

Spotlight on Public History Internships

Undergraduate students Christopher Mengel and Samantha Schnehain combine classical history training with real world experience in bringing history to the community. Chris is working with the Center for Holocaust and Humanity Education developing biographies of Holocaust survivors that will become part of a digital information kiosk when the Center's museum space opens at Cincinnati Museum Center in 2018. Samantha is interning with the Over-the-Rhine Museum (founded by History Department PhD student Anne Delano Steinert) researching the history of buildings that might serve as potential locations to house the museum when it is ready to occupy a physical space.

Samantha Schnehain is a fifth-year Art History major/History minor from Moscow, Ohio and she hopes to secure a position with a museum following graduation. In her "30-second elevator ride summary" of her role in the OTR Museum research project she says, "My job is to find out anything and everything I can about the building's history and previous residents." When asked to speak to the most important aspect of the project in terms of its historical significance to today's audiences, Samantha says: "I think the most (important) thing about the project . . . is how the buildings were used by people over the years. Most of the buildings have been standing for over one hundred years and have been used for many different things. Some of the buildings have been apartment buildings, then single-family homes, as well as businesses. The physical buildings have been through so much over the years that they have their own history."

As part of the Public History program directed by Prof. Fritz Casey-Leininger, the internship Samantha is completing is designed to benefit the program as well as the student. When asked how she thinks the experience will help her academically and professionally, she says: "I think this internship has already provided me with skills and research tools I never knew

about before. I think that knowing how to do these things, like check public records, Sanborn maps, directories, and censuses will help me in the future as I continue with school and eventually move out of the academic world to the (professional) world.”

From this locally-focused project to one with global historical implications, Chris Mengel a fourth-year History major from Cincinnati, is involved in the human side of public history. Chris hopes to pursue his master’s in history following graduation with a concentration in labor history. He describes his role in the Center for Holocaust and Humanity Education (“CHHE”) as “researching and writing short biographies of the Holocaust survivors who resided in Cincinnati after the war. I am also assisting in developing the digital layout of the kiosk (that) the CHHE would like . . . to be easy to use and enhance the museum patrons’ experience.” When asked to identify the most important aspect of the project in terms of its historical significance to audiences today, Chris replied “relating these incredible stories of resilience and persistence in one hundred words or less is a real challenge. The CHHE does an incredible job of allowing survivors to relate these experiences, however, during the next decade, this opportunity will not be available as the surviving population ages. Developing a historically accurate picture of these survivors not only recognizes the horrors of the Holocaust, but pays tribute to these individual struggles. I hope this information will also help preserve evidentiary materials and provide immutable facts of these events.”

Chris also sees the intrinsic worth in the public history internship experience: “I believe my internship with CHHE will be very valuable to my future career goals in history. I have been allowed access to primary documents and sources, required to hone my research skills, and further developed and enhanced my writing skills. I will freely admit that this experience has me considering a career in public history.”

For additional information on these projects, visit the OTR Museum's website at <http://www.otrmuseum.org> and the CHHE at www.HolocaustandHumanity.org.