

Fort Ticonderoga Graduate Fellowship: Placing Women Back in Their Place in History

When looking for a summer museum internship, I wanted to find a position that would expand my horizons in the museum field. To me, that meant being out of state, if possible, and working in a department that I hadn't completed a full internship in before. I cast a wide search radius and stumbled onto Fort Ticonderoga's Edward W. Pell Graduate Fellowships. This group of offerings fit the bill perfectly. The Fort was in upstate New York, and all four opportunities were in departments that I had not yet worked with. The Education and Research fellowship was my favorite of the assortment. I was drawn to the idea of continuing women-oriented research that I had begun with the Sharing Stories from 1977 project in a completely new historical period and working in a museum's education department with an emphasis on teacher education and engagement. The fellowship also paid a stipend and provided free housing on-site, which is incredibly rare and very valuable for someone who would need to travel out of state.

I applied to and interviewed for the graduate fellowship early on in my search process and was accepted shortly afterward. The committee was drawn to my previous research experiences with Sharing Stories, the United States World War I Centennial Commission, and the Office of Historic Alexandria, as well as my work with social media as an author. According to the position description, my initial role would be to review digitized manuscripts with connections to the roles of women at Fort Ticonderoga during the military occupation between 1755 and 1783, compile the most important ones, and begin transcription work to make them more accessible to K-12 educators and students. I would also be working with education staff to develop lesson plans for using these manuscripts in the classroom for 4th through 12th-grade students. Additionally, I would be responsible for supporting the one-week residential Fort

Ticonderoga Teacher Institute this July by helping prep materials, developing social media content, and participating in the program. My primary goal for this fellowship was to gain a sense of how an education department functioned within a museum and whether or not I would be a good fit for that role in the future.

During the first week of the fellowship, I had the opportunity to learn the history of the Fort and the types of tasks that go into keeping a museum running alongside the other three fellows. We were taken up to Mount Defiance, a strategic military point in both the French and Indian War and the American Revolution that overlooks Ticonderoga, and told the history of the Adirondack region by the curator. We got to have a private tour of the museum while it was closed, walk through storage and explore their military collections, and meet all of the key members of staff that the four of us would be working with over the next several weeks. We were still put to work this first week, though; one of the major jobs we had was helping to clean out the small library and remove duplicate books from the collection to be donated or sold later this fall. I could not keep a smile off my face throughout this first week. There is something so incredibly special about being down in the behind-the-scenes areas of museums and physically handling historical artifacts that were handled by important people somewhere along their journey to get to the museum.

My primary focus for my fellowship was on women's history research. I dove into the process right away by reading several background books on women's presence in the American Revolution during the first week. I took extensive notes on the types of roles that women held, such as camp followers, nurses, laundresses, and shopkeepers, as well as any references I could find on specific women in Ticonderoga and the surrounding region. I intended to generate a keyword list of references to women that could then be used to accomplish my first task given to

me by my supervisor, combing through Fort Ticonderoga's publication, *The Bulletin*, and searching for notes on women back to the first edition in 1927. Most of the issues had been digitized in such a way that one could search through the document using a traditional keyword search, but after a dozen or so publications, I realized that I was not catching every reference. I completed that project intermittently over several weeks by reading through every document individually.

From here, I took several different approaches to searching for women's stories. First, I searched through the bibliographies of the background books that I had read to find new resources to read. I read a few of those and compiled the rest into a bibliography for staff and future graduate fellows to work through. My supervisor then found me a new book on the French and Indian War that was being sold in the museum store, with a genealogical index in the back. To my surprise, I found a couple dozen women's names who were physically present at Fort Saint-Frédéric (now Crown Point) nearby and associated dates and relatives attached to them. I was super excited about this as it is rare to find that information already documented in these types of research books. It was a great jumping-off point into the genealogical research into women of the French and Indian War and the American Revolution that I tackled next.

My genealogical research process is something that I have honed over the years through private research and research undertaken during previous internships, and I used the same steps during my fellowship. I would enter any genealogical data that I had on hand about any individual, woman or man, into my Ancestry.com account so that I could visualize the family tree better. Then, I would allow Ancestry to fill in the gaps by taking the information I had and revealing new records or stories that might be related. If nothing comes up or it does not give me enough information to put a complete picture together, I would then take to Ancestry's search

function to see if I could find something related that the algorithm was not offering me at the time.

