

# MDOCS

JOHN B. MOORE DOCUMENTARY STUDIES COLLABORATIVE

Spring 2015, 1.7



February 6, 2015  
A Bi-weekly Newsletter

## Inaugurating *History Where It Happens* – A Local Historical Event Series

### **Benedict Arnold & Horatio Gates Return to Saratoga Springs**

History Where it Happens, a collaboration between MDOCS and community partners to highlight and capture insights of those passionate about telling Saratoga stories, got its start on Sunday, January 25. Excerpts from events and interviews will become part of the Skidmore Saratoga Memory Project.

It was standing room only on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of the Northshire Bookstore as community members from school children to seniors turned out for a passionate debate between Horatio Gates and Benedict Arnold, introduced by Rachel Person, a history buff and the store's Event & Community Outreach Coordinator.

Although neither Eric Schnitzer nor

Joe Craig dressed the part, the Saratoga National Park rangers embodied the two historical figures, bringing to life a debate that has divided revolutionary war buffs for over 200 years: Who is the real hero of the Battles of Saratoga? Was it Horatio Gates, commander of the American militia, or was it the famed Benedict Arnold? With words, quotes from documents, and a lively patter, each ranger made a good case.

The presentation did not resolve this now-centuries long debate, first heard in the halls of the Continental Congress, but the park rangers engaged the larger Saratoga community in a field that has been largely dominated by academics. Eric and Joe, whose collective knowledge of the American Revolution approaches the encyclopedic, articulated and parsed the details of the debate with lively

examples, emphasizing accessibility for a public that included middle-schoolers taking notes.

Eric outlined the eighteenth-century revolutionary army's complex promotional system to demonstrate why Arnold was distraught after failing to receive official recognition. But park rangers Eric and Joe understood that Arnold and Gates' individual characters created the tension and determined their courses of the action. First and foremost, both military men were ambitious, and incited to some not-so-gentlemanly behavior. Gates's formal letter to Congress detailing the battle conspicuously failed to mention Arnold's commendable role. Even more outrageous, Arnold's perceived neglect and disrespect later led him to betray the cause for which he had fought so valiantly. Over a riveting hour and a half, Eric and Joe crafted a compelling narrative and debate that blended military, institutional and biographical histories.

After the talk, I sat down with Eric and Joe to discuss their approach to history, with Stephen McCann (Biology), expertly recording ...→

### Inside This Issue:

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- **New for Summer 2015:** The Skidmore Storyteller's Institute
- **Class, Dinner & a Movie** Filmmakers Salim Amin & Chip Duncan
- **Documentarians on Campus:** Vickie Riley, Campus Videographer

**Plus:** Dates & Events for Spring 2015

the story. Saratoga Springs, they told me, is one of the best places to be a public historian. The Battle of Saratoga remains one of *the* most important battles of the modern era, with global consequences worth highlighting. Britain's loss broke the first link in dismantling the chain of British Empire and initiated a long relationship with France. Before renaming French fries "freedom fries," the rangers maintained, Americans should have remembered: 1. there would be no America to protect without French intervention, and 2. France (and its colony, Haiti), shared many ideals when their revolutions began a few decades later.

Joe and Eric are moved to do this sort of work by a love of sharing history stories and an effort to

combat historical inaccuracy. At Saratoga Northshire Bookstore, Eric and Joe confronted the prevailing view that Benedict Arnold is the de facto hero of the Battles of Saratoga. Their larger project, however, is not only to inform the public about Saratoga Springs but to bridge the divide between academic and public history. If anyone can make headway in that daunting task, it's people like Joe and Eric whose passions for history are absolutely infectious.

-- Ben Polsky (History), '15

*Stay tuned for upcoming History*

Where it Happens events:

MARCH 25: Barnes & Noble

Bookstore, Slate Valley Museum

APRIL 14: Saratoga Springs History

Museum, Mapping Saratoga

Springs Exhibit



## Director's Note

Despite the snow, MDOCS' spring has sprung! Our first week of the semester started with a trifecta (if you'll pardon the racing lingo): a History Where it Happens student-led interview that opens new community connections and student opportunities for Skidmore student documentarians (p. 1); class, dinner and a movie with photographers and filmmakers Salim Amin and Chip Duncan (p 3), and the first workshop on archive, multimedia and storytelling by Jocelyn Arem, '94, with energetic participation of faculty, staff and community partners. Nicky Tavares, the Project VIS MDOCS/Visual literacy fellow joined us this week. We look forward to drawing on her talents, ideas and vision in planning the Storytellers' Institute, whose cohort of student, faculty and professional documentarians will be selected later this month.

LI 113, the MDOCS/Vis lab, also starts off with a roar, as talented student documentarians and designers, begin offering weekly workshops. Look for Nicky's Storyboarding workshop later this spring, and Alex Chaucer's 2-part Digital Map Storytelling workshops later this month! Hope to see you here! In the meantime, stay warm with our first spring newsletter and a new team, headed by editor Maggie Clark (History). — J. Dym

## MDOCS FEBRUARY HIGHLIGHTS

### February 12

**Project Vis/ MDOCS present:**

Nicky Tavares, Mellon Fellow  
Presentation & welcome reception  
5:00-6:30pm, LI 113



### February 18



**John Beckman, '94  
Experiential Storytelling &  
Science Exhibitions**

With Mary Odekon (Physics)  
& Ray Giguere (Chemistry)  
5:30pm, Emerson Auditorium

## LI 113 WORKSHOPS

Student led! Student approved!

