

MÜTTER MUSEUM POSITION #1

Mütter Museum Spit Spreads Death Exhibition

Research Description for Haverford Intern for Summer 2018

Overview: The Mütter Museum of The College of Physicians of Philadelphia seeks a summer research intern to work on an upcoming exhibition, *Spit Spreads Death: The Influenza Pandemic of 1918–19 in Philadelphia*. This long-term exhibition will be on view for at least five years beginning in October 2019. It will tell the stories of the Philadelphians who experienced the terrifying disease pandemic, which killed as many as 50 million people worldwide. In this city, it sickened one-quarter of the population and killed 12,000 in only six weeks in the fall of 1918, just as World War I was ending in Europe. By the following spring, more than 20,000 Philadelphians had died.

The so-called “Spanish flu” paralyzed the city and affected every neighborhood, every block, and every family. To show its impact, the exhibition will display and interpret some historical objects such as anatomical specimens, medical equipment, and personal belongings, along with related documents and images. But because the pandemic was over so quickly, it left few artifacts behind, so the exhibition team is taking other approaches.

The Mütter has commissioned the British contemporary artists’ group Blast Theory to create an interactive artwork (a memorial parade, developed with community involvement) that will help convey the emotional dimensions of the pandemic to museum visitors. Blast Theory’s film of the parade will become an integral part of the exhibition. The exhibition website, which includes blog posts and updates, is at <http://muttermuseum.org/exhibitions/going-viral-behind-the-scenes-at-a-medical-museum/>.

The exhibition will also feature digital interactives based on new data about influenza victims. Historical epidemiologist Nicholas Bonneau is currently overseeing the transcription of data from the death certificates of the 20,000+ Philadelphians who died during the pandemic. The certificates have home addresses, enabling us to track the rapid spread of the disease through the city. They also include people’s ages, occupations, ethnicities, and immigration status, showing a cross-section of the population at the time. Analyzing and interpreting this data will provide the most detailed picture to date of how the pandemic affected Philadelphia and its diverse population.

Research: The intern will assist the exhibition’s guest historical curator, Jane E. Boyd, Ph.D., with data analysis, research, and content development for two digital interactives, to be developed in partnership with the digital design firm Interactive Mechanics.

The first interactive, the Map Animation, will map every influenza death in the city over the six months of the pandemic. As the death toll mounts, newspaper headlines and other information will pop up. Visitors will be able to choose different versions of the animation, showing deaths by gender, age group (demonstrating the severe toll of the pandemic on young people), race/ethnicity, or immigration status.

In the second interactive, the Neighborhood Explorer, visitors will choose from a menu of four different neighborhoods. The map will zoom in on the neighborhood to show dots representing total flu deaths. Visitors will touch hotspots to show period photographs of the neighborhood and its residents, death certificates for selected people, personal stories, and other information, including demographic statistics. Information about the current demographics of each neighborhood will be included to show what has changed over the past century.

Transcription of the death certificates will be completed in Spring 2018. The intern will work with Dr. Boyd and Nick Bonneau to analyze the data and identify patterns and problems. The intern will also do in-depth research on the selected neighborhoods, including finding historical photographs and stories about the area and its residents. Research will be done online and on-site at local institutions such as the

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Historical Society of Pennsylvania, the Urban Archives at Temple University, and the Library Company of Philadelphia. The data, images, and stories will be shared with Interactive Mechanics in Fall 2018 so the firm can begin developing and programming the interactives.

The internship provides the opportunity to participate in an advanced public history project in the digital humanities. The intern's name will be listed on the credits panel for the exhibition.

Work environment: The intern will work mainly in the Historical Medical Library of The College of Physicians on their own laptop. They will have online access to Library resources and to exhibition research materials, including the death certificate data. With Dr. Boyd or on their own, they will also do image and archival research in local institutions. They will mainly work independently, with weekly meetings with Dr. Boyd to share research results and determine next steps.

The intern will have the opportunity to attend weekly Mütter Museum staff meetings, participate in monthly phone meetings with the exhibition team, and go on occasional staff field trips to local institutions.

Work schedule: The intern will work for 8–10 weeks on the project, from late May through the end of July, for 35–40 hours per week (including lunch breaks). Exact start and end dates will be determined with the intern. The College of Physicians has half-days on Fridays (after 1 p.m.) for staff from July 4 through Labor Day. The intern can follow this schedule or work at home or in other institutions on Friday afternoons.

Note: All interns and volunteers must sign a confidentiality agreement with The College of Physicians of Philadelphia.

Requirements: The ideal candidate will have:

- Interest in public history, the digital humanities, medical history and/or anthropology, and local/urban history
- Some experience with primary source research in the humanities or social sciences
- Some familiarity with archival documents and historical artifacts, and the ability to respect and follow guidelines and policies for handling documents and artifacts
- Self-sufficiency and the ability to work independently, with minimal supervision
- Motivation and curiosity to pursue research leads
- Attention to detail without losing track of the big picture
- The ability to track, document, and organize large amounts of historical information so others can use it
- The ability to serve as a professional representative of the Mütter Museum when visiting other institutions