



Sister City Association of Bloomington-Normal

Vladimir
Canterbury

Communicator

Fall 2021



President's Message by Dave Thomas

President's Message

I write this message as I come to the conclusion of my fourth year as President of the VCSCA. As I reflect upon my four years, I look back at all of the good things that have happened and all we accomplished as an Association. We hosted several Open World and university exchanges. We had two Russian students spend a year here as part of high school exchanges. We hosted a virtual alumni reunion and a virtual presentation on the Quakers in Illinois. We also celebrated our 30th anniversary and raised substantial funds that have supported the efforts of our Association. We strengthened our university exchanges and had the legislature of the State of Illinois read a proclamation of support for the connection between Illinois State University and Vladimir State University on the floor of the House. None of this would have been possible without the dedicated work of board members and association volunteers.

We have also had a regular turnover of board members during my tenure. That's both natural and healthy to make sure we stay innovative and include more members of our community in the management of our Association. We are always in the need of additional board members and officers, so if you have ever had an inclination to join in, please let us know. I encourage all of you to become involved in the association and continue to make it an important part of our community.

In the upcoming year, we plan on renewing our OW exchanges and continue to strengthen our relationships with our sister cities. We will have a joint board meeting

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with the Vladimir Association and our group. Read the columns in this newsletter to learn more about what we have accomplished and what we are planning in the future.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve as your President. I hope you continue to support the VCSCA and its new President.

2021 Annual VCSCA General Member Meeting

On the first Thursday in November, we traditionally host our Annual VCSCA Members General Meeting. During this meeting, we usually have a guest speaker, elect new officers, appoint new board members, and conduct our yearly business including receiving reports on our accomplishments, budget, plans, etc. In most cases, this meeting has been conducted in person. However, last year and this year, we have been forced to operate under COVID-19 restrictions/concerns and run our Annual Meeting virtually.

On Thursday, November 4th at 7:00 pm, we will host our 2021 Annual VCSCA Members General Meeting. This meeting will take place on Zoom. For security reasons, you must contact me via email at dqthoma@ilstu.edu to receive the zoom link. We have invited new Bloomington Mayor, Mboka Mwilambwe, to join us so we can introduce him to the VCSCA and get to know him better.

Our guest speaker for the Meeting will be Dr. Karen Dennis. Karen performed a Fulbright Scholar Exchange with Vladimir State University during the winter of 2020. Karen will be speaking about her experience and the research she has conducted as part of the exchange. We hope you can all join us and participate in this exciting event. Please let me know if you have any questions.

Quakers in Central Illinois

On August 26 Bill Kemp, Librarian from the McLean County Museum of History, presented a very enjoyable and informative talk about Quakers in Central Illinois. Bill made history come alive as he talked about the role of Quakers in the early history of our area and showed maps and photographs from the archives of the museum. The presentation was given via Zoom to an audience that included members of our Vladimir Canterbury Sister City Association, sister city colleagues from Vladimir (Marina and Tatyana Semenova) and Canterbury (Linda Quinn, George Conyne, and John Kemp) as well as local members of the Quaker community and a few from farther away including Thomas Hamm from Earlham College in Indiana who is one of the world's foremost authorities on Quaker history.

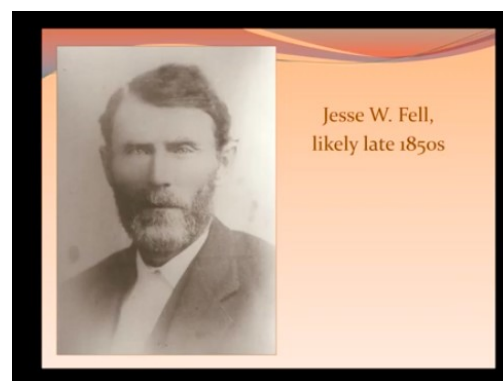
The present-day ghost town of Benjaminville (now Holder — just a few miles east of Bloomington), was once home to the largest Quaker community east of the Mississippi River. The community began 1856 and a Meeting House and Cemetery were constructed in 1859. The Quaker Meeting House that stands today replaced the earlier Meeting House and was built in 1874. The building is on the U.S. National Register of Historic Places.

