

UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS

History

ON THE HILL

SPRING 2026



HISTORY IS MADE HERE



Letter from the Chair

I've always loved the arrival of spring in Lawrence. The gradually warming days, bulbs slowly pushing up flowers, the budding trees. It is a reminder of the cycles of the year and of our lives. On campus, spring rushes us toward commencement and the end of the academic year. Faculty find themselves mentoring students who are completing research projects, senior theses, and graduate milestones. As someone who has spent their entire life living the academic calendar, I have always enjoyed that the school year comes to an end during the most verdant and pleasant season of the year.

In the pages that follow, you can see some excellent examples of student research that is moving toward its completion or transitioning to a new phase. In my fifteen years at KU, I have always been impressed with the original research produced by our seniors in their capstone classes. This year is no different. Kathryn Sauder and Emma Baker share their research journeys as they work to complete their honors theses. Their essays offer a vicarious window into the joy of touching history whether as a material object or archival records.

Graduate student, Alicia Houser, gives us a glimpse into her research journey as a Fulbright-Hays Fellow in Tanzania. Her research paints a vivid picture of how oral history, facilitated and furthered by deep personal connections, offers insights into experiences that may have left little record in formal archives.

Finally, our alumni spotlight features Cassie Osei reflecting on her journey from being a pre-pharmacy major to now an assistant professor of history focusing on Latin America and the African Diaspora. I had the pleasure of teaching Cassie as an instructor and am honored to call her a colleague. Her contribution reminds us that at the core historians are storytellers, and that the stories we tell matter not just because of how they might change the profession but because they shape how our fellow citizens see the world. Sincerely,



Robert C. Schwaller



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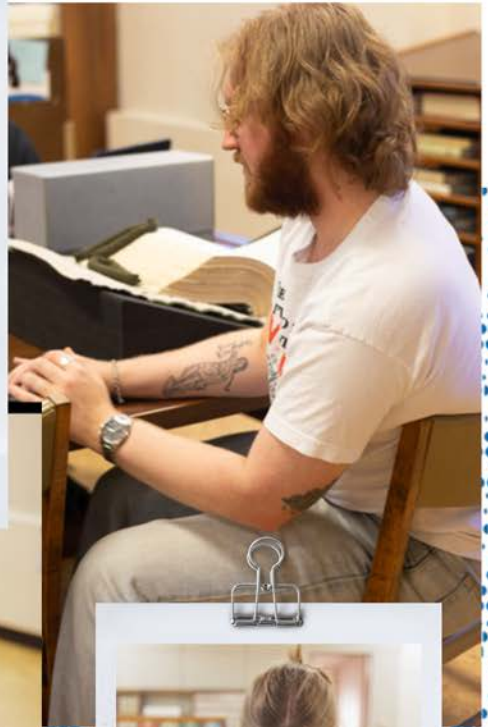
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Undergraduate Research

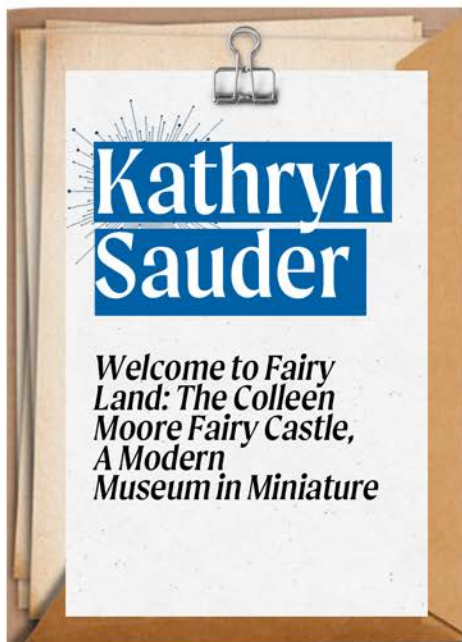
In 2023, the History Department established the Undergraduate Research Initiative to provide small stipends to students carrying out original research in their history classes. After a few years of growing the fund, we were able to hand out the first awards in the 2024-2025 academic year. Read on to learn how two awardees for this year, Kathryn Sauder and Emma Baker, used travel funds to visit archives and museums as part of their research for their Honors Capstone project.



Undergraduate Research



THIS IS THE FAIRY CASTLE! IT IS NINE SQUARE FEET AND NEARLY ELEVEN FEET TALL AT THE TOP OF THE HIGHEST TOWER. WHILE FULL OF MINIATURES, THIS IS NO SMALL CONSTRUCTION.





