

“Other Souths”: The Civil War and Reconstruction in Alamance County, North Carolina

History, Overview, and Goals (Area One):

In the past twenty years, scholars of the nineteenth-century American South have destroyed the notion of a “solid South,” one characterized across the region by the hegemonic power of white elites, and have emphasized instead diversity in the Southern experience. The best recent work reveals the limits of elite authority and recounts the determined efforts by those on the margins of Southern society to wrest control over their own lives from white elites. Scholars, for example, have uncovered enslaved men and women who found financial and personal independence while still legally in bondage, have charted the development of an ideologically distinct Southern middle class, and have documented surprisingly widespread and vigorous black political activism *during* and immediately after the Civil War.¹ Many of these “Other Souths” can be found in Alamance County.² The internet, which facilitates through hypertext the telling of parallel stories, is the perfect vehicle for exploring the lives and motivations of these Southern dissenters in more depth, and for inviting a wide audience along on that intellectual journey.

The use of the World Wide Web to facilitate historical inquiry is not new. Edward Ayers and Will Thomas of the University of Virginia provided a national model for online historical scholarship when they released in 1993 the first version of their prizewinning study, “Valley of the Shadow: Two Communities in the American Civil War” (<http://valley.vcdh.virginia.edu/>). This continually evolving site helps users to answer the question, “What difference did slavery make?” by giving them access to thousands of digitized primary sources and other resources. Though the questions, and therefore the site architecture and intellectual framework, will differ for “Other Souths,” the project will follow Ayers and Thomas’ document- and data-rich approach and allow users to generate their own conclusions.

¹ John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger, *In Search of the Promised Land: A Slave Family in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Presbyterian, 2006); Jonathan Daniel Wells, *The Origins of the Southern Middle Class, 1800-1861* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Stephen Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003).

² A fact that some scholars have recognized. See Bess Beatty, *Alamance: The Holt Family and Industrialization in a North Carolina County, 1837-1900* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999) and Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet*, 201, 274-285.

There are several critical pieces already in place for a successful online project on Alamance County. Carol Troxler, a professor emeritus in the Department of History and Geography, has entered data on the county for the 1850 and 1860 decennial censuses into a database. She also urged Belk Library to purchase dozens of resources from the North Carolina State Archives about Alamance County, resources that will be invaluable. In addition, the Alamance County Historical Museum, the Charlotte Hawkins Brown State Historic Site, and several other practitioners of public history have shown an interest in working with Elon students and in making archival material available for Elon's use. Finally, a growing number of highly motivated history majors are now seeking more intense research experiences to prepare for graduate school.

The primary goals of this project overlap with standing goals of the Department of History and Geography. Both seek: 1. To provide meaningful opportunities for students interested in independent study or in history internships. 2. To forge meaningful relationships with community members engaged in the production of public history and to enhance Elon's offerings in public history. 3. To train Elon students to use technology from a disciplinary perspective. 4. To assist in the digital preservation of archival material, thereby complementing our Special Collections Library's modest holdings and multiplying institutional opportunities for archival work. The subsidiary applications are myriad, but the project would certainly be a teaching tool within the department's courses and a digital repository for student projects. It would also capitalize on the expertise of faculty throughout the department—more so than any other possible topic—and create opportunities for collaboration between Mary Jo Festle, Jim Bissett, Honglin Xiao, Clyde Ellis, Rodney Clare, and me. The project could also very easily facilitate the first history course with a service learning designation, as Elon students serve the community by safeguarding its past.

“Other Souths” will demand theoretical, political, and technical creativity. The chief theoretical challenge will be the creation of a framework flexible enough to absorb years of student research and to facilitate exploration by end users—but organized provocatively and clearly enough to invite active engagement with its materials. Mercifully, this grand theoretical challenge translates into a million component decisions, so that every last collaborator will be able to experience the joy of creative work. Political challenges involve the acquisition of archival material for reproduction and inclusion in the digital archive. This will involve building

close relationships with area historians and with individuals who may possess private records. The technical challenges are endless, from how to create the pages themselves to how to store and back up the files. Students will learn (and I will doubtless re-learn) how to balance conceptual and logistical imperatives.

The project will immediately be transformative at Elon and eventually transformative elsewhere. The project will transform Elon in the short term by multiplying the opportunities for students to engage in primary research, providing them a discipline-based approach to technology, and giving students and faculty an outlet for digital publication of their work. Few history departments anywhere in the nation attempt such ambitious projects, fewer still involving exclusively undergraduate students. Even the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign's struggling "RiverWeb," (<http://www.riverweb.uiuc.edu/>), one of the oldest such efforts, only survives with the active support of the National Center for Supercomputing Applications (NCSA) and the National Computational Science Alliance. A successful "Other Souths" could take a rather decisive step toward democratizing online history scholarship and proving the viability of undergraduate-driven research.