In addition to the town of Benjaminville, Bill talked about the influence of Quaker values on Jesse Fell and other early settlers of our area including Elizabeth Edwards Coale, Hester Vernon Brown (the future Mrs. Jesse Fell), the Benjamin Family, and Captain Edward J. Lewis. Although born into a Quaker family, Captain Lewis joined the 33rd Illinois Infantry Regiment during the Civil War to oppose slavery.

In addition to what we all learned from Bill's engaging talk, it was a pleasure to visit with our sister city friends from Canterbury and Vladimir. While COVID-19 is keeping us apart physically, it's good to continue to share experiences via Zoom.

Inspiration for this talk came from a series of lectures given by Canterbury historians to which our membership was invited. We look forward to more opportunities like this one to engage with one another.

A link to Bill's talk can be found on the VCSCA Facebook page or by going to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YnOxtw3Wc4o>



Update on the US-Russia Medical Project

I wanted to give everyone an update on our US-Russia exchange project working on a COVID response for COVID-19.

The first step was selecting a vulnerable population. It was interesting uncovering the differences in the countries in terms of regulations and social norms. We found it difficult to select one population for both teams. The Russian team selected indigenous communities in remote areas of Siberia. The US team selected the unsheltered homeless in three US cities. We each came up with a tool kit to distribute. The tool kits include information on staying healthy, information on COVID-19, and supplies to stay healthy. The indigenous communities made homemade masks with cultural designs. They are beautiful.

We also focused on exchanging knowledge and cultural information. My public health nursing class created presentations on community development for the Russian team. They utilized knowledge learned in class to assist the volunteers in working with communities. The Russian team sent videos from the indigenous communities on traditional medicine. Then, my students watched the videos and wrote reflections to send back to the indigenous communities.

Right now, each team is distributing the toolkits to the populations. We also have a plan in place to evaluate the effects of our program.

The original plan was to meet in Russia. As of this writing, we may meet in Washington, DC. As a group. However, that remains to be seen.

It has been a rewarding learning experience! I have enjoyed working with the team members.

Amy Funk

Covid-19 in Canterbury

On 19 July our government relaxed most of the Covid restrictions in England. Weddings and funerals, football matches and festivals can all take place much as what we once considered normal. Masks are optional in most public spaces, but many individual shops and premises have chosen to require them for entry. I, for one, though, am disappointed that they are not mandatory on local buses. However... over 30,000 new cases are being reported every day, although most aren't serious. People are still dying of the disease, despite the new treatments available and the highly successful vaccination campaign. 90% of adults over the age of 16 have had at least one jab, with almost 80% now double-jabbed and feeling more confident. Young people, though, are sometimes choosing not to take up the

offer of a vaccination, such that new cases are largely amongst the younger cohort. We're still debating the proposed moves to vaccinate school-children and to administer vaccine boosters to the elderly this autumn. The delta-variant is a nasty beast and even some doubly-vaccinated friends have recently fallen ill with Covid – including some members of Canterbury Three Cities Association. Our National Health Service, which bore the brunt of the pandemic in its worst stages, has also suffered badly. Medical personnel are exhausted and millions of people are waiting far longer than usual for appointments and surgery. The number of people with so-called long-Covid is huge (including my sister, who contracted Covid 18 months ago).

The economy has taken quite a blow, although job vacancies are astonishingly high. The paradox is that, although restaurants have opened up again, there are not enough people available to staff them, imposing an unnecessary brake on recovery. The entertainment and travel industries have suffered badly, too. And yet – vaccinations have enabled the government to open our borders just a crack, so that the determined amongst us can now travel abroad to a small selection of countries, if not yet to the United States.

On a personal note, I have lost three friends during the pandemic. Two – one a longstanding Russian friend – entered hospital for different reasons and came home infected with Covid. The third was a friend and colleague from Kyrgyzstan, who helped me considerably with my research in Central Asia. She was one of the majority in that country who have yet to see a vaccine.

As autumn approaches, there are concerns in some quarters about a potential increase in cases as children go back to school and students to university. Life will not be back to pre-pandemic normal perhaps for ever. We've all learnt a lot – new hygiene methods, new vocabulary, a new reliance on digital communication, and a new appreciation for mundane activities and the family life we will never again take for granted.

Vicky Davis

Alisa Skotnikova

**Student of Linguistics, Vladimir State University,
Street Art**

If you see a curse word written somewhere on a wall – it's vandalism. If you see it, written in some absolutely unreadable style – it's graffiti. If you see an intricate painting with fantom silhouettes of famous people and geometry in Picasso style and you can't really say what they had in mind drawing it – it's street art. Just joking! But well, the point is: street art is more complex than just writing or drawing on the walls, it's about feelings, emotions, experience and ideas. And let's give heed to the word «street», because such artworks are not just in the streets, they are gently and carefully placed in the urban landscape.