THIS IS KATHRYN, AMAZED TO BE SHARING THE SAME AIR AS THE FAIRY CASTLE!

Tell us about your research topic.

My research topic is the Colleen Moore Fairy Castle which is located at the Griffin Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago, Illinois. Colleen Moore was a silver screen actress, with roles in over sixty films, and was one of the highest paid stars of the era. Moore's most notable project though was not any of her movies. Beginning in 1928, she crafted a nine-square-foot dollhouse, estimated now to be worth over 10 million dollars. Moore employed some of the most famous names in Hollywood and beyond to craft and decorate this masterpiece. The dollhouse traveled across the United States to department stores where it would be on public view. Her goal was to raise money for various children's charities during the Great Depression. The castle's final stop was to the Griffin Museum of Science and Industry where it is on permanent exhibit and still dazzles children and adults alike.

What inspired your research?

I was inspired to do my research on this topic for two reasons. I have always loved tiny things, all of my toys growing up were miniatures. So when I found myself in front of the Fairy Castle during a trip to Chicago in 2019, I instantly fell in love with it. I even bought the companion book which I flipped through all the time. Then, this past summer I began working for The National Museum of Toys and Miniatures in Kansas City. Reconnecting with miniatures inspired me to pick my Fairy Castle book back up and when it came time to settle on a topic for my Honors Capstone project, the choice was obvious.



THIS PHOTO WAS TAKEN FROM THE LIBRARY, LOOKING OUT TO THE COURTYARD. PICTURED ARE THE PURE SILVERS HORSES THAT DRAW A CARRIAGE MODELED AFTER THE ONE THAT CARRIED QUEEN ELIZABETH TO HER CORONATION.



How did the Undergraduate Research Initiative funding help support your research?

With the help of the History Department's Undergraduate Research Initiative funding, I was able to visit the Fairy Castle at the Griffin Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago, Illinois. The money was perfect for a round-trip train ticket and being at the museum in person afforded me access to materials that are only kept in the museum vault. I was able to connect with the amazing staff at the Griffin and began to understand the Fairy Castle from someone who interacts with it daily.


While the entire experience was perfect, the highlight of the trip was being allowed to enter the glass case around the Fairy Castle. I stood in there! I was able to take my own photographs and have the curator with me pick up the objects I was the most fascinated by. I will carry that moment with me forever.

Did anything about the Fairy Castle look different in person than it does in photographs?

One of the most striking differences between viewing photographs of the Fairy Castle and standing next to it was being able to look up at the ceilings. The existing images online and in books only show the castle from the same straight-on angle. Being able to walk around within the case allowed me to see the transition spaces from room to room, to look up at the beautiful vaulted ceilings, and to notice the small details that even the best cameras can't see.

Was there a particular room or detail that crystalized your research?

Today, the most valuable object of the Fairy Castle's collection is not kept within it. In the vault of the Griffin Museum is a box of books, all commissioned by, or gifted to, Colleen Moore. The single most impressive one is what Colleen referred to as her "guestbook," a miniature book signed by some of the most famous people of the time. Some of the autographs include: Franklin and



THIS IS A SMALL HAND-DRAWN PORTRAIT OF COLLEEN MOORE, THE ONLY ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF HER NAME OR LIKENESS IN THE ENTIRE CASTLE.

Eleanor Roosevelt, J.P. Morgan, Albert Einstein, Frank Lloyd Wright, Neil Armstrong, Richard Nixon, and countless royals like Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip. This one book is evidence of just how influential Colleen and the Fairy Castle were.

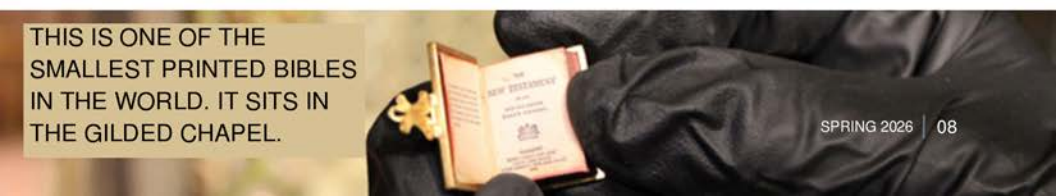
If someone misunderstood the Fairy Castle as “just a dollhouse,” what would you want them to know?

