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Multimedia Database Cataloging: Sailors and the Maritime World

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**“Multimedia Database Cataloging: Sailors and the Maritime World”
Proposal for UAH RCEU Summer 2016:**

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Project Summary:

Over the past two years, I have collected thousands of photographs of archival resources, all related to sailors and the maritime world from 1780-1820. These sources range from shipping manifests, diplomatic papers, sailors’ letters and journals, merchants’ letter books, and other primary sources. The student will work with me populate a searchable database cataloging these documents. The student will learn key historical skills used by professional historians, whether in an academic or public history setting. For example, the student will learn the crucial skill of reading and transcribing archival documents. Under my guidance, the student will become conversant reading these 18th and 19th century sources. After mastering the skill of deciphering the sources, the student and I will work very closely to find an appropriate database platform, identify search categories, and construct the database. The student’s work will be central to this project. Once the student can read the archival documents, the student and I will collaborate on what search fields would be helpful and in how to create the database.

Student Duties:

The student will be responsible for reading and understanding archival resources, which are the basic building blocks for all work historians do. To do this, the student will work with me to learn the skill of paleography; that is, how to read and transcribe 18th and 19th century documents. The student will need to understand the historical context for this material in order to best organize the research and choose the relevant search criteria. The student will thus be responsible for writing a 3-page literature review of work on the early American republic maritime world.

Working closely with me, the student will choose a suitable database platform and have primary responsibility for creating a searchable database in which these primary sources are catalogued. Thus, the student will learn how to catalogue primary sources, a crucial component of many

historical research projects, and gain experience in both creating a database and working with primary source materials. These skills will aid students doing their own research projects as an undergraduate or as a professional working in public history projects that require cataloguing graves, memorials, or material objects. These skills will give a leg up to students applying for master's or Ph.D. historical, archival, or information services programs, where they will be expected to use paleography, catalogue objects and documents, and use primary sources in their own work. For example, if hired by a house museum, this student will be conversant with database options and best practices for cataloguing information about the museum's collection. If applying for a history master's or Ph.D., student could show the database as an example of his or her ability to work with and catalogue primary sources.

Mentor Supervision and Interaction:

During the first week, the student and I will meet daily in my UAH office. Together, we will go over the primary source materials, how to transcribe them, and what systems we can create to track search terms. I will do more instructing at the start as the student masters paleography. Once the student feels comfortable reading primary documents, I will turn over my flash drive of sources and ask her or him to spend some time getting to know those sources, with the intention of creating search terms and thinking about database possibilities. After that, the student and I will meet of twice a week for the next three of four weeks in my UAH office. During those meetings, we will investigate database options and plan operational search terms that cover the disparate documents represented.

Once we have determined a database program and search terms, the student will be responsible for creating the database. During this phase, we will meet as needed, but will communicate via email regularly. I also expect the student to enter some data, which will give her or him an opportunity to read the primary sources, thus practicing his or her paleographic skills. The student's main task is database creation, though populating the database would further develop his or her research skills and familiarity with primary sources.