In Russia, street art has been on the streets for about 15 years. The so called centre of Russian street art is Yekaterinburg and Saint Petersburg where the first museum of street art in the world is located (highly recommend to visit, tours in English available). My favorite piece of art there is the work by Kirill Kto with several phrases, including «It will always be better, than it was» and «Sometimes – yes, but sometimes – just a real mess». The work is devoted to Kirill's departed friend and makes me hope for the better and think about the transience of life. To tell the truth, outside the museum, there is the constant «war» between the municipal workers and artists; hundreds of paintings are covered over, but thousands of them appear again and survive.

paint their works all over the city walls. They (artists, not walls) made several murals (huge artwork covering nearly the whole wall) and also painted some specially made concrete cubes near the local food market. Non-artists could participate as well, listening to several lections about street art and trying their hand at drawing. For me, arranging this festival is a great step forward in declaring street art as a real art, not just an act of the vandalism, as many people think. I personally really enjoy watching fresh artworks in the streets and will always pray for the fate of Russian street art to be «always better, than it was».



Our city, Vladimir, doesn't stand aside, more and more paintings appear here and there. Moreover, this summer the city has held the «Zag festival» (you can check out their intagram profile <https://www.instagram.com/33zagfest>), which enabled artists to

Oksana Seliverstova - About Vladimir

Associate Professor, Department of Foreign Languages for professional Communication, Vladimir State University

Here comes September. Summer has flown by in the blink of an eye, but just like every summer, it was special in its own way and has left its warmth in our memories.

The very special Olympics 2020 held in fact in 2021 kept us in suspense since 11 sportsmen from Vladimir were part of the Olympic team. Although it has no direct bearing on me personally, it gives one a touch of pride and a sense of belonging. Our artistic gymnast Artur Dalaloyan was part of the teams who won the Olympic gold and Angelina Melnikova, an artistic gymnast representing the cities of Voronezh and Vladimir, has become an all-around and floor exercise bronze medalist and a team all-round gold medalist; Angelina Shkatova, a group rhythmic gymnast has brought us a silver Olympic medal. It's great that despite all the controversy at the challenging time we're going through, international events survive and carry on bringing together people and nations.

A local international event I was directly involved in was smaller in scale, but undoubtedly not in its meaning. It was International Youth Forum organized by the NGO Vladimir Euroclub and supported and co-funded by The Presidential Grant Foundation. It brought together young people from twin-cities of Vladimir across Europe and its partner-cities from Russia's distant regions, first for a series of online discussions and creative projects, and finally for a face-to-face meeting in Vladimir in August 26-29. It was a busy but fantastic time with workshops, discussions, tours, a joint work of street art and a festival with music and dance. Truth be told, not all intended participants were able to make it to the Vladimir part of the forum due to covid-related reasons, but the online part was a great value in itself, and those who came made the forum an unforgettable event.

I wholeheartedly hope that the new academic year will give rise to new initiatives, new ideas and projects to build up and strengthen people-to-people ties across the world! United we stand...

Nothing Ever Goes As Planned - Fulbright Experience Cut Short

There's a song with this title by the music group Styx that always come to my mind when I travel to Vladimir. I want to make sure and state emphatically that this is not a bad thing, it just seems no matter what plans I make and prepare for ahead of time, well, they never go quite as planned!

I was honored to have received a Fulbright Scholarship to teach at Vladimir State University (VSU) in the Spring, 2020 semester. This was a dream that I had been working towards for years, and once I received notification that I had been selected I worked and prepared endlessly so that my Fulbright experience would be its best possible experience. I prepared lectures and research materials, purchased equipment to be shipped to the embassy in Moscow, worked with professor friends at VSU to arrange my classes and students, planned for housing and all the necessary details that were required for a six month stay. What I had failed to prepare for, though, was a pandemic.

When the US State Department issued a Level 4 travel advisory due to the pandemic in March of 2020, all Fulbright recipients were told their work was completed and they were to return home. As you can imagine, this was heartbreaking. Yet, true to my history of travels to Vladimir, while my trip did not go as planned, it was still incredibly great, and opportunities came out of it all that I could not have planned for.

