

History Undergraduate Research Seminar

HIST 3120: Revolutionary Stories: Philadelphians and the American Revolution
Spring 2024

Wednesday 3.30-6.30 (Kislak Center and Historical Society of Pennsylvania)

Instructor: Professor Emma Hart emmahart@sas.upenn.edu

As the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence approaches in 2026, the question of how we commemorate it seems a whole lot more complex than it did in 1976, when the nation celebrated its 200th birthday. Partly, this complexity lies in the very different views of the American Revolution held by academic historians and the wider public. While most scholars have spent the last forty years researching the Revolution through the eyes of ordinary people, the public's appetite is often for stories about America's great heroes and Founding Fathers. This research seminar will introduce you to these competing viewpoints, giving you the opportunity to conduct original research into Revolutionary-era Philadelphians, whose lives are documented in the rich collections of manuscripts held at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. At the end of semester you will have written an original biography, grounded in primary sources you have unearthed at the Historical Society. In completing this exercise you will confront some of the most important questions preoccupying Revolutionary historians today: What can these individual stories tell us about the American Revolution? How do we acknowledge their contrasting narratives? And how can we interpret them for those Americans who haven't had the opportunity to read them first-hand?

Key Readings:

Alan Taylor, *American Revolutions: A Continental History, 1750-1804* (New York, 2016)

Kathleen Duval, *Independence Lost: Lives on the Edge of the American Revolution* (New York, 2016)

Eds. Ray Raphael, Gary B. Nash, and Alfred F. Young, *Revolutionary Founders: Rebels, Radicals, and Reformers in the Making of Nation* (New York, 2012)

Andrew Jackson O'Shaughnessy, *The Men Who Lost America: British Leadership, The American Revolution, and the Fate of Empire* (New Haven, 2011)

Woody Holton, *Abigail Adams: A Life* (New York, 2010)

Assignments:

Debates in Revolutionary History Paper: 20%

Class participation: 15%

Final Presentation: 15%

Biography: 50%

Outline Schedule:

Week 1: Wednesday Jan 24

Introductions

Week 2: January 31

Readings in the History of Revolutionary America

Week 3: Feb 7

Readings in the History of Revolutionary America

Week 4: Feb 14

History and Biography

Week 5: Feb 21

Topics in Philadelphia's Colonial and Revolutionary History

Debates in Revolutionary History Paper due

Week 6: Feb 28

Revolutionary Philadelphia and its Archive (HSP)

Week 7: March 6, Spring Break

Week 8: March 13

HSP Archival Work

One page abstract due

Week 9: March 20

Initial project idea presentation/writing workshop

project proposal and bibliography due

Week 10: April 3

Workshop: Using digital sources (Ancestry.com, Evans, Readex American newspapers)

Week 11: March 27

HSP/Kislak Archival Work

Week 12: April 10

Workshop on audience – who are you writing for?

Writing sample due

Week 13: April 17

Workshop on historiography – biography as an exploration of the past.

Week 14: April 24

Drafts returned

Week 15: May 1

Final presentations (last day of classes)

Final Biography paper due