Throughout its creation and national tour, the Fairy Castle was only ever known as a “dollhouse.” It was not until it came to the Griffin Museum that it really took the proper name of “Fairy Castle.” So while it is not incorrect to label this marvelous structure as a dollhouse, it is undeniably more. The castle, while a representation of a home, is exemplary of a fantasy life, a life only a woman like Colleen could have had in the 1920s and 1930s. A critical aspect of my thesis is understanding how the tour, intended to raise money for sick children, worked to build the Fairy Castle into more than a fantasy dollhouse. The tour is an essential element of its story. The Fairy Castle is a work of art, worthy of fame, adoration, and recognition as more than a toy. Though, Colleen did not allow anyone to play with the Fairy Castle, not even her children or grandchildren. Would you allow just anyone to play with 10 million dollars?

What do you hope readers will take away from your work?

The greatest hope I have for my work is that it inspires someone to explore the world of miniatures and the Fairy Castle even further. Every object within the dollhouse has its own creation story. The world is full of big spectacular objects and histories but I encourage everyone to look a little closer at the small things as they hold equally important histories.

Postscript: This spring the Walt Disney Family Museum, which is planning an upcoming exhibit on Disney and miniatures, contacted Kathryn for information on Colleen Moore and the Fairy Castle.



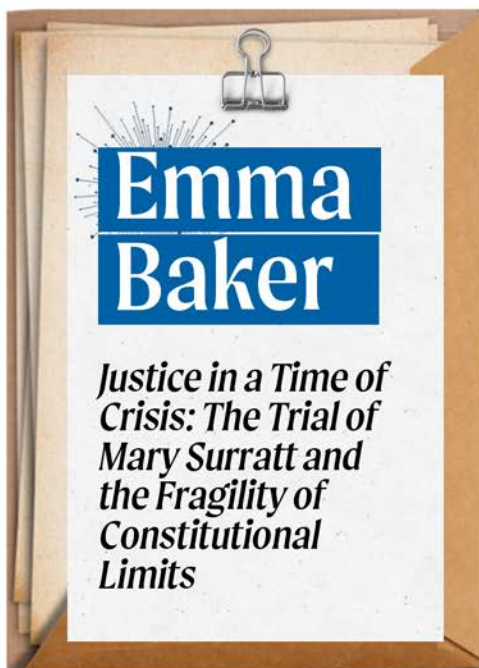
THIS IS ONE OF THE SMALLEST PRINTED BIBLES IN THE WORLD. IT SITS IN THE GILDED CHAPEL.



Undergraduate Research



Mary E. Surratt (1823-1865), the first woman executed by the U.S. federal government, was tried before a military commission despite the presence of functioning civilian courts.



Emma Baker

*Justice in a Time of
Crisis: The Trial of
Mary Surratt and
the Fragility of
Constitutional
Limits*

Tell us about your research topic.

My thesis examines the 1865 case of Mary Surratt, one of the Lincoln assassination conspirators and the first woman executed by the U.S. government. I analyze the constitutional issues that render her trial unlawful and consider the lasting effects of that decision.

I focus on two central constitutional problems: that she was a citizen tried in a military tribunal, and that her right to habeas corpus was suspended. I also examine the federal government's motives for pursuing a military commission and the significant criticism from legal scholars and attorneys who challenged its constitutionality in the years that followed.

Whether she was guilty is not the focus of my research; instead, I examine whether the government upheld the Constitution in prosecuting her. I believe her story deserves to be told not only as history but as a cautionary example of how civil liberties can be compromised during moments of national crisis.

What inspired your research?

During fall break of my freshman year at KU, I went home and watched *The Conspirator* (2010) with my dad. We have always shared a love of history, and this film, centered on Mary Surratt's trial and told through the perspective of her attorney, Frederick Aiken, left a lasting impression on me. Having participated in mock trial for six years prior to college, I was especially unsettled by what appeared to be a disregard for constitutional protections and legal procedure. I had already been considering law school, but watching this film solidified that path for me. I was also struck by how little I had learned about Surratt's case in my formal education.



A lithograph depicting the courtroom from the perspective of the nine military officers who comprised the military commission. Surratt appears alongside her co-defendants on the far right, underscoring that a civilian was tried before a military tribunal rather than a civilian court.

“
Gaining these research skills at the National Archives and Library of Congress fundamentally strengthened both my project and my skills as a historian.”



How did the Undergraduate Research Initiative help support your research?

The Undergraduate Research Initiative supported my research trip to Washington, DC, in January 2026. Because Surratt’s trial took place in the capital, access to the National Archives and the Library of Congress was essential. During my visit, I conducted archival research, examined primary documents, and visited historical sites connected to the case, including Ford’s Theatre.

