



# Gorffennol Digidol Digital Past - 2021

## EXTENDED REALITY, INCLUSIVE HISTORY:

### Exploring Diverse Campus Histories with Extended Reality Technology

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In preparation for the 150th anniversary of the university in 2022, the Visualizing Virginia Tech History team is experimenting with creative technologies to research and present history in new ways. Our student-faculty team brings together research questions and methods from Computer Science, History, the Libraries, Visual Arts, and Education.

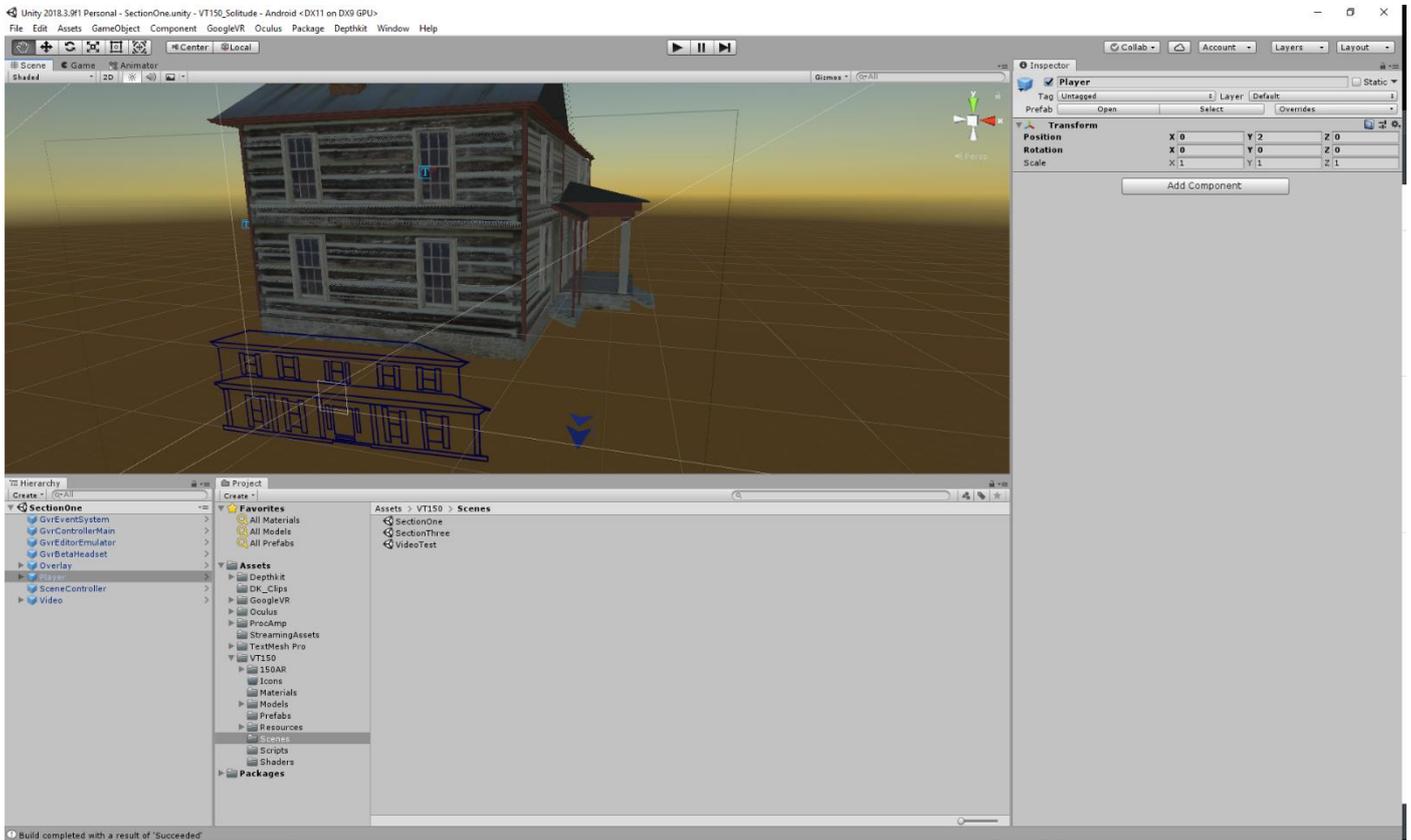
[Digital Past 2021](#): New technologies in heritage, interpretation and outreach | 8<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> February 2021, online via Zoom.

Mae'r ddogfen hon hefyd ar gael yn y Gymraeg | This document is also available in Welsh.

This presentation will explore the benefits and limitations of using technology to bring hidden histories to life, focusing on Solitude, the antebellum slave plantation of the wealthy Preston family and the oldest building on Virginia Tech's campus. Using wearable Extended Reality (AR+VR) technology, we employ green-screen interviews with descendants of enslaved people, virtual tour guides, 19th-century documents, historical photos, and 3D building recreations. These techniques allow visitors to “see” representations of the past that have been destroyed or repressed; they allow us to tell history in more engaging and more complete ways. Yet we will also share our struggles with this technology's limitations in exploring certain kinds of poorly-documented stories that lack compelling audio-visual material.



This presentation will also discuss more generally the specific storytelling affordances of Extended Reality. Rather than the linear narrative experience that history books tend to promote, ER allows for the presentation of multiple stories, from different time periods, featuring different historical actors and themes—all in the same place. It also makes possible a more interactive format, allowing visitors to choose which aspects of the topic to explore, and allowing them to extend their experience by digging deeper into optional historical documents, photographs, and expanded video footage. Here, too, we will address the limitations as well as the opportunities of Extended Reality storytelling, discussing the challenges of fitting important themes into a short timeframe, as well as other technological constraints. In short, Extended Reality closes off certain storytelling possibilities even as it opens others.



## Biography

Paul Quigley is Director of the Virginia Center for Civil War Studies and the James I. Robertson, Jr. Associate Professor of Civil War History in the History Department at Virginia Tech.

Jessica Taylor is Director of Public History and assistant professor of history at Virginia Tech.

Alex O’Dea is an undergraduate history major at Virginia Tech.

Kenny Barnes is an undergraduate student and teaching assistant studying history and sociology at Virginia Tech.

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