

Dr. Benjamin J. Hruska

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EDUCATION

- 2012 Ph.D., History, Arizona State University (ASU)
Dissertation title: "Baptized by Saltwater": Acts of Remembrance and Commemoration
Surrounding the USS Block Islands, CVE-21 & CVE-106
- 2004 M.A., History, Wichita State University
- 2000 B.A., History, Pittsburg State University

SCHOLARSHIP

Books

- Valor and Courage: The Story of the USS *Block Island* Escort Carriers in World War II,
(Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2021.)
- Interpreting Naval History at Museums and Historic Sites, (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman &
Littlefield Press, 2016.)

Book Projects in Process

- "Arm Themselves with Brooms & Shovels:" The Centennial of the Block Island Volunteer Fire
Department, leading the research and writing of a collaborative community history,
targeted completion date of May 2025 to coincide with the BIVFD's 1925-2025
celebration.

Selected Community History Columns in The Block Island Times

- "I have laid aside business and gone a fishing...." – Block Island's Atlantic Tuna Club, July 19,
2024.
- "We've got to hit the fires fast or we don't get them" – The 1952 blaze that consumed one-
seventh of Block Island, July 12, 2024.
- 'Singing Subway Man' discovers Block Island history under the streets of Manhattan, May 31,
2024.
- 'Be Right with the Maker Above' – The loss of the Submarine, S-51, May 24, 2024.
- 'Virtually independent commonwealth out at sea' – Block Island during Prohibition, May 17,
2024.
- 'Courage is merely the conquering of fear' – Fred Benson on the heroics of Bob Gillespie, May
10, 2024.
- 'Sliced away, piece by piece' The yin and yang of tourism, May 3, 2024.
- 'Wait 'til she meets up with a good nor'easter!' Manitou docks at Old Harbor in 1970, April 19,
2024.
- 'It's mine, all mine! Dig here!' The tale of Block Island treasure, April 12, 2024.
- Sixty firefighters and three pumpers descend on Payne Farm: Block Island's wartime response,
April 5, 2024.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Visiting Assistant Professor, University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, Brownsville, Texas, August 2024-Present.

- Teaching 3 sections of HIST 1302.
- Collaborating with UTRGV's CHAPS Program (Community Historical Archaeology Project with Schools) on public history projects in the Rio Grande Valley.

Museum Curator, Block Island Historical Society, Block Island, Rhode Island, October 2023-August 2024.

- Lead research and archival teams in the 2024 exhibition "The Spirit of Block Island," which examined the impacts of American cultural history in the 1920s and 1930s on the only outer island of the nation's smallest state.
- Identified and acquired external funding from the Annenberg Foundation, Block Island Residents' Association, Block Island Tourism Council, the Committee for the Great Salt Pond & Scenic Block Island.
- Conducted detailed oral histories on the postwar period covering such topics as the opening of the island airport, arrival of zoning, and accelerating land prices starting in the 1970s.
- Formed partnerships with a range of Block Island organizations, including The Block Island School, New Shoreham Sea Level Rise Committee, American Legion Post 36, Block Island Conservancy, The Block Island Times, & the Block Island Volunteer Fire Department.
- Serving as a member of the Board of Directors of Block Island's chapter of National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI).

Digital Collections Administrator, Block Island Historical Society, Block Island, Rhode Island, March 2022-October 2023.

The Annenberg Foundation funded this digitization campaign that lasted a year and half in which over 11,000 entries were entered into CatalogIt. Project scope included processing archival work, metadata research, scanning and entry. Genealogical information, most notably the collection of family bibles stretching back to the 16th century.

History Instructor, BASIS Schools at three locations including Mesa, Arizona; Shenzhen, China; and Prescott, Arizona; 2014-2021.

For six school years taught a wide range of AP courses (European, United States, Human Geography) to high school students along with advanced classes in U.S. and World History for middle school students.

Digital Historian, Term position, U.S. Department of Defense, U.S. Court of Appeals for the Armed Forces (USCAAF), Washington, D.C., July 2012-October 2013.

As the Court Historian digitized a past collection of oral histories completed on audiotape, gathered additional oral interviews digitally, and developed an exhibition on the history of the Courthouse building located on E Street in Washington, D.C.

Executive Director, Block Island Historical Society, Block Island, RI, 2006-2008.

Served in this leadership position for three summer seasons. Duties included financial responsibility of the organization, led summer exhibitions, and cultivated relationships with community partners.

Stagecoach Driver & Gunfighter, Boot Hill Museum, Dodge City, KS, 1990-1995.