One of the most striking aspects of this research was seeing how physical spaces connected to the case have changed. Surratt’s former boardinghouse, where the alleged conspiracy unfolded, has not been preserved as a historical site. The Old Arsenal Penitentiary, now Fort McNair, remains an active military installation, limiting public access. These realities reinforced how easily certain historical narratives can fade from public memory.

What was your biggest takeaway from your work in the archives?

While my travels gave me access to invaluable primary sources, the greatest accomplishment was learning how to conduct archival research at the national level. The archivists in Washington DC taught me how to properly handle fragile documents, navigate complex finding aids, and locate digitized materials that are not accessible through simple keyword searches. It is rare for undergraduates to receive hands-on training in archives of this scale.



The Old Arsenal Penitentiary, now known as Fort McNair, where Mary Surratt was tried and executed in July 1865. As an active military installation, the site reflects the federal government’s use of military authority in her prosecution.



What other sources are you using in your work?

Contemporary newspapers have been some of the most valuable sources in my research. Because part of my argument examines the federal government's political motivations in continuing to exercise emergency powers after the Civil War, I analyze public sentiment at the time of the trial. Newspapers such as *The Evening Star* (Washington, DC) reveal widespread anger and demands for swift justice following Lincoln's assassination. These publications help illustrate the national climate in which the government pursued a rapid conviction. I located many of these sources with the assistance of staff in at the Library of Congress.

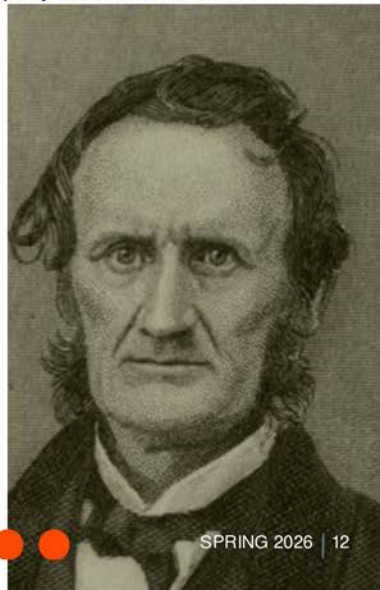
Have you uncovered any surprising or overlooked aspects of this Surratt's case?

One of the most surprising discoveries in my research was the case of Lambdin Milligan. In 1864, Milligan was tried and sentenced to death by a military tribunal in Indiana for conspiracy against the United States. His attorneys petitioned for a writ of habeas corpus, challenging the military's jurisdiction over a civilian. In April 1866, the Supreme Court ruled in *Ex parte Milligan* that trying civilians in military tribunals while civilian courts are operating is unconstitutional. This decision came less than a year after Mary Surratt's execution. The ruling effectively invalidated the legal framework used in her trial, highlighting the constitutional tension at the heart of her case.

What advice would you give to other undergraduates interested in historical research?

Choose a topic that genuinely interests you. Historical research requires significant time, focus, and persistence. For me, this project has become a passion. After nearly eight months of research, I still want to dig deeper. Whether you are pursuing departmental honors or an independent project, your enthusiasm will push you through the challenges of archival work and long hours of writing. When you care about your topic, you can show your readers why they should care too.

LAMBDIN MILLIGAN, THE CENTRAL FIGURE IN EX PARTE MILLIGAN (1866). LESS THAN ONE YEAR AFTER SURRATT'S EXECUTION, THE SUPREME COURT RULED THAT TRYING CIVILIANS IN MILITARY TRIBUNALS WHILE CIVILIAN COURTS ARE OPERATING IS UNCONSTITUTIONAL, CASTING RETROSPECTIVE DOUBT ON THE LEGALITY OF SURRATT'S TRIAL.



The Undergraduate Research Initiative

Support original historical research.



Undergraduate research projects like those carried out by [Kathryn Sauder](#) and [Emma Baker](#) represent the kind of exceptional scholarship and transformative experiences that are made possible with just a small amount of financial support. Our goal is to continue to provide students pursuing historical research with the means to travel to museums and work with archivists.

