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From the Trenches: Cross-Campus Digital History Collaboration

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Abstract
In September 2015, our team launched The First World War Letters of H.J.C. Peirs (www.jackpeirs.org), a digital history initiative built on collaboration between faculty, students, and library staff. The project is founded on amazing primary source material, but with limited financial support and little dedicated staff time. We leveraged the creativity and hard work of our team members to build a website that is maintained by students and enhanced whenever possible with features and commentary from faculty and staff. Members of #TeamPeirs discussed the evolution of the project, the nature of our collaboration, and the intersection of audiences we have discovered.

Keywords
Jack Peirs, H. J. C. Peirs, digital history, digital humanities, First World War, World War I

Disciplines
Archival Science | Digital Humanities | European History | Military History

Comments
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From the Trenches
Cross-Campus Digital History Collaboration

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#TeamPeirs

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Systems Librarian

Jenna Fleming ‘16 (2014-2016)
Kevin Lavery ‘16 (2014-2016)
Melanie Fernandes ‘17 (2016-2017)
Jesse Campana ‘18 (2018)

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The First World War Letters of H.J.C. Peirs

- Around 300 letters, documents, artifacts, maps, and photographs from a British officer of the BEF
- All currently on loan to Special Collections and College Archives Gettysburg College
- Family requested that everything be digitized and made freely available without copyright restrictions
- The Peirs Project = blog + social media
- Engaging with WWI scholars, enthusiasts, genealogists, & students

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Hugh John Chevallier “Jack” Peirs

Photos of Jack and his pram, his sisters, and nieces appear courtesy of Will Hall.

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Collaboration

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Vision and Beginnings

- Classroom connection with student
- Traditional research paper
- Family support for new initiative
- Assembling a "dream team"
- No idea what we were doing

#workedout

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DH @ Gettysburg College

- Digital Humanities not generally a part of institutional culture
- “Mesh network” model for digital projects
- Collaboration built into the Peirs project from the beginning

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Getting Started
In the Digital Trenches

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Day</th>
<th>End Year</th>
<th>End Month</th>
<th>End Day</th>
<th>Display Date</th>
<th>Headline</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1915</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14 September 1915</td>
<td>We have just received Corporal over here from trying to teach us to throw bombs, but he is a professional &amp; we know as much about it as he does.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1915</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>17 September 1915</td>
<td>I want to watch the 2nd day's practice. They have a new tent and sleep in the old school tent.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1915</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>19 September 1915</td>
<td>The census of the most unhappy. I fear the time may have been wasted.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1915</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>21 September 1915</td>
<td>They have a regular work day. We have a lot of work to do.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1915</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>23 September 1915</td>
<td>While we have been busy, we have not had to go off letters.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1915</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>28 September 1915</td>
<td>We went into action at 10 am and 19 quite right, the rest of the battalion is doing well.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1915</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>29 September 1915</td>
<td>Just after leaving we came under machine gun fire</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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“My Dear Mother …”

14 September 1915

My dear Mother,

B.E.F.

14.9.15

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Welcome to the First World War Letters of H.J.C. Peirs, a digital history project at Gettysburg College.

Jack Peirs was a British officer in the 8th Battalion, the Queen's Royal West Surrey Regiment. For three years, Peirs served on the western front, fighting in every major campaign waged by the British Army from 1915 to 1918. During the war, Peirs rose in rank from Lieutenant to Lieutenant-Colonel and he was decorated with Distinguished Service Order (two bars) and named a Companion of the Order of St. Michael and St. George at the King's Birthday Honours in 1919.

Jack Peirs saw hard service and he was a prolific correspondent. He wrote home weekly to members of his family of his experiences at the front. On the one hundredth anniversary of the day in which Peirs composed each letter home, we will release his words here for you to read.

Please feel free to engage with the site. Use these letters in your research (properly attributed) and in your classroom. Bookmark our page, share our posts on social media, and follow H.J.C. Peirs on Twitter and Instagram @maracspring and like our Facebook page.
Mapping the Great War (Then)
Mapping the Great War (Now)
Mapping the Great War (Now)

LE VERGUIER - 21-22 MARCH

Terraces. Bombardment of positions with regular and gas shells commenced at 4:30 AM. The Headquarters is moved again to a bunker fixed on the northeast corner of Le Verguier.

The dugout was on the buried cable route, but by 7 AM all telephone communications with the forward company was lost.

At 10:30 AM Companies A and C were cut off from support by the enemy. A Company's Lance Corporal John Sayer showed incredible resilience for which he later received the Victory Cross.

At 3 PM Pets arrived to take over command and attacks on the village began. Throughout the night Pets leads counterattacks.

On the morning of the 22, only Fort Greasbank and the Battalion Headquarters remain and Pets ordered a cease, against his orders to hold the town.

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Student Roles

- Starting with a student
- Working as a library intern
- Guidance vs. freedom
- Collaboration from the start
Moving Forward

- Developing our goals
- Actually working “from the trenches”
- Making the project better
- Research is truly a process
Controlling the Vocabulary

This entry was posted in Letters and tagged bombing, Christmas, front, Gladys, Katie Paull, letter to mother, post, weapons on May 31, 2016 by Jenna Fleming. Edit
New Territory

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Simply A1

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Field Research & Archival Research (2016)

- Internal grant funded
- France, Belgium, & England
- 100th anniversary of the beginning of the Battle of the Somme
- Visited battlefields, archives, cemeteries, & monuments
- Peirs-specific sites in/near London

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Field Research & Archival Research (2018)

- Crowdfunded
- France & Belgium
- 100th anniversary of the defense of the town of Le Verguier (German Spring Offensive)
- Live broadcasts to classes in Gettysburg & on Facebook Live
- Connected with local people

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Back in the Trenches

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#TeamPeirs Reflections and Evolution

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Thank You!

http://jackpeirs.org // jack@jackpeirs.org // @jackpeirs

Love to all, Jack.