I am honored again to be able to share my story with you at the 2021 VCSCA Annual Meeting in November. I will tell you a little bit about my Fulbright experience, show you some pictures of the city and people I interacted with, and share with you the incredible opportunities and blessings that happened because of it all. I look forward to seeing you there!

Karen Dennis

Changes to the Open World Program

Many of you are familiar with our Open World Exchanges over the years. We've hosted 9 Open World exchanges including hosting close to 50 Russian visitors since 2002. Our last one was in 2019. These exchanges have focused on everything from Agriculture, to Medicine, to Education, to Government, to Culture and beyond. In 2020, we had planned to host an exchange on Music/Theater. Sadly, that exchange was postponed due to COVID-19.

We have been informed that the Open World Program is in the process of undergoing a change. This will not be the first change to the Program. Open World started in 1999 as the Russian Leadership Program. The Head Librarian of the Library of Congress, and a noted Russia historian, played a pivotal role in getting Congress to approve funding the Russian Leadership Program to assist with strengthening the relationship between the US and Russia. At one point, the Open World Program supported the exchange of over 2,000 Russian visitors per year. In 2004, it expanded to other countries (mainly eastern European) besides Russia.

Congress has decided it wants to reorganize the Open World Program by making it one branch under a new Congressional Office for International Leadership (COIL). The new organization will act as a support agency for Congress. The reason for the change is to make ties to Congress more apparent and because it will open up OW to other programs at the request of Congress. The House and Senate subcommittees have not officially changed the name yet (expected by the end of September), but Jane Sargus, the director, has been approved to use it now. The program goals have not changed, just expanded. Their staff resources are expanding, for example. There are now pilot programs in other countries, such as those in Eastern Europe, and others in Egypt and Turkey. There will be an online COIL Resource Center for Readers. Alumni, Peace Corps Volunteers, and others will have access. It will teach topics such as business and government. In response to the name change and mission expansion, they will redo the host handbook later this year. In 2022, COIL/Open World will resume in-person programming. OW will also continue to expand its virtual footprint by making more opportunities for virtual exchanges to take place. COIL will also seek to find additional funding sources as directed by Congress. Currently COIL is a small part of the budget included in an appropriations category with the Capitol Police and the Library of Congress.

We have tentatively agreed to re-plan and host the music/theater exchange which was postponed by COVID-

19 for October of 2022. Due to Covid, there will be some changes in the program (requirement of vaccination and testing negative prior to travel).

In addition, there are other obstacles to overcome. The current relationship between the US and Russia may be the worst it's ever been, including during the Cold War. There are some new difficulties with travel to and from Russia. OW delegates must go to a third country to obtain US visas. Right now, that country is Albania. The logistics of getting Russian delegates to Albania to apply for US visas need to be worked out. For US travelers to Russia, there are two new obstacles: 1) the Russian Law on Foreign Agents – anyone can be accused of being a foreign agent, harassed, and imprisoned. This has happened to some American citizens, business people and university exchange visitors. Combined with the fact the US Consulate in Moscow has been gutted of staff (the US relies on locals at most Embassies around the world to assist with Consular service like visas and the Russian government has now made it impossible for Russian citizens to work at the US Consul), any assistance from US Government would be limited if arrested under this law (or for any other reason). 2) Because of this and the general political tensions between the countries, the US State Department has raised travel to Russia to level 4 status – Do Not Travel!

While these obstacles make international travel more difficult, they also point to the need to continue our Sister City efforts. Person-to-Person diplomacy is the best way to keep our peoples connected and to show how we are more alike than different.

Nomination Committee Report 2021

New Board Members

Anita Carney
Adam Fox
Dan Jaster
Carol Kerestes
Adrienne Huffman
Kate Rybakova
Khrystyna Sanborn
Michael Sulzberger

President - Margaret Ann Hayden

Vice President - Elaine Cousins

Secretary - Carol Kerestes

Treasurer - Bob Kerestes

Leaving the board

Amy Funk
Joe Grabill
Hannah Johnson
Desiree Quizon-Colquitt
Dave Thomas
Wendy Woith



Marina Semenova

Vladimir-Canterbury-Bloomington/
Normal Sister Cities Association Chair

How wonderful that we live in the Age of Digital Technologies! In spite of inability to travel and meet in-person due to COVID-19 limitations, we are able to stay connected with our Sister Cities partners via the Internet. Our on-line cooperation in spring-summer 2021 was successful and beneficial.

