

# Sidelights



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FALL 2018 CALENDAR

Historical Society of Pennsylvania  
1300 Locust Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19107

## Merriment with a Mission

Chances are, if you're familiar with the Young Friends of HSP, you know them best for their lively events with creative themes—from television to sports to poetry. While those bashes offer a chance for history buffs to eat, drink, and be merry, they also connect people to the past.

Young Friends of HSP, driven by an exceptional group of young professionals serving on the Young Friends Board, have been active since 2015, engaging all who share a love of history and value the preservation of rare and vital documents from the past.

"I've always had a strong interest in history," says treasurer Justin Yost. "And like many people who grew up in Pennsylvania, having access to so many important historical locations, objects, and documents really allowed my interest to blossom."

All proceeds generated through the Young Friends—totaling \$50,000 since their inception—go towards HSP's Adopt-a-Collection program, which covers the costs needed to care for and conserve fragile and old documents and materials. So far, they have funded over 20 collections.

Young Friends board members take a hands-on approach to their support, working together with HSP staff to identify which collections need care and attention, and voting to select which ones to fund. "This tangible way that we make a difference, the way we get to choose and shape our contributions, makes our group truly special," explains vice chair Kalela Williams. "We can see, and even touch, the impact of our work."

*Young Friends of HSP welcome new Board members (ages 21–45) to the group. To join the mailing list, send your contact information to Lynette Zimmerman at [lyzimmerman@hsp.org](mailto:lyzimmerman@hsp.org).*



*Young Friends Steampunk Salon Soiree, October 2017*

### Special Thanks

*Young Friends events are made possible in part with support and in-kind donations from our generous partners.*



## Students Connect Technology with Philadelphia's Past at History Makers Camp



*Students paired off to begin their research in HSP's reading room.*

This summer, HSP launched its first-ever History Makers Camp. Under the guidance of HSP's education manager Kimberly McCleary, eight Philadelphia-area students worked with historical documents to create a mobile-friendly walking tour exploring the African-American struggle for freedom and equality in Philadelphia.

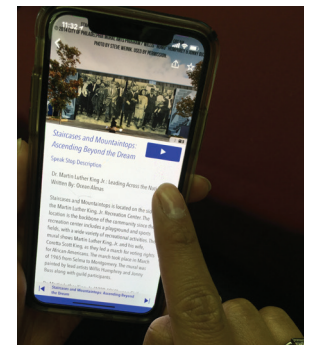
The students started their research journey on foot, visiting Philadelphia monuments and historical sites including the memorial to civil rights activist Octavius Catto, located in front of City Hall, and the Mother Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, which sits on the oldest parcel of land continuously owned by African Americans. "It was important to give the students the chance to see where people lived, worked, and made an impact before they selected their research topics," McCleary explains.

History Makers Camp participants also gained insights from special guest speakers and field trips, paying a visit to Margery Sly, the director of special collections at Temple University Library's research center, and handling artifacts at the Union League. The students also heard from a panel of community leaders on the importance of historical research and how we use history to tell our story today.

Participant Dylan Dang focused his research efforts on the history of William Still, the famous Philadelphia-based abolitionist and conductor on the underground railroad. "I learned a lot from this program," Dang remarks. "It definitely helped me get more in-depth into the history of Philadelphia."

*Take the tour! Visit [hsp.org/explorephilly](https://hsp.org/explorephilly) for detailed download instructions.*

*History Makers Camp was made possible through generous support from the Pennsylvania Abolition Society Endowment Fund of The Philadelphia Foundation, the Historical Society of Pennsylvania Founder's Award 2018 Appeal Auction Contributors, and additional gifts from Friends of HSP.*



*App users can see photos of each present-day site accompanied with photos of historical materials housed at HSP.*



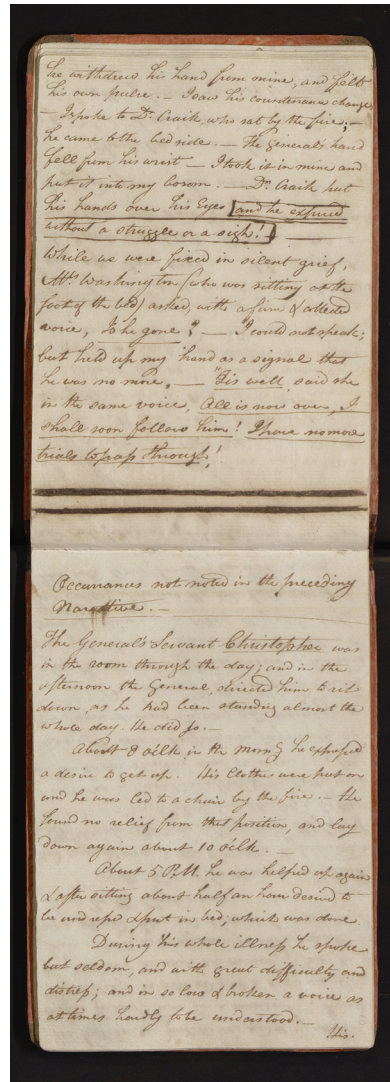
# Diary Documenting Washington's Death Gets New Life