Once my Ancestry research was complete, I drew on my experience with the Sharing Stories from 1977 project and searched a variety of keyword combinations through HathiTrust and Google Books to find more connections. Both of those databases would often yield surprising results and give me new details and stories to include in my overall construction of a woman's history. When the research process had concluded to the best of my ability using online resources and the Fort's collection, I finished by taking all that information and writing up a biography for each woman. Again, my experience writing and editing biographies for Sharing Stories helped me streamline my writing process. I included each woman's history from birth through marriage in the first section. The second section would include a brief overview of her husband and his relationship to Fort Ticonderoga or the surrounding region to give the reader a sense of why this specific woman was being highlighted in the context of the Fort. The rest of the biography would at the very least include the woman's death date and at best, include her role at the Fort and surrounding region and any role she played in assisting the soldiers' efforts. I loved working on these biographies because they were a creative and more tangible way to showcase the research and ready-made for other staff to utilize in educational sessions on-site and online.

One of the American women's stories that I enjoyed the most was that of Mary Worrall Taylor, wife of General Persifor Frazer. Frazer was first a farmer and an iron manufacturer and merchant in Pennsylvania. He became a major in Wayne's Battalion in September 1776 and was later promoted to lieutenant colonel of the Fifth Pennsylvania Line a few days later. He was present at Fort George and Fort Ticonderoga, from which he wrote letters to his wife. He was

captured after the Battle of Brandywine and remained in captivity for six months before escaping. For the first ten years of their marriage, Mary lived “the ordinary life of a prosperous matron of the time.” The only difference was that her husband’s business and public affairs took him away from home frequently, leaving her to manage the estate. When he left to fight, she took care of the farm, the Sarum Iron Works, and Thorndale Mills. Her daily routine consisted of riding over the farm to give instructions to the various workmen, checking on the iron works at Chester Creek, and then returning home by breakfast to care for her children and the house. She sent letters to her husband frequently to report the state of the property under her wing.

When her husband was taken prisoner in September 1777, she defended their household against the British troops. She rushed many items of value over to a neighbor before soldiers raided her home and took family heirlooms back from the men when they tried to leave with them. When the captain told her that his orders were to take her husband prisoner and burn the house and barn, but he would spare the property for her, she replied “I can’t, sir, thank you for what is my own, and if such were your orders you would not dare to disobey them.” During her husband’s imprisonment, Mary also took care of the soldiers in nearby Valley Forge, carrying comforts to the soldiers there and reporting the state of her husband and other prisoners to General Washington himself. She smuggled a letter to Washington in the lining of her petticoat, and the contents helped to arrange an exchange of prisoners in 1778.

On the education side of my fellowship, I had the privilege of supporting the Fort Ticonderoga Teacher Institute, which is a weeklong residential program that uses the object and archival collections as well as the expertise of current staff and visiting scholars to educate teachers on early America’s military history and how to teach the topic in the classroom. This year, the Institute emphasized both the French and Indian War and the American Revolution and

the military occupations here at the Fort. Leading up to the Institute, I worked with Rich Strum to prepare materials and work out logistical details. During one of my first weeks at the Fort, I read *Mark Lender's Fort Ticonderoga, The Last Campaigns*, which is a book on the Northern Campaign of the American Revolution that the teachers were required to read before the Institute, and put together a set of discussion questions that were used throughout the week. Rich and I were constantly going over the schedule and moving sessions around depending on the staff's availability and what themes made the most sense to cover with which topics. For each day, we picked a document and an object from the collection to utilize in that day's content. Sometimes, those pieces were used to add context to the discussion; other times, they were good examples of what could be used in the classroom. Through this process, I got an intimate look at the careful planning that it takes to put on a program of this size and scale and all the different stages and coordination that are involved. I am a planner by nature, and I feel like those skills must be amplified when compiling a program that brings in people from all over the country, provides funding for them, and requires the coordination of multiple staff members and outside speakers.

The Teacher Institute itself was fantastic. The group of teachers gelled with each other very easily; by the end of the first day, they were visiting other historic sites in the area together and going out to dinners in groups most nights. They were so eager to take part in the classes, engage with the material, and ask questions. My favorite part overall was listening to the teachers swapping ideas for lesson plans and teaching tools with each other and comparing notes about the social studies standards by state, by district, and by grade level. The variance between these is huge overall. Dr. Kristi Fragnoli from the College of Saint Rose did an amazing job with the pedagogical sections, and Dr. Maeve Kane from the University of Albany shared some

fantastic resources and stories from her research into Native Americans in the French & Indian War. Outside of the educational sections, the teachers got to handle objects in the collection under the direction of Dr. Matt Keagle, hear from Margaret Staudter and Stuart Lilie on the current research projects in archaeology and public history, respectively, and participate in several public history programming activities on-site like the cannon and musket demonstrations during the day and hands-on work with the interpretative staff. It was a valuable experience for them, and I feel like I got a lot out of it too, even as an observer.

