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# Georgia Southern graduate builds future by looking to the past

May 10, 2022



*Alyssa Watrous at Commencement*

It was family that drew Double Eagle Alyssa Watrous into the field of history. Her father suggested that she look into a public history concentration at Georgia Southern University, noting that her grandmother had been a historian.

“My grandmother unfortunately passed away when I was three, so I didn’t get to know her,” Watrous said. “She kind of inspired me to get more into history because, after finding out that she was a historian, the more I did in history, the closer

I felt to her and her work. When I get to focus on women’s history especially, it reminds me of her.”

Watrous was able to build an entire exhibit focused on women’s history through her work with the Georgia Southern University Museum. The “More than Meets the Eye” exhibit, currently displayed in Zach S. Henderson Library on the Statesboro Campus, focuses on the role that Georgia Southern women, including Georgia B. Watson and Roxie A. Remley, played in the World War II-era Women’s Auxiliary Army Corps and Women’s Army Corps. Though Remley left a collection of her memories and work to Georgia Southern in her will, the items did not make it to the University until Watrous put in the time to find them.

“I started trying to find Roxie’s collection in January 2021,” Watrous said. “It took me 14 months to secure. I couldn’t believe that I actually found her collection. It was her last wish for it to be here at the library and here I was finally fulfilling it. In researching this, I discovered that she’s my seventh cousin, four times removed, and so there’s a little bit of pride that I just fulfilled my family member’s last wish.”

The connection to Remley made this exhibit a little more meaningful for Watrous than others she has worked on.

“This exhibit was my favorite because when I started working on it I didn’t have Roxie’s collection,” Watrous said. “The further I got into researching these women and their lives, the

more this project meant to me. I hadn't really seen anything like this prior on the Women's Army Corps. I'm glad that I got to be so involved with this project. I got to learn about some topics that are still relatively unknown, taught myself how to code to create my virtual exhibit, and spent late nights working to hunt down my relative Roxie's collection."



*Alyssa Watrous with her "More than Meets the Eye" exhibit*

The chance to create this project came from Watrous' decision to continue her education at Georgia Southern. She had been told by other universities that these types of hands-on opportunities were unavailable, but at Georgia Southern, she saw a chance for growth.

"Other schools told me I could be a teacher's assistant," Watrous said. "But when I asked them about opportunities to volunteer, intern, work with public historians or even the Park Service, they said no. Georgia Southern said yes, so I decided this was the place for me.

For undergrad it was home, but now it was a new opportunity and I wasn't seeing it as my home, I was seeing it from this new lens of somewhere I can grow my network and learn."

This decision saw her work not only with the Georgia Southern University Museum, but also with the U.S. National Park Service at Fort Pulaski National Monument and the National Mighty Eighth Museum. With the experience she gained through her time at Georgia Southern, Watrous is ready to dive into her new career.

Watrous completed her bachelor's degree during the COVID-19 pandemic, studying history, anthropology, and women's, gender and sexuality studies. Now earning her master's degree, she crossed the stage at Paulson Stadium for the first time on May 9. Following commencement, she will move to Albany, Georgia, where, just one week after graduating, she will begin work as the lead educator for the Thronateeska Heritage Center.

"I was hired at the Heritage Center which is part of the Artesian Alliance," Watrous said. "So I will be working at the museum, but there will also be days where I am working at the zoo or at the aquarium. I'm excited to get back into education work and working with school groups and visitors from all over. I'm getting to do educational programming and I'm very excited for that."

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