On April 2, "Autism Awareness Day" Vladimir and Bloomington-Normal Sister Cities Associations organized "Museum Visitors with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Best Practices and Perspectives" Zoom meeting. Hannah Johnson, McLean County Museum of History Director of Youth and Family Education, Vladimir-Canterbury Sister Cities Association of Bloomington-Normal Board member, moderated the meeting and convened a wonderful team of professionals: specialists from the McLean County Museum of History, Normal Public Library, Children's Discovery Museum and Autism McLean. Vladimir was represented by employees of the Vladimir-Suzdal Museum Reserve, Head of Vladimir-Suzdal Museum Educational Centre and members of the Vladimir Regional non-profit organization "Outspeak", which helps children with autism spectrum disorder. The Zoom participants discussed educational programs for children with autism spectrum disorder, methods of working with such children, problems they face in their work, challenges and successes. Russian participants of the Zoom meeting learnt a lot from their US counterparts and have already started using the new knowledge they gained. Head of Vladimir-Suzdal Museum Educational Centre Olga Sorokina and her co-workers have started using sensory bags, worked out on-line workshops on Vladimir painting for children with special needs and are planning to participate in the inclusive project "The Art of Being Near" in 2022.

Another highlight of summer 2021 was a Zoom lecture "Quakers in the 19th Century McLean County" by Bill Kemp, Librarian of the McLean County Museum of History, held on August 26. Zoom participants learnt many new facts from McLean County history, had a chance to listen to the stories of Quakers, living in McLean County and were delighted to see US and UK friends on Zoom. We are very thankful to Elaine Cousins and David Thomas who organized this wonderful event for the partners from Vladimir and Canterbury.

This year we have also been able to revive our cooperation with Canterbury partners by joining the UK – Russia Twin Cities Forum. Monthly Zoom meetings of the Forum covered a wide range of topics for discussion: Our Families War Time Stories, Life Long Education, Local Writers, Local Museums, Ecological Movements at our Towns and Cities, Nature Reserves, Local Festivals, Music Life, Theatre, Our Gastronomy and Food, Local Architecture. Zoom meetings, moderated by Olga Lawson, Coordinator of the UK – RF Twin Cities Forum and Vice Chair of the Great Britain Russian Speaking Community Council, united Twin Cities Associations enthusiasts from Canterbury, Cheltenham, Durham, Exeter, Coventry, Volgograd, Kostroma, Novorossiysk, Yaroslavl, Sochi, Vladimir, etc. who were happy to expand their cultural outlook, to learn more about different spheres of life in the UK and Russia, who shared their knowledge about creating partnerships between our countries. We hope that this experience will help us in developing more effective cooperation with our Sister Cities and Twin Towns partners.

VCSCA Board Candidates

Anita Carney - a passionate interest in visiting with and learning from a wide range of people from the international community

Adam Fox - Civic Arts Director for the Town of Normal

Dan Jaster - Assistant Professor Sociology Eureka College

Carol Kerestes - Returning member of the VCSCA board.. Worked extensively with high school host families.

Adrienne Huffman - Program Coordinator for the David Davis Mansion responsible for public events and educational programming.

Kate Rybakova - Native of Moscow. Admissions Counselor Illinois Wesleyan University.

Khrystyna Sanborn - From Ukraine. Assistant Director of Adult Education Instruction at Heartland Community College.

Michael Sulzberger - retired from McLean County agribusiness.



MEMBERSHIP FORM

Is Your Membership Up to Date? If you have not sent in your 2021 membership, please use the form below. VCSCA is a 501 (C)(3) not-for-profit, dues are tax deductible.

MEMBERSHIP LEVELS:

___ AUSTEN LEVEL / STUDENT	\$15- 39
___ TOLSTOY LEVEL / FRIEND	\$40 - 99
___ AKHMATOVA LEVEL / PATRON	\$100 - 199
___ CHEKOV LEVEL / BENEFACTOR	\$200 - 499
___ PUSHKIN LEVEL / CORPORATE	\$500 - 999
___ GOLDEN RING / LIFE MEMBER	\$1000

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY/STATE/ZIP _____

EMAIL ADDRESS _____

Return completed form with check payable to:

Vladimir/Canterbury Association
P. O. Box 1262
Bloomington, IL 61702