One other educational experience that I helped with early on in my fellowship was the regional meeting of the 250th Commission, the organization responsible for planning and executing events for the upcoming 250th anniversary of the United States. The meeting brought in leaders from museums, heads of historic offices, and a few politicians from all over the Northeast. I was a bit starstruck. I helped everyone check in and sat in on the meeting. It was amazing to hear how the different states were making efforts to commemorate the 250th with a limited budget and virtually no oversight from the national level. Ideas were being floated around about how to collaborate more with each other and share resources, as well as how to advocate to the national leadership that more assistance was needed to put on something remotely close to the scale of the 200th anniversary in 1976. One of the things that struck me right away was how business was conducted during the official meeting and how discussions were then facilitated in later breakout groups and an optional evening cruise. The two tones were distinct, yet both made leaps and bounds toward growing ideas within this association.

Throughout my time working at Fort Ticonderoga, there were several opportunities to take part in activities at the Fort or out in the community. As a group, the fellows and I embarked on a riverboat cruise around Lake Champlain with staff members to celebrate our first few weeks

there and see many of the key military bases in the region during the time period that their institution covers. We also participated in the Guns By Night program where we got to watch muskets and a cannon be fired off with twice as much gunpowder as the daytime show and Cannons and Coffee, an early morning tour with the curator that explores the fascinating history of the manufacturing of cannons over the 18th century and their use at the Fort. Off-site, we took a field trip one Tuesday to the Adirondack Experience, another museum in the region. While there, we sat down with young professionals at that institution and discussed things to know when entering the field. Many of them had come from all over the country and applied to whatever jobs were available, even if it wasn't in their preferred department or something they had specific experience with. Nearly all of them recounted that the most important thing to do was simply to get your foot in the door.

Overall, I think my coursework at the University of Houston prepared me for this fellowship in less obvious ways. While my early American history course with Dr. Hopkins this past fall covered the time period I was working with at Fort Ticonderoga, we did not cover the Northern Campaigns in great detail. What Dr. Hopkins' class did prepare me for, however, was the sheer lack of women's history details being incorporated into mainstream scholarship. Almost all the books I read in her class had some major component focused on women's roles, and I had heard of absolutely none of them nor the information contained within them before. I learned how one sometimes needs to return to previously researched sources and see if more information can be pulled or whether one can read between the lines to learn something new about women and their places in history. This is particularly true in early American history where we do not read much about women in the classroom outside of the traditional motherhood roles they played in a strictly cultural and societal sense. Additionally, I think both my Museum

Programming Class this past spring and the introductory Public History class from the fall helped prepare me for how to prepare content for display to a wider audience. I was always incredibly focused on what stories people were going to want to hear and what elements they would include, and then going and hunting for those stories in my research through creative avenues. At the same time, I think those classes taught me to remain cognizant of the bigger picture and capture the overall story of women in the American Revolution and their impact on the military campaigns while still focusing on who these women were as individuals.

I believe that through this fellowship, I have grown in interpersonal skills as well. At the Teacher Institute, I was present as a support person as well as a colleague. I helped to navigate people between activities, answer questions about the Fort and the teachers' assigned coursework involved in completing the program, and even drove Dr. Fragnoli back to her hotel to pick up supplies that she had forgotten. Because I was also the fellow most frequently up at the main offices, I also had frequent interactions with staff members across various departments. Over time, I started to develop a friendly professional demeanor where I found that I could still engage with day-to-day work tasks and interactions while also keeping an upbeat and bubbly nature that I have been known for at previous jobs. This is something that I always knew was an option conceptually, but it was good for me to see that I could execute that and bring my personality to my work. Additionally, I expanded on my public speaking skills through a presentation at the Fellows Symposium that I took part in at the end of the fellowship experience. I focused the majority of the presentation on stories of women that I had discovered throughout my research. I shared relevant dates, her husband's role at Fort Ticonderoga, and how each woman impacted the French and Indian War or the American Revolution by taking care of their husband or other

military-related efforts. I received several compliments on how engaging the subject matter and the style of the presentation was, which I was happy about.

As I leave this fellowship, I walk away with a deeper understanding of myself as a historian and the type of career I want to have. I believe that my talents and my interests are far more focused on the research side of planning exhibits and historical interpretation rather than the direct handling, sorting, and cataloging of artifacts. While I still hope to work hands-on with collections items as a part of my weekly tasks in a future job, I do not think I could feel fulfilled doing that full-time. I love being able to chase down a research lead and scouring through a wide range of sources until I find what I'm looking for, if it is out there. I like the thrill of not being sure how a day is going to go and what I might find next and jumping around from trail to trail until something clicks. I am extremely fortunate to have been able to spend the entire summer at Fort Ticonderoga working with the amazing staff here, and I am proud of the contributions I have made to the institution. I hope to stay in touch with the other fellows and the staff at the Fort as I move forward into my last two semesters of graduate school and into a museum job.