Horatio Fox Smith was a member of Bowdoin’s class of 1865. Upon his 18th birthday in the summer of 1863, the Gorham, Maine native left Brunswick and traveled to Providence in hopes of enlisting in a Rhode Island regiment. Though his initial efforts to join the Union Army failed, he ultimately enlisted in Company F, 31st Maine Volunteer Infantry Regiment on April 16, 1864. His journal and letters do not simply illuminate the experience of a Union soldier, but of a Bowdoin student who, at an age younger than the majority of incoming first years, left the comfort of college, prepared to die “for God & my country.”

Recently Bowdoin acquired Smith’s 1863 journal as well as many of the letters he wrote from Virginia during the Overland Campaign in 1864. This summer I worked with Patrick Rael, Professor of History and Africana Studies, and Richard Lindemann, director of the Department of Special Collections and Archives, transcribing these documents in preparation for their coding into the Text Encoding Initiative (TEI) standard. TEI allows for a more accurate digital representation of texts, as it can code for the aesthetics of the item as well as for edits and anomalies, including overwrites, marginalia, strikethroughs, and overlapping texts.

For example, due to the scarcity of supplies, including paper, on the front, Smith crams whole paragraphs in the margins of his letters, starts new paragraphs in between the lines of previous ones, or writes over past correspondences. This is one of the abnormalities that a straight transcription fails to depict, but aids in a fuller understanding of this soldier’s experience. TEI allows the sharing of these items with the Bowdoin community as well as with other academic institutions without compromising the original document or the valuable information gathered from the aesthetics of the document that can get “lost in transcription.” Digitizing Smith’s writings with TEI encoding enables us to share this personal account with a large audience without compromising the condition of the documents or losing the richness of the content.

The digitization of primary sources in the humanities is gaining momentum in academia. Though a digital copy can never replace an original, handwritten document, digitization assures the preservation of the content as well as of the irreplaceable items themselves. Now that I have transcribed and annotated the collection, I am learning how to use the TEI “language” and will begin the digitizing component of the project as an independent study this fall. I hope to continue studying Bowdoin student involvement in the Civil War through an honors project during my senior year. The ultimate goal of my project is to develop the Horatio Fox Smith Papers into a publishable academic work.

**Faculty Mentor: Patrick Rael**

**Funded by the Mellon Humanities Fellowship**

Richard Lindemann, Director of Special Collections and Archives