It was the middle of December 1799 when George Washington's personal secretary, Tobias Lear, recorded the president's last moments of life in stark and moving detail at Mount Vernon. Centuries later, Lear's small, unassuming pocket diary is getting new exposure thanks to a serendipitous collaboration.

While it is not Lear's only account of Washington's death, this diary is unique for two reasons: first, it was written just days after the fact, when the events were fresh in Lear's mind. Second, this diary offers a detailed description of the arrangements that took place in the wake of the president's passing.

"It talks about what happened after, like taking measurements of the body," says Lee Arnold, senior director of the library and collections. "How do you notify people, and whom do you notify? Who gets a messenger on a fast horse, who gets a letter?"

While the diary may be used by researchers by special request, it is fragile. The measures meant to keep the notable document safe and secure—behind locked doors, deep within HSP's Treasures vault—"deter the merely curious," Arnold notes. And until recently, he adds, "I don't think anyone ever read it the whole way through." So when volunteer Cameron Kline approached Arnold with an open-ended offer to work on a project for HSP, Arnold knew just what to pursue: a full transcription of Lear's diary, cover to cover.



*The passing of George Washington is mourned with thick black marks. Until HSP conservators reinforced the paper with Japanese tissue, the deep, heavy lines nearly perforated the page.*

Kline first encountered the diary on a behind-the-scenes tour of HSP. Several years later, he says, "it stuck with me that this amazing document is just living here in Philadelphia."

Reading through the diary gave Kline a newfound understanding of the individuals described in the text. "Washington to me was the historical guy, the myth," Kline admits. "This was different. There is a sense of real compassion and humanity from Washington." Even in the passages describing his final moments, which Kline describe as "brutal," Washington keeps his composure. "He wasn't feisty, he wasn't gesturing madly. He was well aware of image, he knew he was dying, he was aware of his place in history."

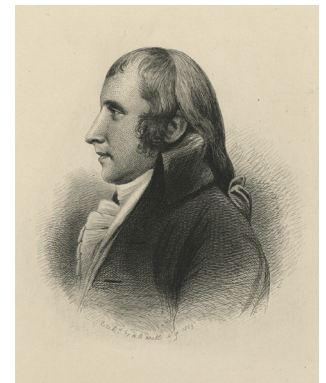
After detailing Washington's death, the journal explores Lear's travels as an ambassador to Haiti. Ever the conscientious secretary, Lear takes copious notes during the long sea voyage, from his packing list ("2 barrels containing Hams; 4 ditto containing china ware") to daily recordings of wind speeds and other weather conditions.

The process of transcription, though enlightening, was also tedious. Kline worked from existing high-resolution digital scans of the journal. While Lear's handwriting is generally readable, "some of it was done on a moving vessel, which makes it difficult," Kline notes. "And he has his own shorthand."

Once the first run was complete, Arnold and Kline cross-checked the transcription—page by page, word by word—against the original diary. Scholars from HSP and Mount Vernon then weighed in, reviewing the work and filling in some of the more illegible parts. Only a handful of words remain unidentified.

With the transcription and high-resolution scans of the diary now available to researchers, "I hope people will read the transcription first to understand the document," Arnold says, "and turn to the scans to see Lear's handwriting or other visual cues from the notebook." This important document, an invaluable contribution to the historical record of the nation's first president, is fully accessible to the curious for the first time.

Find the transcription, scans, and additional collections items online at [hsp.org/lear](https://hsp.org/lear).