We are especially proud that the [Undergraduate Research Initiative](#) is sustained by modest donations from our community: graduating seniors and their families, faculty, alumni, and friends. As Nathan Wood, Director of Undergraduate Studies explains,

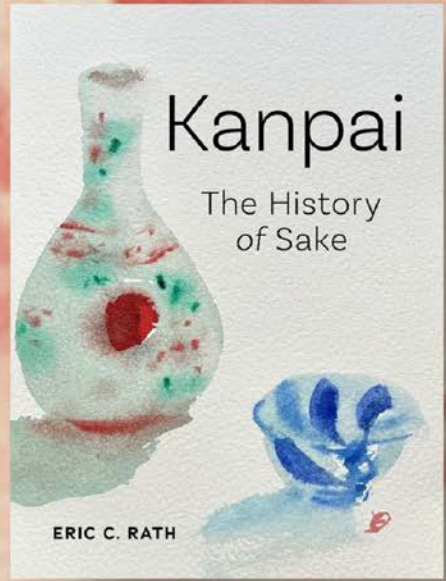
[Our efforts promote not only scholarship but also community-building and mutual support. As I see it, the fact that these research funds come from many people connected to the department, rather than a single donor, makes them all the more meaningful.](#)

We invite you to help us sustain and expand research opportunities by making a gift to the Undergraduate Research Initiative in support of the next generation of historians.

Scan to Contribute or visit:

<https://launchku.org/campaigns/undergraduate-research-initiative>





Faculty Publication

Eric Rath publishes new book *Kanpai: The History of Sake*

Sake is Japan's "traditional alcoholic beverage" with more than 1,200 years of history. For most of that time you needed sake to worship the deities, get married, pledge fealty to a samurai overlord, or simply get a buzz. Having researched Japanese food culture for 25 years, I felt the glaring lack of a history of sake in English, which prompted me to write this book. *Kanpai: The History Of Sake* is the first comprehensive history of the beverage written in English. My book shows how sake is integral to Japanese food and culture; and in the last five years we have seen a surge in local sake breweries outside of Japan, a trend my book also documents through conversations with North American brewers.



A WATERCOLOR OF BREWERIES IN HIROSHIMA BY KIYOMI SEKO

For people new to sake, I hope my book unlocks some of the magic of the beverage and dispels misconceptions about it. Sake is a unique alcoholic beverage that is usually served incorrectly in the US. Readers will develop a deeper appreciation of the drink and its cultural significance by reading my book.

Excerpted and adapted from Eric C. Rath, *Kanpai: History of Sake* (Reaktion Books 2025), pp. 99-104.

MEDIEVAL DRINKING GAMES

Sake brewed in late medieval Japan (1400-1600) would have been much rougher tasting than the beverage enjoyed today. Brewed year-round with wild yeasts, medieval sake would have had a gamier flavor profile and a much shorter shelf life since it was not well pasteurized, if at all. One wonders if medieval brewing techniques would have always produced something palatable. In other words, the fact that the medieval elite developed customs and games to encourage rapid, continuous, and excessive consumption may have been because the taste of sake was not always worth savoring.





THE INTERIOR OF A PUB CALLED AN IZAKAYA

Medieval samurai and aristocrats enjoyed drinking games that facilitated rapid intoxication. In contrast to modern drinking games that require the ability to launch a coin or ping-pong ball into a glass, medieval drinking games focused on speed and mental agility. One drinking game for the third lunar month (February) was named after the plum flower, in bloom around that time. Players arranged five sake cups on short stands around a sixth cup to form the shape of a plum flower. The contest was to see how fast a drinker could down all of the cups. A more challenging version of the game played in the seventh lunar month (June) used thirteen cups to evoke the shape of wisteria blossoms.

A game called “drinking ten-times” used ten sake cups, one for each person sitting in a circle. The oldest person started the game by using a pourer to fill the cup of the person next to them before passing them the pourer. Each participant then filled their neighbor’s cup as the pourer made its way around the circle. The challenge was that everything must occur in complete silence. The participants could not even mouth words. If someone spoke, they lost and had to drink all the cups.

Other games tested one’s ability to drink just the right amount from a sake cup. To win the game “a single dewdrop,” the drinker had to finish all the sake except for one drop, which had to fall from the cup when it was turned upside down. If two drops fell, that meant a loss. And, if no drops fell, the drinker also lost. One can imagine a player shaking their cup to try to get



A COLLECTION OF VARIETIES OF SAKE BY THE FAMOUS NIIGATA-PREFECTURE BREWER KOSHINOKANBAI

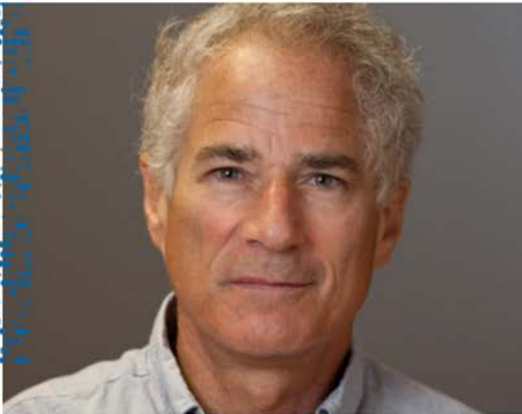
just the right amount of moisture to fall. More challenging yet was the game “drink a mountain peach,” which presented the drinker with a cup of sake with a mountain peach (yamamomo; *Myrica rubra*) floating in it. The trick was to bite the approximately 1 inch fruit in half while downing the cup of sake.

