

I am still in the development stages for my final grant proposal for my Digital History course, so I want to share an overview of my ideas and thoughts that I have been putting together over the course of the semester via weekly journal entries. I am really excited to see this come together in the next two weeks.

Mission Statement Draft From Week 13 Exercise: "Follow Her Path" educates secondary and undergraduate students on women's roles in American history through the discovery and reclaiming of historical women's lives through choose-your-own-adventure-style storytelling.

Week 2 Journal Entry: Begin imagining the type of digital exhibit you would want to create. Address the following questions: What is the central topic? General theme(s)? Underlying research idea(s) and question(s)? What do you seek to accomplish? What kinds of digital category/tools/interfaces might help you accomplish these goals?

Before the start of this course, I really didn't think I had any ideas for a digital project that I might want to work on. Digital history has been an area that I have been interested in for ages; I think it is the way of the future for public history. But I had never really stepped back and thought about whether I myself had a project I would want to create rather than working within another institution's goals. During the first class, Dr. Neumann walked my classmates and I through the process of formulating ideas through finding where our field research, personal digital interactions, and the audience we wanted to reach intersected. As I was making notes on these three areas, an idea hit me. As a kid, I loved the You Choose: History series from Capstone Press. Essentially, these stories were the history lover's side of "Choose Your Own Adventure" style stories, and each of the three chapters corresponded to a different everyday person's perspective within a certain time period. Some of these perspectives were my first interaction with women's history, and correlating to my current graduate work in that subfield, I realized that I wanted to bring more of those stories to unfamiliar readers.

My first thoughts are to create an interactive program geared towards students at various levels (middle school, high school, undergraduate) that follows the You Choose: History format with well-researched and accurate storytelling of women's history and pairs that with stunning visuals and provided resources for further exploration of a certain time period or niche topic. I think the project should start by focusing on American history in broad time periods such as colonial America and the Revolutionary War, the Civil War, Westward Expansion, and the Great Depression. These are areas that many U.S. students will have had some basic background study or interaction with during their history classes and likely will not have included much in-depth information on women and their roles. Through this project, I would want to improve visibility on women's history and further illuminate not only the broad stories that get told about women's historic contributions to society, but the lesser known tales that had major impacts on regional and national history that is rarely told in a broad study.

I think that tools like inklewriter and ink may work for this type of project. Someone dropped a link to the programs in the Zoom chat during this week's class, and at first glance, they seem like they would be a good fit. inklewriter is a platform that can be used to write basic interactive stories and would be a good planning tool to show how a story branches out based on the different choices that a reader makes. ink could then be used to actually start creating a basic form of the project as it is the actual narrative scripting language that is used to professional game development and to a lesser extent, to write choice-based interactive fiction. I have played on several different types of interactive fiction apps, so the basic visuals and interface are familiar enough to me that I could describe it in a proposal and possibly experiment with creating some of the actual stories myself.

Week 3 Journal Entry: Discuss potential audiences for your project, what you hope they will learn from your exhibit, and the strategies by which you plan to reach them. Additionally, what challenges in design or content might your audiences encounter?

I really enjoyed this week's conversation about audience identification, especially the handout with the brainstorming questions and instruction for creating user personas and archetypes. I have actually worked with similar questionnaires for creating the ideal reader for my fantasy books (a common strategy in putting together marketing plans for books and series), so I am super familiar with this line of thinking.

When considering potential audiences for my digital project, I'm going to use some of the answers to those questions in my journal entry today. (I want to do this in bullet point form because that is just how my brain works best.)

- Psychographic/Behavior Considerations
 - My audience enjoys reading in general, but also storytelling in as many different forms as possible (TV, short videos, cartoons, flipbooks, movies, serial fiction, etc). I'm thinking the enjoyment of animated shows and/or mobile apps with episodic stories where you choose options to influence the outcome might be an interesting niche hobby that ties in with my audience well, which aligns with some of my thoughts about the type of graphics I would want alongside the historical stories.
 - I think my audience cares about women's presence and roles in the world as well as women's issues in general, no matter what side of the debate they fall on. I imagine that many of them wonder why they don't hear about women's history or women's stories as much except in certain context, and if they knew where to start, they would definitely want to learn more. Education is a priority for them, inclusive and exclusive of any family pressure or expectations.
 - There's a potential assumption by my audience that the mainstream primary sources of various areas of history do not talk about women in a substantial capacity or that every role that women played was in the background of the

context of their time period rather than relegated to the background in modern interpretations.

