Appendix 12.3

OpenValley Community Partnerships
Ken Cooper and Elizabeth Argentieri

OpenValley is a digital humanities project that uses a spatially defined criterion—roughly, the Genesee Valley region—as the basis for creating an archive of digitized primary documents and scholarly work. It has an explicitly ecological focus and therefore may differ somewhat from other historical archives in terms of emphasis, interpretation, and even advocacy. An important aspect of our project is SUNY Geneseo students working in partnership with area organizations toward mutually beneficial ends: students gain hands-on experience with local places and their histories; organizations develop new programming and foster the next generation of caretakers.

Guidelines for Partner Organizations

- Work with *OpenValley* coordinators to frame a project that's clearly defined in terms of materials, timeline, and intended outcome. A working group of four to five students can accomplish some things during an academic semester but not others. There will be "quality control" checkpoints along the way to ensure the final work is suitable for public presentation.
- Consider an undertaking that combines basic archival work and original student analysis. Routine clerical tasks or simply duplicating some existing display into a web exhibit may limit the possibilities; think of the opportunity as a (very small) barn raising.
- Specify the form(s) in which the final work will be delivered. Will students provide research for an upcoming exhibit? Will they record oral histories? Will they create digital files of scanned documents or recorded interviews? Will they create an embeddable Story Map for your website?
- Clarify the usage rights of materials. *OpenValley* is an academic, noncommercial website and as such exists to promote access; digital items and student-created exhibits on its website will be accessible to the public. If

there are restrictions on any particular documents, please consult with coordinators as to arrangements that will be satisfactory for both organizations.

- Arrange an initial group meeting. It's helpful for students to learn about your organization's history and mission, to meet staff or volunteers, and perhaps even have a first look at the materials with which they'll be working.
- This project may be a student's first paraprofessional experience with a nonprofit organization, so clear guidelines are very useful: preferred contact and best means of communication; amount of prior notice for student visits; procedures for handling materials; means for feedback on student work; appropriate use of devices; etc.

Guidelines for Students

- While your work with this organization isn't a formal internship, it will be most productive if you approach it as field *work*, not a field *trip*. You'll have the satisfaction of knowing that your contributions will be received by a public audience; expectations are higher because this isn't simply a class assignment.
- During your initial visit, bring a notebook. Write down relevant details concerning the project and its logistics, the names and contact information of people with whom you'll be working, and any questions you might have. It's fine to ask for clarification because this will prevent confusion later on.
- Lead times for your project are longer than for a typical college essay. Please be proactive and professional in setting up visits to your partner organization. The various deadlines on our course syllabus are to ensure adequate time for research, analysis, mapping, writing, feedback, and revision.
- *OpenValley*'s emphasis is on the use of *primary* documents, along with your interpretation of those documents for time-present environmental concerns; you should work from the specific to the general (and not vice versa). The aim of historical specificity is to liberate readers from the tyranny of what

they already know; people haven't "always" lived as we do.

- You're not in competition for a limited supply of good grades. This mindset is extremely corrosive to our project, which depends upon respect for the work of all group members and active collaboration to bring out their best.

OpenValley Information

Website: openvalley.org

Project Coordinators:

- Ken Cooper, Dept. of English, SUNY Geneseo (cooper@geneseo.edu)
- Elizabeth Argentieri, Milne Library, SUNY Geneseo (argente@geneseo.edu)