Competition – and drinking – could become heated. At one session at the imperial court in 1478, Shogun Ashikaga Yoshimasa (d. 1490) and his wife Hino Tomiko (d. 1496) participated in a drinking game that lasted from midday to 2 a.m. and then still did not end – the competitors were invited back to compete the following day.

Drinking games encouraged rapid intoxication, sometimes to the point of sickness, but that was the point. Not only was vomiting tolerated in the late medieval period, but it also became “all part of the fun” at parties, to quote historian Sakurai Eiji who calls the era “the age of hangovers.” In fact, there was a specific term for throwing up at drinking parties: “what came up there” (tōzae). And there was even a game associated with puking. Anyone who vomited at a party had to host the next gathering. Vomiting was part of the spectacle of the occasion that made it enjoyable and memorable for the participants, especially those who attended similar gatherings on an almost daily basis, like the shogun. Getting sick provided a bonding experience between the participants as some helped their suffering comrades while others laughed at them.

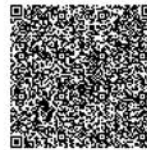


Faculty News



Emeritus Professor and former Roy A. Roberts Distinguished Professor of History at KU, [David Farber](#), has received the Balfour Jeffrey Award in the Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences. Farber is one of four Higuchi-KU Endowment Research Achievement Award recipients.

To read about Farber's scholarly work and outstanding contributions to the field of history scan the QR code.



Read more about Lewis's research by scanning the QR Code.



David B. Pittaway Professor of Military History, [Adrian Lewis](#), has published a chapter, "The Cold War" which appears in *The Oxford Handbook of American Military History* edited by Samuel J. Watson.



Associate Professor, [Elizabeth MacGonagle](#), was named a Hall Professor of British History. MacGonagle's research and teaching focus on the History of the British Empire and legacies of slavery, colonialism and apartheid. Her newest project maps transnational memories of slavery to examine how we remember the historical threads and connections that formed during the movement of enslaved Africans and their descendants in Atlantic and Indian Ocean societies. She is also currently designing a summer study abroad program to the UK that centers around the concept of the "price of empire" and Britain's reckoning with its past.



Associate Professor [Sean Seyer's](#) book, *Sovereign Skies: The Origins of American Civil Aviation Policy*, has earned this year's 2026 Gardner-Lasser Aerospace History Literature Award from the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics (AIAA). This award is given for the best original contribution to the field of aeronautical or astronautical non-fiction literature published in the last five years.



Graduate Research

Alicia Houser

A Year in Tanzania



PhD Candidate, [Alicia Houser](#), examines how women across different economic spectrums have constructed their lives and reconstructed the city of Moshi, Tanzania since its independence from British rule in 1961. Houser recently received a Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad Award, allowing her to spend a year in Tanzania conducting research.

365 days, 17,000 miles traveled, and a wealth of experiences later, Houser captures what research and life in Moshi was like.



Tell us about arriving in Moshi.

I had very little idea of what to expect when I arrived in Moshi. Though I have been going to Tanzania, in East Africa, regularly since 2017, before my Fulbright, I had only ever experienced Moshi as a weekend getaway. I entered my field work with the goal of letting topics and central themes come from the women I met. The most accessible women were those selling on sidewalks in the center of the city, so my work will dive into the informal economy more than I had planned, requiring me to tackle a whole new literature while in the writing phase!

In a chance encounter, I met the granddaughter of a local chief. I attended a commemoration event honoring the lives of the 19 area chiefs hanged by German colonizers on March 2, 1900, her grandfather being one of them. While waiting for the event to begin, I stood in the shade of a tree and danced to some of the music. The granddaughter was sitting nearby enjoying shade from the same tree. She liked my dancing, and Swahili, and the fact that I wore locally made clothing and then she kind of adopted me. In her 70s and not having any children—a rarity in Tanzania—she was eager to tell me about her life and share her family photos with me. Her older brother had held a fairly high up government position and built the house she lived in. As a girl, her father had not paid for her to continue education beyond the minimum requirement. I think she found in me a captive audience after being accustomed to the men around her getting more attention. I found it really meaningful and more interesting frankly to work with such a personal archive and would like to seek out more of those in future work. I am much more drawn to individuals and their stories than I am to the random assortment of documents housed in national archives.





