

Caroline Rogers

Fund for Innovative Teaching and Learning

University Archives, Sewanee, TN

Summer 2012

World War I and the University

On the sandstone wall facing Guerry Garth, there hang several large plaques with names inscribed on them. These names come from all years of Sewanee history and they represent alumni who have contributed to the University for thirty or more years. The “Founders’ Challenge” plaque, which is on the far left, reads:

“Those remembered here have walked in the steps of our founders who determined to build up a great university, which shall open its arms far and wide to literature, to science, to art, to knowledge...”

During my summer research into the effects of World War I on the Sewanee area, this quotation continually echoed throughout each bit of research that I compiled. Alumni have contributed to the institution of the University in so many capacities, and for five weeks this summer, I was able to learn about a group of alumni who contributed actively and ultimately to the University and to their country.

My summer internship at University Archives and Special Collections was a deep dive into Sewanee history. Funded by the Fund for Innovative Teaching and Learning, the research compiled this summer serves as the foundation for further research and the eventual preparation of a future exhibit through University Archives. The exhibition is being planned for display in 2013, and the research undertaken involved work with primary sources—both literature and artifacts—sourced from this area throughout World War I. My work centered on the earliest stages of this exhibit, which will distill the information gathered and will dynamically explore the effects of World War I on the Sewanee community.

Those effects were felt acutely throughout the area. There were such challenges throughout the University’s history, and perhaps none were as visible or visceral as the First World War. Entire class sizes at Sewanee dwindled to six or fewer men as their classmates joined the Sewanee student military

Caroline Rogers

Fund for Innovative Teaching and Learning

University Archives, Sewanee, TN

Summer 2012

organization, enlisted in the Army, or trained and traveled with the Sewanee Ambulance Corps. Students and faculty of the University “open[ed] [their] arms far and wide,” a phrase adopted from the “Founders’ Challenge” plaque, and both students and alumni traveled across the Atlantic in various military capacities, some even received the Croix de Guerre, or French Cross of Honor, for exemplary service.

During my research, I was directed by the curator for Special Collections, John Tilford, and the visiting curator, Rachel Hildebrandt. I compiled weekly inventories and databases of information regarding Sewanee’s role in the war effort. I acted in a primarily research capacity, and delved into the papers of numerous Sewanee legacies. I began with the perusal of former Vice Chancellor the Rt. Rev. Albion Knight’s papers, and remained immersed in such papers, diaries, and photo albums throughout the rest of the summer. I spent a few days perusing and archiving articles from the Sewanee Purple circa 1915 through 1920. I learned about Frank Hoyt Gailor’s service with the Belgian Relief Commission in the midst of his tenure as a Rhodes Scholar, Charlotte Gailor’s years working with the Red Cross in Paris, and the immense contribution that University students, alumni, and Sewanee Military Academy students made to the United States and to the world.

This summer was an exercise in research, which can be both perilous and rewarding. I was engaged in scanning documents and files for most of the time that I spent at Archives. I created inventories from the numerous files and boxes, and I delved into online archives as well as internet and database searches. As with most research, some days garnered amazing finds, and other days offered less rewarding yields of information. The bits of information that trickled in, however, created a fascinating story to which we are still adding. Sewanee has such a rich history, and it exists all around us. I realized that fact even more acutely while learning about the lives and service of Sewanee students and faculty. This is exemplified in letters from the front, R.B. Tullis’ wartime diary, and the correspondence of William Alexander Percy. One day, research even took me to the front of Quintard dormitory to inspect

Caroline Rogers

Fund for Innovative Teaching and Learning

University Archives, Sewanee, TN

Summer 2012

the memorial to the Sewanee Military Academy which stands between Quintard and Tennessee Avenue.

Though sometimes overlooked by passersby, it memorializes the Sewanee Military Academy and the sacrifices made by its students.

One of the more intricate aspects of my research involved using two artifacts to create a timeline of the movements of the Sewanee Ambulance Corps during the war. Made up of Sewanee alumni and students, the Ambulance Corps was engaged throughout northern France during the last year of the war. A student involved in the Ambulance Corps, R.B. Tullis, kept both a scrapbook of photographs and a diary during his time at the front. I used both to create an outline of dates, movements, and French cities where the Ambulance Corps served. Tullis' diary is so detailed and begins with training at Fort Oglethorpe, GA, which occurred just after the University's commencement ceremony in 1917. The diary ends with Tullis' return home in the spring of 1919. His travels and records of service are both fascinating and humbling to read.

My favorite aspect of my research was time spent learning about Charlotte Gailor's life during the war. After graduating from Vassar, she moved to Paris and worked for the war effort in various capacities. After admitting that she had little, if any, nursing experience, she worked as a "searcher" in French hospitals. It was her job to interact with wounded soldiers. She helped interpret for the French doctors and American soldiers, but her most impressive occupation was that of letter writing. I opened an archival box one morning and found stacks upon stacks of files containing letters addressed to Ms. Gailor from soldiers and their families. She wrote letters home for the wounded men, but she also contacted families of soldiers who had died in the hospital in order to tell them a little about the soldiers' final days. Her letters were so heartfelt and so detailed. Charlotte received correspondence long after the war had ended from families thanking her for her information regarding their loved ones.

Caroline Rogers

Fund for Innovative Teaching and Learning

University Archives, Sewanee, TN

Summer 2012

The goals for this summer of research included a gaining a greater knowledge base for the effects of World War I on this region. Sewanee has such a unique culture, and, since World War I shook the globe, it was fascinating to delve deeply into primary sources, journals, and first-hand accounts of that pivotal time in the early 20th century. I cannot wait to see the research that I have done take a tangible form and experience the compilation of different perspectives into a cohesive whole. I anticipate that each discipline studied will come together in an attempt to recreate a worldview surrounding intricacies and impacts of World War I. During the summer, I was able to exercise research skills and explore incredible documents, and it will be satisfying to see that information and the story it creates coalesce into a final product which will be seen by the public. Immersion in the period was fascinating and engaging, but I sometimes lost sight of the end result because we were working so far in advance of the exhibit's opening. Seeing everything in cohesion and telling the story of Sewanee during World War I will bring closure to the research on which I have embarked. It will also present a snapshot of Sewanee during the war as well as that important group who, as the "Founders' Challenge" plaque reads, "walked in the steps of our founders" to preserve and to protect.