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Mount Paran Cemetery Digital History and Mapping Project

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Mount Paran Cemetery Digital History and Mapping Project

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Adjunct Mentor: Caroline Gibbons, Digital Projects Specialist, Special Collections, Salmon Library

Adjunct Mentor: Reagan Grimsley Head of Special Collections and Archives, Librarian III, Salmon Library rlg0020@uah.edu

RCEU19-HY-CES-01

Project: The student will develop a digital history project in the Omeka digital platform and Neatline, which will be hosted on the UAH Special Collections and Archives server. The student will work with UAH mentors and Mount Paran Cemetery Association members to create a map of Mt. Paran Cemetery that can be used by researchers or the public to explore the cemetery.

The Mt. Paran Cemetery is a historical landmark in New Market, Alabama that encompasses 400 gravesites, spanning burials from 1806 to 1976. The Mt. Paran Campground and Cemetery Inc. staff has begun research on the 100 known burials, which includes Revolutionary War and War of 1812 veterans, and decorated veterans of WWI and WWII.

The student will use a suite of digital humanities tools to map Mt. Paran Cemetery. Using the data provided by Mt. Paran Campground and Cemetery Inc. staff, the student will compile a digital collection of cemetery burials using Omeka, a web publishing platform for sharing digital collections and creating online exhibits. The student will learn how to manipulate the data to conform to Dublin Core metadata standards, and he/she will learn how to describe the data using common controlled vocabularies, including Library of Congress Subject Headings, Library of Congress Name Authorities, and the Thesaurus of Graphic Materials. Learning how to write metadata will give students practice distinguishing between useful and extraneous information and writing concisely. This skill will be especially useful to students with an interest in a career in archives, libraries or museums, as description is a key component of those professions.

The student will use a Canon DSLR camera to photograph each of the 98 extant grave markers at Mt. Paran Cemetery. Reagan will provide camera and photography training. The student will manipulate the photos and link them to the corresponding metadata in Omeka. Using Neatline, a digital exhibit tool integrated with Omeka that allows users to map out data in space and time, the student will plot the data on an interactive map based on a map of the cemetery property. Mapping the graves will allow the student to explore the spatial relationship between the graves and the sections of the cemetery and to draw conclusions about the cemetery's development and the people who are buried there. The map will allow users to search by name for those buried at the cemetery or to explore known burials at the cemetery. The database will provide information about those interred at the cemetery, including date buried, obituaries, or other historical information.

In addition to working with the UAH Archives staff to develop and format the dataset, the student will work to populate the database with information provided by the Mount Paran Cemetery Association.

Duties and Mentoring to create burial directory/map/database:

The student will work directly with Caroline or Reagan in workspace provided in the UAH Special Collections. Reagan will provide an introduction on how to use the DSLR camera and some tips for photographing cemeteries. Christine will provide guidance on research methods and serve as the liaison with the Mt. Paran Cemetery staff.

Caroline will train the student on the needed digital tools, including Omeka and Neatline, and the student will work with Caroline to learn how to write metadata and convert the data supplied by the Mount Paran staff into Dublin Core metadata entries in an Excel spreadsheet. Caroline and the student will develop a metadata worksheet that fits the specific criteria of the cemetery data. Reagan will advise the student on effective digital humanities methods and will provide guidance on project design. Overall, the student will meet with a mentor--either the faculty member, the archivist or Mt. Paran staff--three times a week at minimum. Normally, students will meet with Caroline on Mondays and Reagan on Wednesdays.

This RCEU project will provide a valuable public service to the community while working with archives staff, faculty, and community members. The UAH Archives will provide workspace and technical advice to the student. Reagan Grimsley, Head of Special Collections, Librarian III and Caroline Gibbons, Digital Projects Specialist will serve as Adjunct mentors for the project to provide technical support and research advice.

Student Product: The student will create an interactive, searchable map of the known burials at Mt. Paran Cemetery, using Omeka and Neatline, which will be publically available on the UAH Archives website. The student will be learning and practicing historical research, metadata analysis, photography, and archival storage of photographs or files of photographs. In addition to the RCEU poster, the mentors will work with the student to assist them in finding a venue to present the research to the public.

Student selection criteria: Any academic rank from freshman to senior. History, English, or related discipline preferred. HY300 preferred.