- Demographic Considerations
 - My target audience is between the ages of 13 and 25, though I think the project will be easily translatable and marketable to middle-aged and older adults as well. I think it's best to start connecting students with women's history in middle school where they have learned enough basics to see where women fit into the overall historical narrative (particularly if they haven't had any interaction with this topic before). I want the stories to be applicable and readable to middle school through college age students, but also intriguing to adults who don't get much interaction with history after high school. (Especially with many universities getting rid of general education requirements and lumping history in with geography, sociology, economics, government, etc.)
 - My audience is highly likely female in majority. I would like to find ways to appeal more to male students, but this is something I would really need to think through more.
- Technological Considerations
 - My audience is familiar with technology overall. I would consider them to be moderate or avid users of the Internet, video games, and/or mobile apps.
 - My audience gets their news and information from a variety of sources: Google searches, mainstream news networks, TikTok videos by reputable and focused creators, and Twitter hashtags/trending topics that they later read more about in reputable news sources.

Overall, I would like my audience to walk away with a deeper understanding of women's history and where women's history fits into the overall narrative that many are taught in school.

Strategies to reach my audience:

- Education: The point of entry for most of my audience most likely starts in getting teachers, librarians, and other educators on board with the program first. This is especially important for people of middle school age as many often have some level of Internet restriction or curriculum guidelines by their school district.
- Online: TikTok and Instagram are the two of the most significant platforms for reaching my target audience. I think showing previews of stories in video clips or still images that people can flip through with a page at the end that encourages them to read more on the site/mobile app.

Challenges in design or content: I think that my biggest challenge will be creating a format that is usable across multiple types of devices. My target audience utilizes the Internet and various online programs in a variety of ways, so to reach the most people, my digital projects needs to be available in a variety of formats as well (website on desktop, website on mobile, mobile app, computer app, etc). I am already a huge proponent for museums creating content both in physical and online spaces that resonates with a wide variety of learners, so I want to take

into account as many of those accommodations as I can as well (appealing to visual learners, auditory learners, people with ADHD/autism, etc).

The more I develop these components of the overall goals, the more I really like this project idea.

Week 5 Journal Entry: Consider the resources and material that will form the foundation of your exhibit (NB: when selecting items, do not choose solely on visual appeal, but rather choose an item for its inherent information or story advancement). Begin crafting a codebook, which describes your collection, categories of material, and the variables/metadata contained in your collection.

In order to narrow down my project a bit more, I have decided that I want to focus on women of the American Revolution first. I have a good amount of information from my graduate fellowship at Fort Ticonderoga to start with, and I know of several more women that I could get information on fairly quickly from previous coursework and readings.

The bulk of the digital project will be centered around the series of Choose-Your-Own-Adventure-style stories. Instead of organizing the stories by name to start with, each pathway starting point will be arranged by description. For example, in the case of Mary "Polly" Worrall Taylor, the wife of General Persifer Frazer, her description might be "a woman who contributed to military efforts while at home" or "a woman who defended her home against British troops on her own." I think this will encourage visitors to explore new perspectives without gravitating to stories that they already know the outcome of by name recognition. This also allows for potential overlaps of openings so that people can actually end up in multiple places at the end that reveal a person's life story. Depending on the visitor's choices during the story, the ending will have a reveal of whose life they modeled throughout the story (or which outcome represented the person the best).

In the person reveal, visitors will be greeted with a biography of the woman in question along with a collection of associated records, documents, and/or images. This allows for further exploration of women's history as well as creates an opportunity to weave in lessons about how to find women's history by reading between the lines.

