



"One Day in May"

(May 15, 2020)

Name: Sarah McNair Vosmeier

Class Year:

Connection to the College (student? faculty? alum? friend of the College?): Faculty/staff

Describe your day today -- did you go out? what did you do for fun? did you cook or eat anything special? did you do work or chores? who did you spend time with?

When I contemplate my experience with Covid-19, my heart breaks for all the people in circumstances more difficult than mine. I worry about my students and the College and my loved ones in harm's way, but I know how fortunate I am to be able to work from home in comfortable surroundings.

In terms of the concrete details of everyday life, food comes to mind most readily. The first time I went to the grocery store after the College announced that on-campus classes were ending, I was simply astonished to see all the empty shelves. I expect stores to sell out of staples before snowstorms or other weather emergencies, but I'd never seen whole rows of empty shelves at a big store like Walmart. It was unnerving – as if I'd suddenly found myself in some strange alternate reality. Since then, things have gotten better, but pandemic grocery shopping is always a challenge as there are always empty shelves and always one or two items from our list that we can't buy. The day my husband brought home a bag of bread flour seemed like a major victory and cause for celebration.

I spent part of my day today figuring out how to convey Winfield Scott Smith's experiences on May 15, 1918. I'd found a small newspaper notice that told me that he'd taken a train out of Madison that morning, but I had to decide how to flesh out the few details the article provided. I'd hoped to find a photo of him, but pandemic limitations meant I couldn't use the archives to find one. I eventually decided to illustrate the story with a photo of the train station instead, which I found at a National Parks Service website. With more background from online sources provided by the Jefferson County Historical Society and the HC Archives, I could get a reasonable picture of his experiences that day. I posted the story on Facebook and on our project webpage to give people a sense of the kinds of things future historians might want to know.

I also took a walk on campus with my camera to try to capture what today looks like. The campus is very quiet now. A few "essential workers" are around – mowing grass and working on various construction projects, making safety patrols, and providing meals for the few students still here. But it's disconcerting to see so many empty parking spaces and to hear so few human-made sounds. I'm not sure if the squirrels and birds care that's everyone's gone, but -- for what it's worth -- bluebirds have been sighted closer to the center of campus than usual. It would be nice if the "bluebirds of happiness" were some kind of harbinger of good things to come.

The "One Day in May" project preserves the everyday experiences of Hanoverians on an ordinary spring day (in this case, May 15, 2020). The Submitter has consented to its being made available to library users, and granted Hanover College a nonexclusive, perpetual, royalty free license to use, duplicate and distribute it.

Planned construction continues on campus, even when campus offices and classrooms are closed.



The "One Day in May" project preserves the everyday experiences of Hanoverians on an ordinary spring day (in this case, May 15, 2020). The Submitter has consented to its being made available to library users, and granted Hanover College a nonexclusive, perpetual, royalty free license to use, duplicate and distribute it.

Most college employees are working from home, but Debbie Kroger and the rest of the safety staff are continuing their regular shifts, opening doors for the construction workers and patrolling the campus as usual.



Some students left in a hurry-- these shoes are waiting patiently for their owner to return.



The "One Day in May" project preserves the everyday experiences of Hanoverians on an ordinary spring day (in this case, May 15, 2020). The Submitter has consented to its being made available to library users, and granted Hanover College a nonexclusive, perpetual, royalty free license to use, duplicate and distribute it.

What do you remember best about being on campus in May of other years?

Right now, when I think about previous Mays at Hanover, Commencement comes most readily to mind. It's often hot for the graduation ceremony – certainly for those of us wearing heavy black robes, but even for the parents and family members in summery dresses and shirt sleeves. And it's always emotional. I remember a colleague telling me long ago that, when you've been here long enough that the graduates are people you had in class as first-years, that's when you have to remember to put kleenex in your pocket before leaving the house for Commencement.

What seems so odd in retrospect is the physical manifestations of emotion. The faculty sit very close together – we're literally shoulder to shoulder as we watch students walk across the stage. We're so close that I can hear the non-verbal expressions of pride or whispered commentary all along our rows. And when the ceremony is over, I feel like I'm wading through a sea of enthusiasm. Hundreds of people mill around, shaking hands, patting backs, conversing enthusiastically, giving hugs, and squeezing around others doing the same. I wonder when we'll see that scene again. . . .

About One Day in May –

I got the idea for our "One Day in May" project from "Mass Observation," an organization founded in England in 1937. The initial Mass Observation team intended to study everyday English life to create an "anthropology of ourselves," and one of their first projects was to collect one-day diaries from people across the United Kingdom for May 12, 1937 (which was the coronation day for George VI). After the University of Sussex Archives became the custodian of the Mass Observation papers and data, they revived some of their projects, including the practice of collecting one-day diaries for May 12 of every year. That kind of project seemed like a good fit for Hanover College, both because it would capture the way Hanoverians were experiencing the coronavirus pandemic in 2020 and because it would capture the everyday experiences of May Term in more ordinary times.

The "One Day in May" project preserves the everyday experiences of Hanoverians on an ordinary spring day (in this case, May 15, 2020). The Submitter has consented to its being made available to library users, and granted Hanover College a nonexclusive, perpetual, royalty free license to use, duplicate and distribute it.