Student Involvement and Student Learning (Areas Two and Three):

Facilitating student participation in primary research is a key goal of the project, and students would be involved at every stage. The project coordinator will create the initial site architecture, set the initial research agenda, and guarantee the quality and accuracy of subsequent contributions. Students will digitize and transcribe newspapers, letters, and diaries for inclusion in the project, will create digital "learning objects" for insertion, and will have extensive control over the subordinate levels of the site architecture. Participants will come to the project by registering for independent research or internships through the Department of History and Geography, by applying to work over the summer for wages, or by signing up for a course that demands a web-based project as a course outcome. Research Methods students will be the most consistent users in this fashion; participants in this "content-blind" course will use the project to realize the course goals of learning to engage primary sources and to use technology effectively.

Students will demonstrate learning through a variety of mechanisms, dependent entirely upon their role in the project. Students involved in the creation of the site through independent studies, for example, will negotiate syllabi with their faculty director at the outset of the semester in which they are working. Students

working for a wage during the summer will do the sort of data entry that is the most difficult to evaluate qualitatively. Those who use the site for a class could create traditional papers based on the site content which could be evaluated as any other paper. Student learning is only one goal, however, and quantitative measures will determine success on the other goals. The volume of traffic, the number of manuscript pages digitized, and the number of internships or independent studies offered will each provide clear evidence of the project's success or failure.

Personal Implications (Area Four):

Investing in such a long-term and significant project is a bit terrifying, for investment of time necessary to make it a success can shape one's teaching and research agenda very decisively. "Other Souths" would serve as an enormous asset in my teaching and would gradually become useful for my research. I could immediately use the site as a teaching tool in my courses on the Civil War, on Slavery, and on the United States to 1865—and as an outlet for the creative energies of my best advisees. My current research is based in Virginia, which would limit the immediate usability of material from "Other Souths." I am, though, already thinking through the next two projects and plan to expand the geographic scope of my work across the Upper South. One of these projects, on the two-year period after emancipation, will examine why roughly one-third of black evangelicals maintained institutional connections with white evangelicals after most black men and women (approximately two-thirds) left to form racially separate congregations. Historians generally skip from emancipation to ecclesiastical segregation, and I am interested in the gap between these events. This topic fits smoothly under the "Other Souths" rubric, so work on the website would dovetail nicely with this scholarly interest.

External Implications (Area Five):

The very nature of "Other Souths" is public. After an incubation period of up to one year, during which time the project will live only on machines at Elon University, we will make the site public. At that point, the product will be accessible to scholars and students around the world. Ideally, it will serve both as a reliable and refereed archive of primary sources and as an example of digital collaboration between faculty, students, and community members.

Timeline and Budgetary Needs (Area Six):

The project will mature over a two-year period but will not be completed. The goal is simply to create a product of sufficient weight that it can serve as a valuable learning tool while interns and classes continue to add to it. The project will not even be public in its first year of existence, while I create its initial framework and supervise the incorporation of the first data sets and archival materials. After that first year, the project will be public but will still be in a period of accelerated growth. Expenses for the first and second year would include:

First Year:

- Digital Camera Designated For Project Use: Jerome Strum and the University of Virginia's Bradley Daigle (Special Collections, Digital Services) each assure me that we will get adequate resolution for both digital preservation (at higher resolutions) and for online presentation (at lower resolutions for file size) with an "over the counter" digital camera, c. \$350.
- Tripod for Digital Camera: c. \$30.
- Scanner: For larger scanning surfaces, c. \$120.
- Dreamweaver Software: \$375. Hopefully Elon has a way to get this software at a reduced price...
- Adobe Photoshop: \$100. I will consult with Instructional Design and Development to be certain that Elements is adequate; it might be cost prohibitive to purchase CS2, however.
- Purchase Rights to Carole Troxler's Alamance Databases, Including 1850 and 1860 Census Records: c. \$500. I casually mentioned this possibility to Carol over a year ago and learned only that she is not ready to make it publicly available without a fee. This is the figure about which I am the least confident.
- *NB – Assumption that computer needs will be met through my computer and the use of the labs.
- Unaccounted for: c. \$525. Some of these funds will doubtless go to peripherals (CDs, Memory Expander for Camera, Mileage for Site Visits, etc.). I hate to spend any of it until I know for certain that we have the technical resources to begin "production" and access to Troxler's work. The two obvious uses for the remaining dollars are: 1. Wages for student workers or 2. A dinner for directors of contributing public history sites. I think that Elon has enough expertise in-house through Instructional Design and Development that I should not need to hire an outside consultant.

Second Year:

- Wages for Student Worker: \$1,600.
- Administrative expenses, etc.: \$400. These figures are obviously approximate. The principle in play, however, is that I would like to use as much of the fund as possible to sponsor student workers.