Biography Format

- Image of woman (if available) or symbolic representation (a consistent icon by time period to allow for future expansion of the project)
- Provided in a separate fact box underneath the image
 - Full name of subject (Maiden name whenever possible. I think this reclaims women's stories as their own a bit better even if there are more common names that they are known by in history.)
 - "Also known as" listing (married name, nicknames, Mrs. "Husband's last name")
 - Birth date (always provides the year; month and date if available; if no date information available, list as unknown)

- Birth location (country, state/colony/province if known, city/town if known; if no location information available, list as unknown)
- Death date (always provides the year; month and date if available; if no date information available, list as unknown)
- Death location (country, state/colony/province if known, city/town if known; if no location information available, list as unknown)
- Husband's name (first and last)
- Body of the biography
- Citations and links to associated records/documents/images

Records/Documents/Images Metadata Information

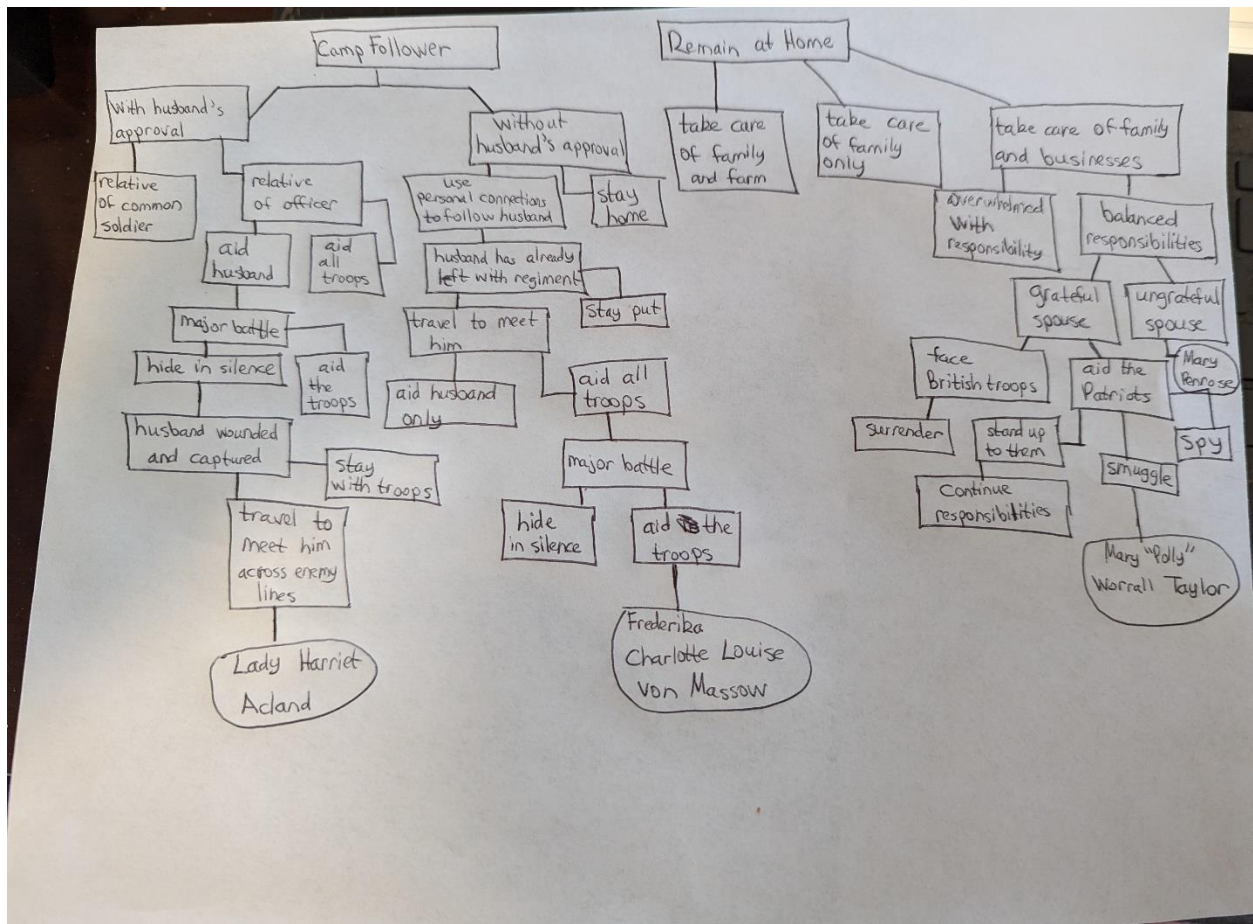
- Provided in a separate header box
 - Title of document/image/record
 - Name of woman subject (hyperlinked to a tag with the woman's name to connect to other items in the collection)
 - Type of document/record/image
 - Author of document
 - Date of document/record/image (always provides the year; month and date if available; if no date information available, list as unknown)
 - Location of document/record/image creation
 - Archival location of document/record/image
- Description of image or document's/record's content
- Level of Document Storytelling (indicates the level of information that can be pulled from this item; categories include direct source, indirect source, brief reference, historical inference, etc.)
- Reading Between The Lines section (a description of how a historian would examine the document/record/image and pull information about the woman's life from it)
- Related Documents (2-3 links to other related sources)

