programming. This issue of Cross Ties introduces John C. “Chuck” Chalberg of Minnesota, whose programs feature figures from the Mid-Atlantic past, including Theodore Roosevelt (born and raised in New York) and Branch Rickey, the Brooklyn Dodgers manager most famous for signing Jackie Robinson and integrating major league baseball in 1947. Chalberg also presents golfer Bobby Jones, who won the first leg of his 1930 grand slam at the Merion Golf Club on Philadelphia’s Main Line. One of America’s great literary personalities, Baltimore’s H. L. Mencken, also comes to life in Chalberg’s skilled presentation.

Each presentation begins with a monologue in character, followed by an an unrehearsed, in-character question and answer segment. Chalberg will also step out of character for additional conversation with audiences about the process of researching and creating first-person interpretation. 

Chuck Chalberg holds a Ph.D. in American history and is the author of biographies of Jackie Robinson and Emma Goldman. He has taught college history for many years and can be reached through his website www.historyonstage.com.

As Branch Rickey, Brooklyn Dodgers manager who signed Jackie Robinson in 1947.
Cross Ties Newsletter / Fall 2006

Projects to Watch Fall 2006

Congratulations to New Jersey which is, as of early September, on the verge of securing federal designation for the Crossroads of the American Revolution National Heritage Area. New Jersey’s Revolutionary War resource base spans fourteen counties, from Bergen and Passaic counties in the north to Camden and Gloucester counties in the south. A 2002 National Park Service feasibility study recommended the NHA designation. Final Senate action on the legislation was expected as this publication went to press and advocates expect to see it signed into law in September. The Crossroads of the American Revolution would become the ninth National Heritage Area in the Mid-Atlantic.

The Baltimore City Heritage Area (BCHA), with strong support from local and state political leaders, has applied to the National Park Service for designation as a National Heritage Area. BCHA raised more than $100,000 to hire Mary Means & Associates to develop a National Heritage Area Feasibility Study. The NHA application builds on three years of sustained collaborative efforts by BCHA to promote the Star-Spangled Banner National Historic Trail, visitation to Fort McHenry, and interpretation of the War of 1812. Successes include working with the Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network to to create fifteen converging nature and history trails, as well as co-hosting with the Park Service a well-attended May 2005 workshop on the identification, protection, preservation, and interpretation of area historic, cultural, and natural resources. Baltimore’s success would bring to ten the total number of National Heritage Areas in our region.

The National Endowment for the Humanities offered six teacher workshops in our region in 2006. NEH workshops provide support for K-12 and community college teachers to participate in academically rigorous, but also practical and collegial, study. Available workshops are announced each January, and teachers invited to apply by mid-March. Please watch www.neh.gov for details on what will be available for 2007.

Colgate University in upstate New York is investigating a collaboration with The Exhibition Alliance (formerly the Gallery Association of New York State) to create an internship program that would produce, among other things, a low-cost traveling exhibition on regional humanities and history for distribution to library branches and other small cultural venues. The internship particularly looks to recruit individuals from minority backgrounds, as a step toward fostering professional museum careers for a more diverse population than is currently represented.

For Your Calendar

The Pennsylvania Historical Association will hold its 2006 annual meeting in Philadelphia, October 19-21, 2006, hosted by the McNeil Center for Early American Studies at 34th and Walnut Streets on the campus of the University of Pennsylvania. For information and registration, contact Daniel Richter at drichter@history.upenn.edu

The Mid-Atlantic Association of Museums will hold its 60th annual meeting October 22-24, 2006 at the Brooklyn Bridge Marriott in Brooklyn, New York. The theme for this year is “Bridging Communities.” For information and registration, visit the MAAM website at www.cmiregistration.com/user/splash.jsp?org=231#article1 or contact Brian J. Mandrier - Meeting and Membership Coordinator, at (202) 452-8040.

The 33rd annual conference on Washington, DC Historical Studies will be held October 27-28, 2006, at The Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Library, 901 G Street, NW, Washington, DC.

For information and registration, contact Karen Blackman-Mills at karen.blackman-mills@dc.gov, or (202) 727-1213.

The Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference will be held October 26-28, 2006 at the Westin Gouverneur Morris Hotel in Morristown, New Jersey. For information, contact Dale Patterson at (973) 408-3195 or dpatterson@cgah.org or Alan DeLozier at (973) 275-2378 or delozial@shu.edu.

The first New Jersey Forum, to be held Saturday, November 18, 2006 at the War Memorial, West Lafayette Street, Trenton, will feature six panels on state history. An adaptation of the annual history issues conference, the sessions are hosted jointly by the New Jersey Historical Commission, New Jersey State Archives, and Rutgers University’s Eagleton Institute of Politics. Special guest Robert Selig will discuss his work on the Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route. For information, contact Diane Dillon of the New Jersey Historical Commission at (609) 984-3458.
GOING TO THE WELL GEOF HUFF

Improving Local Government Through Good Records Management

In 1989, after many years of grassroots effort, New York State enacted a law creating the Local Government Records Management Improvement Fund (LGRMIF). This fund uses modest document filing fees collected in every New York county to help underwrite a robust program of local government records services. In sixteen years, over eight thousand grants totaling $158,024,041 have helped more than two thousand local governments care for their historical records, create secure storage areas, microfilm records, plan for disasters, set up filing systems, index records, and implement systems to help manage the electronic records of today. The expanding grants program has encompassed new areas of endeavor, ensuring its continuing relevance in a constantly changing world.

