Revolutionary City: A Portal to the Nation's Founding

In anticipation of 2026, the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, the American Philosophical Society is seeking to explore the development of an online portal from an international network of archives of digitized collections that relate to the American Revolution. The long-term vision for the portal is to create a one-stop-shop for scholars, teachers, students, and other researchers.

Statement of National Need

Revolutionary City will digitize a key selection of important manuscript material that documents the history of the American Revolution in Philadelphia, defined as 1774-1783 for this pilot phase. Unlike the Digital Public Library of America, which hosts thumbnails of materials and links to the repositories of record, *Revolutionary City* will host the images on its own site, allowing for easier access. By focusing on the wide range of materials – such a private diaries and correspondence of less well-known individuals – the portal will provide a more complete picture of the Revolution than other online databases, such as *Founders' Online.*

To explore this concept, the (APS) has joined with The Library Company of Philadelphia (LCP) and the Historical Society of Pennsylvania (HSP) to pilot this initiative. These three special collections libraries hold the vast majority of material that documents Philadelphia's role in the American Revolution. Combined, we estimate that the three institutions hold over 100,000 pages of material. The project will digitize a select portion of those for the pilot, focusing on collections with high research value and with a preference for related collections that are separated by institutions. If the pilot is successful, the powerful partnership of three major independent research libraries could form a strong foundation for the national and international collaborative that is envisioned.

Project Design

The pilot project will develop a process that will allow separate archives to independently scan and describe material, while also contributing remotely to a shared online portal. We will experiment with two options for gathering data: automated data scraping and human assisted uploading. The first option, data scraping, would use OAI-PMH (Open Archives Initiative Protocol for Metadata Harvesting) to harvest collections and objects from Islandora and dynamically populate the portal. The second option, human assisted, would involve writing a script that queries Islandora and generates upload packages for the portal. We will evaluate both means of collecting data with due consideration for their application beyond this project.

The data will be presented using a combination of HTML5 and the open-source content management system, Drupal 8. Functionality of the site will require the assistance of a subject specialist to develop and assign subjects at the collection level. Working at the collection level and allowing for data to cascade to objects will allow for working with a few hundred entries rather than tens of thousands. These data will allow us to create thematic galleries that highlight different aspects of the Revolution and create applications for classroom use.

Impact
The pilot project, *Revolutionary City*, will address important accessibility issues, while also creating a new model for institutional collaboration. Currently, the APS, LCP, and HSP hold many inter-related collections. There is vital correspondence that is now artificially separated by institutions. For instance, the APS holds key writings by Benjamin Rush, one the central figures of the American Revolution, while the LCP holds the vast majority of Rush's papers. Similarly, the HSP holds a large corpus of the Burd and Shippen Papers, prominent families deeply involved in the era of the American Revolution, while the APS itself holds several collections of related Burd-Shippen material. By focusing on these types of collections in the pilot, the online portal will break down these institutional walls and combine artificially separated collections, giving researchers easier access to these materials.

Scholars also report that time and financial resources are major barriers to using the collections at these institutions. At present, the APS has approximately 1,500 to 2,000 reader days a year in its Library Reading Room, while its Digital Library receives on average 18,000 page views a month. By focusing on Philadelphia, the center of the national government and a key site of revolutionary events, we anticipate that the online portal would receive much heavier traffic. Additionally, we would develop additional content to appeal to other constituents, like digital galleries and curriculum for teachers and students.

The pilot and initial portal will be designed with scalability in mind. The longer-term goal is to develop an expanded, world-wide online portal on the American Revolution. The APS is now uniquely positioned to organize and facilitate such an international endeavor. In May 2019, the APS and the David Library of the American Revolution (DLAR) announced a long-term partnership to create an unparalleled single physical site for the comprehensive study of this era. The partnership brings the David Library's rare primary source documents and 10,000 reels of microfilm containing millions of manuscript pages from over 60 repositories around the world. Independent of *Revolutionary City*, the APS plans to digitize this corpus and make it available, at first, as downloadable PDFs available through the APS network.

With these scans complete, and with the anticipated success of the pilot project, the APS would, with the permission of other archives, include these scanned microfilm images in the online portal, thus quickly creating the most complete digital portal for the American Revolution. In time, and with the model established with *Revolutionary City*, archives and repositories will be able to upload their high-resolution scans as they happen. In sum, all of these materials together will create an incomparable resource for access to materials related to the founding of the United States.

Budget
The total budget for the exploratory and pilot phase is $97,130. Direct costs include $7,500 to cover the fees for the developer, $70,000 for a project cataloguer to digitize a select sample of documents from the APS, LCP, and HSP for testing of the portal, $7,000 for an educators' stakeholders meeting, and $3,800 to cover travel expenses for the PI to meet with possible future collaborators and the developer to visit the APS. Indirect costs include $8,830 to cover F & A.