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Research Summary

Receiving the ARC Knickerbocker Award for Archival Research in American Studies aided immensely in my dissertation progress for the summer and beyond. This grant enabled me to focus exclusively on my research, and provided me with the financial means to travel to several archives and gain access to materials I would not have been able to obtain at this stage in the process otherwise.

First, I traveled to Philadelphia in July to work with materials related to elite women in the early national period. While there, I toured both the Library Company of Philadelphia and the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, familiarizing myself with the available resources in both those repositories; these include correspondence between Sarah Livingston Jay and Mary White Morris, and the Elizabeth Drinker diary. I met with James Green, the Librarian of the Library Company, to compile sources relevant to my project, particularly in reference to upper-class female patrons of subscription libraries, the focus of the first chapter of my dissertation.

I was also able to travel to the New York State Archives in Albany, New York. The research into probate records and property holdings I conducted while there provide the foundation for my fourth chapter, which centers on female economic roles in relationship to gendered constructions of civic duty. My research there allowed me to begin to compile a comparative database of upper-class wills proven in New York City between 1783 and 1815. This work has already yielded some fascinating results regarding changing practices of women's inheritance over time and by economic strata. Though, unfortunately, it did not reveal the widespread use of equity trusts to protect women's property as I had originally hoped, these probate materials have offered me a substantial amount of evidence regarding the objects women owned and were given by husbands, a foundational element of my methodological approach.

In between my more distant research trips, I spent my summer at archives local to New York City. At the New-York Historical Society, I delved into collections of family papers in order to learn more about the economic habits of elite women. There, I spent time with the papers of William Duer, which contains correspondence with his wife, Catherine; when Duer was imprisoned for bankruptcy, his wife conducted many of his financial dealings. Likewise, the papers of John Pintard, elite New York merchant, revealed a wealth of material regarding his wife Elizabeth's position as intermediary during Pintard's financial exile. At the New York Public Library, I spent time going through a wide array of materials pertaining to the Livingston, Van Cortlandt, Van Rensselaer, Schuyler, and other families. Perhaps most fascinating was my time spent with the diary of Elizabeth DeHart Bleeker. Bleeker, a member of New York City's social elite, meticulously tracked local events, socializing, and purchases between 1799 and 1805. This diary in particular provided me with a framework around which to shape my chapter on social networking and entertaining as one element in women's civic role in the new nation. In addition, its detail on attending and purchasing goods at estate auctions has been foundational in the analysis of women's participation in the New York marketplace. Lastly, I was able to use a portion of the grant money to pay the University of Virginia Library to copy and mail the correspondence of Angelica Schuyler Church they hold in their archive.

In sum, being a recipient of this grant allowed me to complete an unprecedented amount of research in one summer, and enabled me to broaden my research base by funding my travel outside of New York City. I am incredibly grateful for this opportunity to expedite my dissertation research, and anticipate that I will complete my degree in 2015 as a result.