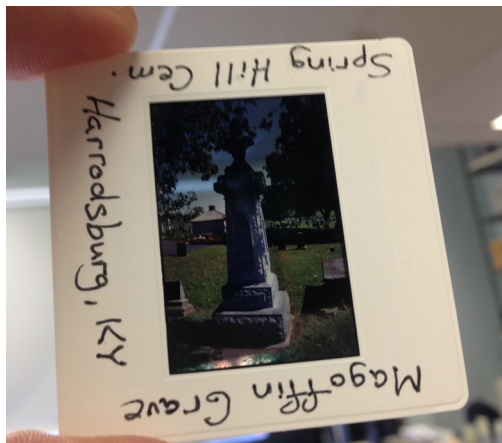
*Tobias Lear portrait, 1869, H. B. Hall, Simon Gratz autograph collection [250A].*

# New Collection of Gravestone Images Offers Glimpses into the Past

Each year, HSP expands its collections with generous donations made by people from all walks of life. This spring, retired high school teacher Thomas Fisher gifted a special collection of images of notable graves and gravestones from around the United States, assembled over the course of 73 years.

Fisher began his collection by traveling to the gravestones of famous individuals, photographing subjects that represent a variety of different fields, including science, religion, and literature. He photographed notable American Indian graves and gravestones (including Sitting Bull's in North Dakota) and those of regional figures (including the grave of Pennsylvania's third governor, Simon Snyder, located in Selinsgrove, Pennsylvania). His collection also features images of important memorials from such major events in U.S. history as the Space Shuttle Challenger memorial in Arlington National Cemetery.

By the time Fisher switched to digital photography, he had already filled 60 boxes with slides depicting gravestones reflective of the many cultures that make up the fabric of U.S. society. In addition to the slides, Fisher donated 19 DVDs filled with digital images, two flash drives, and four notebooks containing carefully compiled records documenting his work.



Slide from the Thomas Fisher collection of images of graves and gravestones, 1944-2017 (Collection 4218).

In addition to providing researchers with valuable insight into the lifespans and resting places of thousands of historical figures, this collection serves as a valuable trove of information regarding cultural practices and burial traditions across the United States.

## Fall 2018 Calendar

*Unless otherwise specified, all events are \$10 General Admission or free for Friends of HSP.*

### SEPTEMBER

#### Foundations of Genealogy II

September 19–November 14

Wednesdays, 1:30–3:30 p.m.

*\$300 for Friends of HSP;*

*\$350 for General Admission*

#### One-on-one Genealogy Consults

September 19–December 19

Third Wednesday of every month

1:00, 3:00, and 5:00 p.m.

*\$99*

#### Young American Muslims: Faith, Country, and Community

Wednesday, September 26

6:00 p.m.

#### Friends Day

Saturday, September 29

8:00–1:00 p.m.

*Free; Friends of HSP exclusive*

### OCTOBER

#### 1968: Civil Unrest and Civil Rights

Wednesdays, October 3, 10, and 24

6:30 p.m.

*Friends of HSP Free; General Admission is \$20 for the three-program series, or \$10 for a single program.*

#### “In Cider” Knowledge: Young Friends Board Meet and Greet

Thursday, October 4

6:00–8:00 p.m.

Held at Strangelove's, 216 S 11th Street

*Free*

#### Military Records for the Family Historian

October 11–November 15

Thursdays, 1:30–3:30 p.m.

*\$250*

#### The First Gay American Novel: A Forgotten Book by Sarah Orne Jewett

Tuesday, October 16

5:30 p.m. reception, 6:00 p.m. program

Held at the Library Company of Philadelphia, 1314 Locust Street

*Free*

#### Cabaret Philadelphia: Young Friends Fundraiser

Thursday, October 25

6:00–8:30 p.m.

*\$30*

### NOVEMBER

#### Intriguing Sources: The Mystery of the Lost Battalion

Wednesday, November 14

6:30 p.m.

#### A History of Fast Food

Thursday, November 15

6:00–8:00 p.m.

*Free; Friends of HSP exclusive*

#### Becoming U.S.: Food and Cultural Traditions

Thursday, November 15

6:00 p.m.

Held at the Parkway Central Library, 1901 Vine Street

*\$5 admission; register at [freelibrarycook.eventbrite.com](http://freelibrarycook.eventbrite.com).*

#### Food and Fun Fair

Saturday, November 17

10:00 a.m.–8:00 p.m.

*Prices vary; see website for details.*

### DECEMBER

#### Friends Day

Saturday, December 8

8:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m.

*Free; Friends of HSP exclusive*

*HSP also features new document displays every six weeks and offers Act 48 teacher workshops!*

*Find more at [hsp.org/calendar](http://hsp.org/calendar).*



1300 Locust Street Philadelphia, PA 19107-5699

### **Thanks for your support!**

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