During high school summers worked as a living history interpreter at this seasonal museum reenacting gunfights and driving a stagecoach through the streets of Dodge City.

GRANT PROJECTS

Centennial of the Block Island Volunteer Fire Department: ongoing digitization of the archival collections related to the BIVFD, 300 scans completed thus far, targeted completion of 1,200 scans of meeting minutes, rosters, fire investigation paperwork is July 1, 2025.

Royal Bruce Montgomery Collection: digitization of cartoon collection of this Block Island artist, over 800 scans, completed February 20, 2024, grant funding total of \$3,000.

Block Island Residents' Association Collection: digitization of newsletters from the 1970s and 1980s, over 700 scans, completed January 15, 2024, grant funding total of \$2,000.

GR0W@Annenberg Digitization campaign: a sixteen-month effort in the archival digitization at the Block Island Historical Society, over 11,000 scans, completed October 3, 2023, grant funding total of \$60,000.

Elizabeth Ann Evans Collection: digitization of the personal collection of Elizabeth Ann Evans covering Block Island life in the 1950s and 1960s, 1300 scans, completed September 15, 2023, grant funding total of \$10,000.

INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC HISTORY

History News: Magazine of the American Association For State and Local History, "Public History in Hong Kong: A Survey," (Summer 2018, Vol. 73, No. 3), 24-27.

Global Maritime History: Maritime History, Broadly Conceived: Museum Reviews after personal visits, Australian National Maritime Museum, January 2018; Hong Kong Maritime Museum, February 2018; Memorial Ship Mikasa (Tokyo,) April 2018.

Fwd: Museums Journal: "Hong Kong Identity: Utilizing the Small to Challenge the Big," University of Illinois at Chicago, Volume 1 (2017): 132-137.

Australian Centre for the Study of Armed Conflict and Society: Conference presentation, "Interpreting Naval History via Ship Museums" Canberra, Australia, July 13, 2017.

International Journal of Cultural and Creative: “Platform of Memory’: Morphing Aircraft Carriers from Weapons of War to Cultural Destinations,” Industries (IJCCI), Tainan, Taiwan, Volume 1 (2014): 14-27.

PROFESSIONAL TRAINING

Seminar for Historical Administration (three-week program in fall of 2007).

Program included one hundred hours of lecture over twenty days from leaders in the fields of museums, public programs, and grant writing. Hosted by the Indiana Historical Society allowed site visits to a range of institutions in the city. Sponsored by the Smithsonian, American Association for State and Local History (AASLH), and American Association of Museums (AAM).

PRESENTATIONS

Allure of the Forbidden: Block Island Speakeasies: Block Island Historical Society’s Thursday Night Program, July 11, 2024.

Roaring ‘20s and Block Island: Land, Sea and Air: Block Island Maritime Institute, Block Island, RI July 9, 2024.

Interpreting Naval History at Museums and Historic Sites: Block Island Free Library, Block Island, RI June 27, 2024.

Harvard’s 1952 plan to Transform Block Island into A Stately Pleasure-Dome: Annual Meeting of the Block Island Residents’ Association, October 12, 2023.

The True Gift from the Annenberg Foundation: Annual Meeting of the Block Island Historical Society, September 20, 2023.

Nuts & Bolts: Conceptualizing the Exhibition *Reluctant Paradise*: Block Island Historical Society’s Thursday Night Program, July 20, 2023.

Reluctant Paradise: Block Island 1950-1970: Block Island Maritime Institute, Block Island, RI July 11, 2023.

Annenberg Foundation Digitization Grant: CatalogIt and the Block Island Historical Society’s 21st century archival collection: Block Island Community Center, Block Island, RI, January 24, 2023.

Gift of the Elizabeth Ann Evans Collection to the Block Island Historical Society: Block Island Community Center, Block Island, RI, December 13, 2022.

From Shenzhen to Block Island: Proposal for 2023 Summer Exhibition, Block Island Conservancy Annual Meeting, 1661 Inn, Block Island, RI, October 9, 2022.

INVITED INTERVIEWS

TV Series, Hell Below: a produced partnership with The Smithsonian Channel, On Role of the Escort Carriers in the Battle of the Atlantic, September 20, 2023, forthcoming Season 4, July 2024.

Boston Globe: article “The forgotten history of Block Island’s Harborside Inn,” published August 24, 2023.

Providence WPRI Channel 12: television interview, “‘The heart of Water Street:’ A look back at the history of the Harborside Inn, aired August 23, 2023.

Podcast, Two Guys on Block Island: Ep.64, Block Island’s Historian At Large, July 7, 2022.