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Professor M. Houston Johnson
Virginia Military Institute
Department of History
Lexington, VA 24450

Greetings Professor Johnson and Members of the Search Committee,

Please accept this letter and accompanying documents as an expression of my sincere interest in the tenure-track position of Assistant Professor of United States History at the Virginia Military Institute. With a Ph.D. in History from the University of Missouri, conferred in June 2024, and graduate-level certifications in Geographic Information Science and Museum Studies, I bring a multidisciplinary approach to my research and teaching. My academic, work, and service background, coupled with my specialization in Colonial, Early American, and Atlantic History, particularly transatlantic communication, knowledge production, and economic networks, aligns closely with VMI's mission to offer a liberal arts education with a global perspective.

My research agenda centers on the economic, social, and intellectual networks that shaped the Colonial and Early Republic. My dissertation, "Reciprocities Market: John Bartram's 18th-Century Botanical Subscription Service and the Seeds of Independence," explores deep-seeded interdependencies between local knowledge production, transatlantic communication networks, and economic transformations throughout the 18th and 19th centuries. This work contributes to the fields of economic and intellectual history by analyzing the emergence of market and consumer revolutions through land use, material exchange, and scientific inquiry. Demonstrated through social network analysis alongside traditional historical methodologies, I argue that colonials not only utilized consumption as a means of asserting independence, but that they embraced the mechanisms of the market. I pull the timeline of the market revolution forward to argue for their concurrent materialization. This year, in my position as a postdoctoral fellow within the University of Missouri history department, I will complete my book proposal and secure a publisher as I complete the final chapter, which centers the economic and scientific motivations behind John and William Bartram's discourse and observations regarding Indigenous land use and praxis.

In terms of teaching, my eight years of teaching at various institutions, from Missouri's flagship university with a 30,000-student body population to McKendree University, a private liberal arts college, comparable in size to VMI. Since 2019, as an adjunct faculty member at McKendree, I have developed a broad range of courses to classes ranging from eight to twenty-five students, in topics ranging from

introductory U.S. History and Geography to specialized writing intensive upper-division courses, such as exploring the development of the nation state across Early Modern Europe. My courses employ a middling-out and bottom-up approach that centers material culture alongside political economy and diverse actor-agents. I ground students with weekly readings, semester-long individual and collaborative assessments alongside frequent interactions with primary sources and diverse media elements like historic maps, music, journals, and digital exhibitions. This teaching method privileges varied and diverse narratives and histories and encourages critical engagement with historical narratives to better understand the complex interplay across a diverse demographic, physical, and intellectual landscape.

In addition to my teaching credentials, I am committed to maintaining an active scholarly agenda. My strong external funding record and publication background likewise make me a strong candidate for this position. My research has been well supported through generous residential fellowships at the Huntington Library, American Philosophical Society, Florida Atlantic University, and the Winterthur Museum, Garden, and Library. I have a similarly proven record as a producer, through the publication of a co-annotated book project *Legends of Mexico* (2019), an award-winning article in Lindenwood University's journal *The Confluence* (2021), and contributions to high school and undergraduate pedagogical development through longstanding projects with Bedford Freeman and Worth (McMillan), creating testing and broader assessment content for the first and second editions of the AP U.S. History textbook, *Fabric of a Nation*. These combined experiences demonstrate a deep commitment to research excellence as much as innovative teaching practices.

Such experience, however, extends beyond the classroom. As a public servant, I worked as an archivist technician with the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, interned and volunteered as a docent for a National Landmark and Historic House Museum, and led teams of undergraduate and graduate students for a countywide digital archive and encyclopedia, *Madison Historical*. Since 2019, I have served as an executive board member of the Historic Preservation Commission in O'Fallon, Illinois, a city of 35,000 residents. My service and labor reflect a broad scope of applied knowledge and a strong commitment to community as much as academia. I hope to bring my commitment to historic and local preservation and service to Lexington and its surrounding communities.

I am particularly drawn to VMI's unique mission to combine military exactitude with a rigorous liberal arts education, recognizing the important role that history and the humanities more broadly plays in cultivating critical thinking and leadership. I am eager to bring my multidisciplinary approach, teaching experience, and scholarly expertise to VMI, contributing to its academic excellence, diversity, and public-service goals. Thank you for considering my application for this position. I welcome any questions and look forward to the opportunity to discuss how my experience, research, and teaching philosophy align with the goals of the Virginia Military Institute.

Sincerely,

Shannan Catherine Mason