The program’s goal is, simply, to transform local government. When the program began, only a handful of local governments maintained an archive. Today, scores do. Few local governments microfilmed important records, but now over one thousand have. Governments that used records storage areas as no more than dumping grounds have gained good general control of their paper records and are beginning to address their electronic records. Good control of records equips local governments to do their own work and to respond to the needs of citizens, a benefit to the entire state and all its people.

While we are proud of the achievements of the grants program, advocates for the Fund have believed all along that grants alone are not the answer. More local governments succeed at professionalizing their records management when they are supported by a full program of training and advice. We offer thirty different half-day workshops across the state, covering the entire range of knowledge in the field. We also deliver technical information via a publications program, and additional specific online services through our website.

Most importantly, we support local government records programs through regional offices. The archivist in each region visits local governments in person to assess particular situations and provide professional advice. Local governments faced with records emergencies can expect their regional advisor to show up to provide direction and other assistance. And local governments receive all these services for free.

We believe the New York State Archives has a responsibility to ensure the preservation of the historical record wherever it exists across the state. Helping local governments manage materials is one part of meeting this larger goal. Find information on our services to local governments at www.archives.nysed.gov. For specific information about the LGRMIF grants program, contact Meredith Cherven-Holland, Manager of the Grants Unit, at mcherven@mail.nysed.gov. GeoH Huff is the Director of Government Records Services at the New York State Archives.

REGIONAL ROUNDUP

Congratulations to the Greater Philadelphia Tourism Marketing Corporation for winning three of eight possible Odyssey Awards, given annually by the Travel Industry of America. GPTMC won for publicity and promotion for the “Philly’s Got Benergy” campaign surrounding Ben Franklin’s 300th birthday. They won two other awards, the domestic marketing award for “Philadelphia - Get Your History Straight and Your Nightlife Gay,” and the tourism economic awareness award for using market research and economic-impact studies to sell political and business leaders on investments in tourism. (Thanks to Tom Belden and the Philadelphia Inquirer for details of this story.)

David Moltke-Hansen, president of The Historical Society of Pennsylvania since 1999, has decided to retire at the end of his current contract in 2007. In making the announcement, Board chairman Collin McNeil noted Moltke-Hansen’s accomplishments, including engineering the 2002 merger of The Society and the Balch Institute for Ethnic Studies, raising significant grant funds to evaluate and conserve the Society’s collections, and helping the Society recover from a period of public controversy. After leaving the Society, Moltke-Hansen intends to pursue writing projects of his own. A search is underway for the Society’s next president.

Monica Cawvey has succeeded Sue Seiter as Mellon Financial Vice President for Development for the National Constitution Center. Cawvey came to the Center from The Field Museum in Chicago, Illinois, where she was the Director of Individual Giving. She has a particular interest in American religious history and brings a national fundraising base to the Center’s efforts.

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W. Eric Emerson, formerly director of the South Carolina Historical Society, was the board hope to have the Society back on a sound financial footing soon, and then to begin an extensive outreach program to areas of the state and parts of the population that it has not served effectively. MARCH will continue to watch and report on the Society’s efforts.

The Mid-Atlantic Association of Museums has resolved its leadership change by moving the office from Baltimore, MD to Washington, DC and engaging Graham Hauck as its new executive director and Brian J. Mandrier to coordinate meetings and membership. MAAM can now be reached at 1255 23rd Street, NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC, 20037, (202) 452-8040.

Designs for the installation at the President’s House in Philadelphia were on display from August 16 through September 12, 2006 in the Grand Hall Lobby of the National Constitution Center. The President’s House Oversight Committee is evaluating public responses collected on the comment cards provided with the display. MARCH has long supported extensive public input into the design process for this site, and we will continue to report on the developing design process. For updates, see http://americanhistory.si.edu/archives/scurlock/index.html.

Steel: Made in Pennsylvania opens October 15, 2006 at The State Museum of Pennsylvania, 300 North Street, Harrisburg. The exhibit features digital photographs by Museum photographer Don Giles, taken over the last two years at abandoned and active Pennsylvania steel mills in Bethlehem, Steelton, and Ambridge, documenting this moment in the history of one of Pennsylvania’s most important historic and contemporary industries. The project is sponsored by The State Museum of Pennsylvania, the Society for Industrial Archeology, the Pennsylvania Federation of Museums and Historical Organizations, the National Museum of Industrial History, and the Rivers of Steel National Heritage Area. After closing in Harrisburg in April 2007, the exhibition will travel to Bethlehem and Homestead in 2008, and is available for other venues as well. For information, contact Robert Weible at rweible@state.pa.us or (717) 783-9867.