Feb 8: Intro to Final Cut Pro X

Feb 15: Using a Go Pro

Feb 26: Into to Sound Recording

March 1: Basics of Poster Design

*Sign up:*

LI113@skidmore.edu

## Storytellers' Institute

Deadline: to apply for five



lively weeks of thought-provoking conversation, work-shopping, and creation

FEBRUARY 6 (Students)

FEBRUARY 13 (Faculty)

**June 1<sup>st</sup> - July 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2015**

For more information, please visit the [MDOCS](#) website.

## Filmmakers Get Down to Business

On January 26, MDOCS kicked off the semester with filmmakers Salim Amin and Chip Duncan, who offered students in Principles of Documentary insights into what it takes to get a documentary film from idea to production to distribution. That evening, they joined students, faculty, and community members for dinner and a movie. Nathalie Cabrera (Sociology, MFS), '17, reports.

The night started out with a dinner at Skidmore's dining hall in a private room tucked away in a corner of D-halls "blue side". As a student assistant to MDOCS/LI 113, I helped the filmmakers and other guests find their way around the dining hall. Not going to lie—I was pretty excited—this little task let me interact with a pair of documentary filmmakers, something I couldn't pass up! Once everyone found their dish of choice, about 15 of us settled down around the table and introduced ourselves.



We were a pretty diverse group of professors, students, a couple of Saratoga Springs residents and friends of MDOCS Jim and Sue Towne, sharing interests in film, Africa and documentary. Our conversations ranged from our backgrounds to current social issues and our favorite films. All in all it was a lively dinner and I was lucky to make a few new connections in the world of documentary.

After dinner we relocated to Zankel, Skidmore's Music Center across campus. Here Jordana Dym, the host and director of MDOCS, and may I also add my boss, gave a brief introduction to the film and filmmakers. Roughly 25 people braved warnings of snowmageddon to watch the film—I know because I took pictures (see above), moving to take in audience and filmmakers. Maybe, one day I'll be able to do the same thing on a bigger scale....

After

introductions, the lights dimmed and the film started. The documentary *Mo & Me* (2006) tells the story of Salim's father Mohamed Amin, a renowned photojournalist who documented crucial and historical events across Africa, including repeated coverage of famine in Ethiopia until the world began to care. To be honest I hadn't heard about Mo, but was mesmerized and impressed to learn about three decades of heartbreaking and inspiring work and its impact on his personal life, relationships, family and friends. I thought the blending of storylines was perfect. Sometimes, documentaries focus on one aspect of a story; *Mo & Me's* angles and storylines added depth & character.



After warm audience applause, Salim and Chip Duncan, who is working on a feature film about Mo, fielded questions which converged on the distant relationship between Salim and his father, and his admiration of his father's work and inspiration. While the film highlights Mo's work, many people, including me, seemed more intrigued about the family relationship. Fittingly, the last of several fairly intimate questions ended the evening. When asked "what would your father think of this film?" Salim replied, "He would probably ask why is it *Mo & Me*? Take out the "Me."

## Documentarians on Campus: Vickie Riley – Director of Videography and Digital Resources

*Over the last week, Vickie Riley has led the collaborative effort to produce a memorial video of former Skidmore first lady, Anne Palamountain. Maggie Clark '15 connected with her to hear about the project.*



In the words of Vickie Riley, video is a team sport. The Anne Palamountain memorial she produced recently is a testament to her statement. She credits Wendy Anthony, Bob Kimmerle and Jordana Dym as essential and declares: "[t]his piece could not have happened in such a short period of time without Pat Wright who knew our library of photos and what we had to work with. After I edited the audio, I could ask her, 'we need something for this part', and she knew where it was or who to call."

And the team *did* complete the memorial in record time. Anne Palamountain, beloved former Skidmore first lady, passed away on January 24 and already the memorial is published to Skidmore's website. Luckily, Riley had a previously recorded interview with Ms. Palamountain to work with, courtesy of documentarian Eileen McAdam and the Skidmore-Saratoga Memory Project (an MDOCS program.) For Riley, the emotion Ms. Palamountain displayed as she told her own story was "crucial" in connecting to viewers. That's because the Skidmore videographer has a strategy for making the most of voice recordings. She listens to the audio in full and notices how she feels, then pulls out the segments that make her feel that way. In emphasizing Ms. Palamountain's passions – her independence and love for her husband and Skidmore – Riley accomplished her goal of honoring a legendary woman.

*Vickie Riley is the Director of Videography and Digital Resources at Skidmore, and holds an MFA from Columbia College Chicago. She showcases Skidmore College through video, film, and multimedia for the web.*

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*Jordana Dym, Eileen McAdam and Anne Palamountain at Skidmore Celebration Weekend, October 18, 2015*

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