Week 7 Journal Entry: Create a starter storyboard for your digital project. A storyboard includes a written and/or graphical depiction that details the progression of the narrative along with accompanying media (images, audio, interactive elements).

After trying several different digital ways to approach the storyboard, I found that the choose-your-own-adventure style really needs to be mapped out by hand on paper. I do all of my outlines for my fiction books via Google Docs with chapter-by-chapter descriptions and bullet point brainstorming thoughts or use an Excel template first that breaks down my thoughts scene by scene so I can later turn them into chapters. I've never tried outlining this style of storytelling before, so it ended up being a pretty fun learning experience. I decided to write the basic descriptions of each series of choices and show how different threads connect to each other or deviate. The four women named in the ovals are connected to their full pathway; once the 'final'

choice had been made, a page with the conclusion of their story would appear, and a button would offer to take visitors to the full biography page with the primary sources and images (if applicable) attached to it. As I was thinking about these various choices, I started thinking about different women who could appear at the end of different pathways that are already outlined or partially outlined in this storyboard. My hope is that making one different choice at any stage of a pathway could potentially lead you to a completely different woman whose story starts similarly to another, but ends completely differently. I think that makes the project more interesting and would encourage visitors to go back to the beginning and try for different answers and different results.

In terms of imagery, I'm still struggling with deciding what kinds of visuals need to be the backdrop of the story and each set of choices. I'm not usually this torn between realistic styles and a more animated, or what I would call a "realism with fuzzy edges" type of style. On one hand, I feel like images that portray the landscape and/or residential or government building interiors of each scene (particularly if there are historical images or paintings of them) would give the project a level of gravitas, but it could be seen as sort of boring. On the other hand, a more animated style could be more engaging for students overall, but I have concerns about it clashing with the academic nature of the project, even when it is framed in a storytelling sense. This might be something I would want to ask other members of the class about or conduct some sort of basic survey with my target audience to see what they would prefer.



Week 12 Journal Entry: Using words or mock-ups, think through the visual elements of your project. Describe and/or visually illustrate how a typical user would experience the project. Consider the following questions especially: What projects/webpages inspire you (NB: think beyond the museum world)? What are the components and layout of your exhibit (e.g., how you will structure the content of your exhibit; what features or pages will be offered)? How will your exhibit user navigate through your exhibit (NB: consider sitemaps and wireframes)? Style (e.g., color palette, tone of language, visual weight/focal points)?

When thinking about how I want users to experience my digital history project, I am calling upon my previous research into basic web design that I conducted while putting together my writing blog and my author website. I want to create a background interface that is somewhat understated in color, but has a clear and consistent palette that can be used across the entire website as I potentially expand into other historical areas. Consistency in color and font style are two incredibly important elements when developing a brand identity, and I do think that digital history projects should have their own branding similar to other websites, companies, and/or products. My first thoughts lean towards pale blue, a lighter brown, and white as well as a serif font in a dark color.

In terms of navigation for the overall project, the user will start on a home page that includes a tagline, a short bio for the project with a button offering a chance to read more, and featured stories for the user to get started with. Ideally, those featured stories would rotate as more possible narrative pathways are added to the project. There will be a locked menu bar to the top of the home page (and every web page contained in the project) with moderately large section headings for accessibility purposes. From left to right, the menu will read:

Home – Home page

About – extended biography about the project, its origins, the project team, etc.