“Slavery in New York” at New-York Historical Society

Through the National Heritage Areas program, the National Park Service seeks to support places “where natural, cultural, historic and recreational resources combine to form a cohesive, nationally distinctive landscape arising from patterns of human activity shaped by geography.” There are twenty-eight existing Heritage Areas, nine in the Mid-Atlantic.

First-person interpretation of Mid-Atlantic history

There are many first-person interpreters who present Mid-Atlantic characters available around the country. As first-person interpretation can vary widely in effectiveness and historical accuracy, it is wise to solicit recommendations and if possible, witness a presentation before committing to a performer. Here are two more presenters who, like Dr. Chuck Chalberg (www.historyonstage.com), this issue’s Featured Resource, have recently performed in this region. Charles Everett Pace (www.charleseverettpace.com) presents Frederick Douglass, Langston Hughes, W. E. B. DuBois, and Malcolm X, while Elena Dodd (www.gis.net/~mtf/er.htm) presents First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt at all stages of her remarkable life. For links to additional high quality performers, contact the Great Plains Chautauqua organization at www.gp-chautauqua.org.
Learning From The Visitors To Slavery In New York

Like many museum people, I used to greet exhibition openings with relief. For better or worse, the show was up and it was the visitors’ turn. Opening night in the theater, by contrast, always feels much more like a beginning than an end. As museums become less custodial and more performative, though, this distinction is collapsing. The interpretive designer of a history exhibit is also launching a performance that will be reviewed, no longer by visitors simply imbibing exhibit content but by people provoked into thinking and constructing historical narratives for themselves. Unlike other educational settings, though, a museum gallery seldom offers opportunity for visitors to register their reactions.

American History Workshop sought to learn from exhibit visitors by installing its Telling Lives story-capture station near the end of the Slavery in New York exhibit pathway. Just over 175,000 people saw that exhibit, open from October 2005 to March 2006 at the New-York Historical Society. Of those, 6,000, about 80% of them African American, devoted ten minutes to recording their reactions. The recordings from the booth provide an extraordinary archive for studying how museum visitors make personal sense of a public interpretive installation.

The Telling Lives system asked a series of questions – “How did you hear of the exhibit? What was your overall impression? How did the exhibit add to or alter your previous knowledge of the subject? What part of the exhibition was particularly noteworthy?” From previous research, we knew that relatively imprecise questions would elicit progressively more complex responses. With the help of Chris Lawrence, an M.Ed. candidate at the Bank Street College of Education, I have been reviewing the 1,000 hours of video files. This is a preliminary report on what we have heard from our visitors.

Visitors commonly expressed surprise at the scale, duration, and significance of slavery in New York’s history, though Caribbean and African visitors frequently had had better education about the history of slavery than people raised in the U.S. Often white New Yorkers -- though not a single black respondent -- expressed a kind of possessive sadness that the economy of “my city” was rooted so deeply in slavery. Many more black respondents felt the exhibition confirmed what they already knew of the importance of slavery to America and to New York. While many visitors blamed their schooling for obscuring this history, blacks were less shocked than whites by this “failure.”

The media elements in the show rated particular notice. Visitors praised a video re-creation of four 18th-century African women at a city well for vividly presenting the resourcefulness of enslaved people. Visitors also responded powerfully to stories of individual black actors in New York’s history. But, remarkably, virtually every single document, object, media piece, or design treatment fit someone’s definition of “most noteworthy.”

About 10% of the total respondents, most of them black men, were angry – at slavery and racism, and at the exhibition for inadequately denouncing historical atrocities. An equal number of black respondents were simply gratified that their ancestors were at last receiving attention from the New-York Historical Society. But most African-American visitors focused positively on having learned new aspects of black history.

As they moved through the Telling Lives questions, respondents increasingly linked elements of the exhibit to their personal histories. A black lawyer noted her “shock at how New York’s municipal code was used” to intensify the repression of enslaved people in the 18th-century. A young woman promised that she would feel very differently about “returning to work on Wall Street next week, knowing that it was first built by people who looked like me.” An older man reported that the “Well” video helped him finally to understand why “white people will just barge into a quiet conversation among blacks, so impolitely, and ask, ‘what’s going on here?’ They’re so fearful of what black folks might be thinking or talking about, or what they might do if they were not working.”

Finally, some visitors appreciated the exhibit for its contemplative, aesthetic, or “spiritual” value. Art pieces like the wire sculptures depicting 17th-century black New Amsterdamers, the Akan-language recollection of the 1712 slave revolt, or the hymns and parade music written by 19th-century black men generated heartfelt, sometimes tearful, responses.

In a forty-year career in history museum interpretation, I have never learned so much from and about visitors. The installation confirmed psychologist Jerome Bruner’s suggestion in The Culture of Education that students can usefully “externalize” their understandings before quitting the learning experience. Knowing more about the men, women, and children who use our work to fashion their own understandings of the past can alter everything we do in planning exhibitions.
Cross Ties: News and Insights for Humanities Professionals
Fall 2006 Volume I, Number 3

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MARCH thanks Stevie and Ted Wolf for their long-standing support and particularly for their generosity in making this newsletter possible.

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