So much of your work involved maintaining relationships with the people of Moshi could you tell us how these relationships impacted your research?

My research is the relationships I developed. There is no separating them. In *Research is Ceremony*, Dr. Shawn Wilson writes that “reality is relationships or sets of relationships. Thus there is not one definite reality but rather different sets of relationships.” My everyday reality in Moshi started and ended in relation. I lived communally with a multi-generational extended family. I stepped out my door each morning to two young mothers preparing for the day, initially with a baby strapped to one of their backs and by the end of the year to that baby running around saying my name when he saw me. In town, I went from one friend to another to sit and observe them at work. Even on coffee shop days, I knew the servers and we chatted about the news. In late afternoon, I returned to my neighborhood and made the rounds greeting everyone out and about.

This produce market was my first research site. My host introduced me to a woman who sells tomatoes, potatoes, and onions. With that one introduction, I came to be a known entity around the market and women I did not know started wanting me to come greet them, sit with them, and buy them sodas. Unlike some other parts of Tanzania, markets in this area were historically exclusively female spaces. Those gendered divisions have weakened some today, but women still vastly outnumber men as produce sellers.





I ended most days by visiting the local hang out spot—a couple of benches set up outside my friend’s shop where an animated shoe repair man had his stall. There were always people around to sit with and to watch the day come to a close. Another way to illustrate the impact these relationships will have on my research – of the 39 people I worked closely with, my host only introduced me to two of them. The rest I met on my own, and their lives will be the story I write.

Is there an experience that captures the spirit of your project?

Making the rounds during my last weeks in Moshi, I was struck by the things women remembered about me. It felt affirming to know that our time together was not only me gathering information from them, but also me sharing myself in ways they held onto. One woman I met early on and then did not see again for many months remembered how much I love pilipili (spicy sauce, literally “pepper”). Another remembered that in the United States I don’t eat meat. These seem like small, incidental recollections. But for me they signified the work I had put in to really getting to know women and not having my research be unidirectional. I shared myself with them too. I loved answering their questions. They wanted to know if the U.S. has poor people, Black people, mean people. Do people sell used items in the U.S.? Do they sell outside sitting on sidewalks? What kind and quality items do they sell? The goal of incorporating oral methods into my research was to cede over some power of myself as the researcher, and I think I managed to do that in my small way.

The print on the wall says, "No business allowed outside the mosque." Various buildings around town posted this same message, and yet they all had people set up outside them doing business each day.





The original iteration of a place called Moshi sat higher up on the slopes of Mt. Kilimanjaro. The location of today's city came about in 1912 when German colonizers funded an extension of the railroad from the coast to the present-day location of Moshi. Like a lot of towns around Kansas, Moshi developed into a bustling center of trade because of the railway. After shutting down for some years, the government revived the route to Moshi in 2018. I interviewed three women who set up small food kiosks to serve passengers.



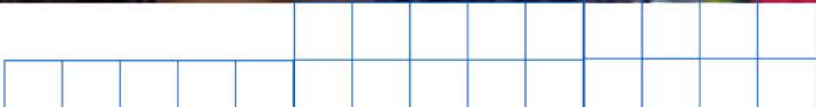
If you had to distill your time in Tanzania into a single image, moment, or sentence – what would it be?

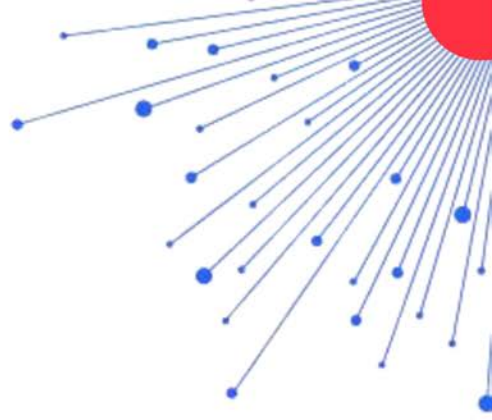
Sitting in a blue plastic chair, on a patch of bare ground outside my friend's shop, separated from the main dirt road by a bush that I enjoyed watching mice play in, as part of a circle of women from different generations, drinks in hand, watching the world go by and talking about our days as the youngest generation ran in and out of our circle playing with their cousins, friends, and neighbors.