Explore Women's Stories – A link that will take the user to the main interactive section of the website. There, the user will be able to pick from a series of themes (I.e., camp followers, female soldiers, women on the home front, etc.) and dive into their chosen narrative. I'm thinking that each "page" of the story should essentially start with a background image that the user moves to (or zooms away from, depending on the image). Then once a few seconds have gone by (enough for the user to have absorbed the image), there will be somewhat of a darker filter that will descend over the image, and the main body of the story section will appear on the screen. I would love to see it scroll across the page line by line, like the sentences are being written in real time. At the same time, I would want to keep that transition short so that people can actually get to reading, which is the most important part. After the paragraph comes up, two choices or more will fade in to the screen. I'm thinking those will be short phrases contained in their own box with some sort of decorative border around it. Once a user selects their choice, they will be whisked away to a new section where the visual process repeats itself until the story concludes with an outcome and the woman whose story it resembles appears. Then, the user will be taken to a biography page with images and primary source resources for the woman in question.

Women Biographies – A page that will essentially be a masterlist of all of the women's stories that one could currently access. Each would be hyperlinked to their biography pages with the same resources listed above. I felt that this would be best for those who want to read about women's history in general or find specific women for research projects.

I feel like I need at least one more tab with a contact form or a suggestion form that allows visitors to propose women's stories who should be included in the next batch of new stories that get added periodically to the site. But I'm not sure what I would want to name that yet or how I would want to structure the form itself, so I'm going to keep thinking on that area.

Week 13 Journal Entry: Think through the practical components of your digital exhibit according to the following questions: In 1-2 sentences, what is your project's mission statement or elevator pitch (see online exercise)? In order for your project to be successful, what team members will you need (i.e. describe their role)? What are potential costs associated with your project? How long do you anticipate your project will take?

In yesterday's class, I really appreciated the second half of the session where we got to start walking through some of the specific key statements and components of our digital projects step-by-step. While I had definitely been doing some of that work throughout the semester, the exercises helped me condense my many thoughts down to simpler statements. My current mission statement draft from that class is as follows: "Follow Her Path" educates secondary and undergraduate students on women's roles in American history through the discovery and reclaiming of historical women's lives through choose-your-own-adventure-style storytelling. I really like the way I have this phrased currently; it hits on my main audience, content type, and ultimate objectives. The main problem that I am trying to address is the lack of women's stories and roles incorporated into the "mainstream" presentation of history, particularly the history that is taught in the academic classroom. The one main struggle I had during the class exercises yesterday was that I haven't quite figured out whether my themes are in fact actual themes. In the Teams chat, I wrote down interactivity/engagement, storytelling, and reclamation of history. But after reviewing the Historic Hudson Valley proposal for my evaluation task this week, I think I am approaching it incorrectly. I would love some advice on how to nail down my themes.

Having run and operated my own publishing business since 2021 and having been responsible for the content and upkeep of two different websites, I feel like I have a really good sense of what any particular project is going to entail, how much I can personally be responsible for, and where I am going to need specific assistance from outside contractors or internal team members. In an ideal situation, I think the content for my digital project could easily be produced with a small group of research assistants and content creators, including myself. I would want to look for people with a background in liberal arts research (preferably historical research) with additional skills or experiences with creative writing specifically. Good historians are not always good storytellers, and this is a project that absolutely requires both. I find it much easier to teach a good storyteller how to conduct solid historical research and incorporate that into their work than teach a strong academic historian how to create narrative flow in their work. I would also

want to hire a graphics design person to help guide the imagery side of this project as well as a UX designer to deal with the broader elements of the digital interaction. This would be an area where I would do a deep dive into researching previous projects to find people who align with my vision for the project stylistically as well as have a passion for the types of projects that they complete that are similar to my own.

Instinctively, I feel that the first phase of my digital project could be started up within a year, given the right resources and a commitment from me after my work hours. The biggest costs associated would be with paying research assistants and the technical designers and most likely obtaining the proper rights and permissions for various primary sources. A smaller portion of the budget would be set aside for the actual website hosting services/design platform/cloud services, depending on how much space the actual content of the website takes up. I know how much it costs to run my two sites currently, and although a project like this would require more space, I don't think the website costs would be so significant compared to other associated expenses.