

Christian Overland: Help record the history of the COVID-19 pandemic as it happens

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Big history is happening.

History is shaped by, transformative moments. Throughout time and place, humankind has encountered many challenges, and the struggle to overcome these challenges reshapes the world as we know it. We know this by looking back at the stories of our ancestors, documented in their own words through, letters, journals, photographs, music and more. Their words provide guidance, comfort and perspective as we take on our own challenges.

As the premier storyteller and collector of Wisconsin history, the Society has a long history of documenting these big moments. In 1861, Society founder Lyman Draper asked soldiers stationed at Camp Randall in Madison, Wisconsin to help document the Civil War by keeping a diary. After the war, those diaries were mailed back to the Society, where today they are regarded as one of the most valuable collections in our archives.

This simple act of recording daily thoughts not only documented the events of the war but provided an intimate and captivating window into the experience as it was happening. Today, more than 150 years later, people from all over the world use these journals to understand the impact of the Civil War on the local community, the state and the world.

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We are living in a transformative moment today battling COVID-19, a moment that historians will analyze and write about for decades to come. As we look to history

for guidance during this time, studying moments such as the 1918 influenza pandemic, we must also think about the future. Decades from now, a similar challenge may face society, and they will turn to us, today, in this moment, for guidance.

Now it's your turn to record history as its happening. The Society has launched a COVID-19 journal campaign to collect the stories of what life is like, firsthand, for citizens going through the COVID-19 pandemic.

Every story is important. The Society is seeking individuals and organizations from all walks of life, different cultures, as well as different ages to participate and document their daily life for the next 30, 60 or 90 days.

The journals can be written, recorded, photographed or expressed through artwork. How people document their journal is up to them. Later in the year, the Society will reach back out to participants with information on how to donate their journal to the Society archives.

Our mission from the beginning has been to collect, preserve and share stories, and we have an opportunity to live that mission by sharing your voice in time so that future generations will understand first-hand stories of perseverance, ingenuity and the courageous efforts of many who worked together to keep us safe and healthy during this pandemic.

Anyone interested in participating in this journal project can sign up through the Society's website. For information on the project and how you can participate visit wisconsinhistory.org/journalproject.

Countless stories will emerge from this unique moment in history. Know for certain that the Wisconsin Historical Society will collect and preserve our collective stories of the pandemic so that future generations can learn from our experience. We look forward to creating the future of history with you.