Cassie Osei





History Makers Alumni Spotlight ✨

2015, B.A. in History and Latin American Studies

Dr. Cassie Osei graduated in 2015 with B.A. in History (with Departmental Honors) and Latin American Studies. She is an Assistant Professor of Latin America, Brazil, and the African Diaspora at Bucknell University in Lewisburg, PA. She loves the transformational power of history, the city of São Paulo, and nachos.

What brought you to the University of Kansas to study history?

Part of my KU lore is that I arrived on campus a pre-pharmacy major, flunked out after three semesters, came back a history major and kicked ass ever since. I am proud that my path has not been linear, for the detours, temporary delays, and re-routes have made my professional journey rich with breadth and depth. Some of those detours involved just meeting people in hallways or events at the right moments. Kim Warren, Jonathan Earle, and Elizabeth Asiedu convinced me (and my parents) that I was not going to ruin my life doing a history major. I had the “happy accident” of being in Robert Schwaller’s Afro-Latin America course while being enrolled in





CASSIE HUGGING HER ADVISOR AFTER RECEIVING HER PHD

Elementary Brazilian Portuguese, which for the first time in my brain put the spotlight on Latin American history. I was able to think comparatively between Latin America and the United States (through Jonathan Haged and Sheyda Jahanbani). I also took coursework in AAAS with Randal Jelks and Clarence Lang, the later of whom was my honors thesis advisor and research mentor.

What are you two proudest professional or personal accomplishments that occurred after graduating from KU History?

The first can be bundled into two: I graduated with a PhD in History from University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign and became a college professor soon after. I am also proud of the professional and personal life I have cultivated for myself abroad in Brazil. I have been traveling to Brazil since 2013. Back then my junior self, who barely spoke Portuguese and felt so overwhelmed by culture shock, could not have foreseen what has unraveled since: language fellowships, research fellowships, being invited to present about myself and my work, and just traveling across the country. I don't think she could have imagined all of the things I've done with the language: I've dated, navigated the federal and civil police, translated documents, had medical treatment, obtained legal documents, and negotiated prices all in Portuguese. I have built a large network of connections in Brazil, some that are so close-knit that they are my home away from home.



CASSIE IN HER REGALIA CELEBRATING THE GRADUATION OF ONE OF HER STUDENTS.



RIO DE JANEIRO IN MARCH OF THIS YEAR DURING CASSIE'S RESEARCH SABBATICAL FOR HER FIRST BOOK.

What do you enjoy most about your current position?

I love being able to travel more often within the U.S. While I miss Kansas, I don't miss driving 9 to 10 hours to get to Chicago. I live in a particularly rural, inland part of Pennsylvania, but I am now three hours within Philadelphia, Baltimore, D.C. and New York. I can get to Pittsburgh in 4 hours, and Raleigh in about 7 hours.

When I was an undergrad, I used to think about the potential courses I could teach in some far-off future where I was a college professor. I teach those courses now. I really enjoy seeing my students transformed by their learning. Seeing them change over time by drawing their own conclusions on course material, or witnessing them come into their own power and authority greatly satisfies me. The invisible part of being a college professor is uplifting students through coaching them. I'm very good at that.

How have you connected your work with the wider public?

I have written social commentary and cultural criticism for magazines in Brazil. About two years ago, my co-author and I published in Revista Cult about a social media controversy involving a high-profile scholar and netizens over Beyoncé's 2020 film, Black is King. It is common in Brazil for big media outlets and prestigious newspapers to merely translate popular columns from The New York Times or Washington Post. However, those U.S. outlets don't share the widest array of perspectives, and Brazilian media doesn't.





CASSIE (R) IS PICTURED HERE WITH HER MOTHER (L) IN 2015 AT THE HISTORY DEPARTMENT GRADUATION RECEPTION WHERE SHE WON THE BEST HONORS THESIS.

often investigate why those perspectives are limited. Being able to communicate in a foreign language and have familiarity with the social, political, and economic contexts of two countries gives my voice more authority when I choose to intervene in public debates.

I have also been interviewed by Portuguese-language news outlets on my research. For example, a journalist from the BBC contacted me for a story she was developing on Iracema de Almeida, a previously forgotten female Afro-Brazilian trailblazer in gynecology and philanthropy. Besides two historians in Brazil, I was the only other person who had substantially written scholarship on her in any language. And this journalist discovered my work because Google included my dissertation in the search results. The BBC article, for which I was interviewed, brought more attention and interest in my research and with such speed than a traditional academic article could ever do.

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