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For our first assignment in the second semester of the History Honor Colloquium, Dr. Bell tasked us with finding out as much as we could about the production, circulation, and reception of an 1841 twenty four-page “true-crime” pamphlet entitled *The Narrative and Confessions of Lucretia P. Cannon*. Our class was given a photocopy of *The Narrative* and asked to describe the contents and genre of the pamphlet, to determine which businesses sold it to the public, figure out its cost to buy and produce, its popularity, its audience and intended audience, how and where it was advertised, the number of copies published, printed, and sold, and to out find the pamphlets author and determine, if possible, the author’s other works. This assignment was structured to teach us the difficulties the historian faced in correctly categorizing and analyzing documentary history. Simply by working on this assignment, our class would be offered the opportunity to learn possible methods of documentary research.

Immediately, I realized just how difficult the assignment would be. The photocopied pamphlet revealed little, only the story and two pictures, the names of the authors, and the date and the location of publication were revealed. With only this information, I went to the Libraries Online Catalogue and Research Port to try a few of the keywords found on the pamphlet. In my initial search I found two important leads. First, an article in JSTOR about the life and works of one of the authors of *The Narrative*, E. E. Barclay, and second that Lucretia P. Cannon never existed, but was based on the real-life Delaware kidnapper, Patty Canon. Looking up “Patty Cannon,” I found there were several books that discussed the kidnapper in the Maryland Room at the Hornbake Library, a location I had never been, despite being a History Major and in my Junior year. The Hornbake Library staff was

extremely helpful and took the time to teach me how to order, reserve, and take photos of books and documents. Word spread around the Honors Colloquium of how useful the resources at the Hornbake Library was and how the staff was an enthusiastic ally in our difficult project.

Through secondary sources at Hornbake, I discovered the pamphlets genre, price, method of advertisement, and hints that the pamphlet had in fact been popular for a time, yet I could find no more information than this. I was missing the portion of the paper focused on the cost to produce *The Narrative*, the numbers of copies sold, and definitive proof of the pamphlets popularity. In order to learn more about printing I searched the Catalogue for books on nineteenth century printing and literature, and found the book that would become the main guideline for my paper, *Pillars of Salt, Monuments of Grace* by Daniel Cohen. *Pillars of Salt* provided two important insights. First, it described the evolution of “true-crime” literature in the mid-1800s, which began as true stories and shifted overtime towards fiction. Second *Pillars of Salt* prescribed a formula to determine popularity of any early work of literature, which included examining the documents price, advertisement, which I knew, and number of editions, which I did not know.

To determine the accuracy of these propositions, I used Research Port to access the America’s Historical Newspapers and Newspaper Archive databases to examine newspaper articles dealing with the Patty Cannon case. I found, after extensive examination into the wording, location, and date of the articles on Patty Canon, that Cohen’s analysis of the pattern evolution of “true-crime” literature could be correctly applied to *The Narrative*. To determine the popularity and readership of the pamphlet I enlisted the aid of both my professor, Dr. Bell, and UMD Library Subject Specialist Eric Lindquist. Dr. Bell advised I visit

the Library of Congress to search for the actual pamphlet and Eric Lindquist showed me how to use WorldCat effectively. With his aid, I was able to find out through WorldCat that multiple editions of *The Narrative* had been printed, answering both the question of the production and popularity of the pamphlet. Visiting the Library of Congress also confirmed this information. There, I found both one of the original copies of *The Narrative* and a book on book and pamphlet collecting, which informed me how inexpensive the pamphlet was to produce. I also managed to sit down with a librarian, show him my assignment, and asked him to determine if my findings about the production of pamphlet were correct; and found they were.

After gathering a large number of primary sources, mostly newspaper articles demonstrating the evolution of the Patty Cannon story, and some supporting secondary sources, which focused on evolution of print media in the mid-1800s and information on the real life Patty Cannon, I was prepared to write my paper. I wanted the focus to be on primary source research in order to back up idea that Cohen's analysis could in fact be attributed to *The Narrative*. Secondary sources would therefore provide the structure of my argument, while primary sources will fill the body of the essay. I believe this formulation created a successful and convincing thesis that also answered all the assignment's questions.

The research and writing process for this assignment was extremely influential on the course of my academic career. The research process for this assignment taught me to respect the difficulty of proper documentary history, gave me the opportunity to become adepts in searching Catalogue, WorldCat, America's Historical Newspapers, Newspaper Archives, and other databases, and allowed me to become accustomed to the University's

library system and its employees. I have used the lessons learned from this experience in each of my following assignments, and now that I am writing my honors thesis, I continue to benefit from the lessons learned last spring. After graduation, I will take these research skills to a job, and then to graduate school in Law, History, or International Relations.

I cannot find much I would like to change about the University Libraries. If I could change something it would be that more classes in the University should spend at least one lesson on using the resources afforded by the Library. Research is an important skill that everyone, regardless of major, should learn. A one-credit class could also be offered on library research methods and skills. I believe this would be beneficial to students of several majors. I feel if more students were taught how to use the Library, undergraduate research would increase and improve.