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Molly Dorsey, Associate Professor of History, COLA travels to New Zealand

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Molly Dorsey, Associate Professor of History, COLA travels to New Zealand



UNH Global

Molly Dorsey

Associate Professor of History ~ New Zealand

The Center for International Education and Global Engagement generously provided critical support for my trip to New Zealand, an incredible experience for my scholarship, teaching, and life.

My first priority was to present a paper at a conference titled “War, Peace and International Order? The Legacies of The Hague Conferences of 1899 and 1907,” sponsored by the Faculty of Arts at the University of Auckland and the New Zealand Centre for Human Rights Law. The gathering brought together scholars from approximately ten countries and multiple disciplines to study the short and long term impacts of these conferences. The Hague meetings established or codified laws of war, ranging from rules about prisoners of war to bans on poison, in the hope the conflict would become more civilized. Many expectations about wars that we have today arise from the conventions drafted at the Hague in 1899 and 1907.

In my presentation, I discussed the legacies of the Hague Conferences’ failed, but influential, chemical warfare ban, effects that have lasted over 100 years. Since my current book project is about chemical warfare and World War II, an area influenced by the consequences of the Hague



View of Auckland from the top of the old volcano at the center of the Mt. Eden Domain, the highest point in the city

treaties, the conference was an invaluable opportunity to interact with international experts in disciplines relevant to my research, such as law, science, and diplomacy, especially since I most often engage with military historians. Conversations during panels and breaks, and even in the weeks since the conference, have stimulated me and helped my ideas evolve. It is particularly rewarding that my work has been selected for inclusion in a book based upon the New Zealand conference.



New Zealand National Archives in Wellington

After the conference, I traveled to Wellington to use the National Archives to find material on New Zealand's experience with chemical warfare in World War II. Its role as a nation threatened by potential Japanese poison gas attacks at home and in battle broadened my perspective of the challenges of resisting, yet preparing for, chemical warfare. New Zealand's position as a country in the British Empire, yet fighting in close concert with the United States, offered unusual perspectives about wartime policy choices. In addition, fortuitously, I had some time to use the National Library in Wellington, the Turnbull Library, and the Auckland Museum Library.

The trip was rewarding in terms of teaching as well as scholarship. I expected to gather new ideas to share in some of my diplomatic history, war and society, and Justice Studies courses, and that happened. However, I had not taken into account that I visited New Zealand the week before ANZAC Day, April 25th. This holiday memorializes New Zealand and Australia's landing at Gallipoli during World War I. It is a date now perceived as a formative event in New Zealand's national identity, too. In fact, during my first class on American

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Field of Remembrance at Auckland War Memorial Museum


warfare after my trip, students and I discussed why World War I does not permeate our national consciousness as thoroughly. I had photos from a Field of Remembrance (special displays of crosses honoring the war dead in public parks), monuments, a concert, museum exhibits, posters, and even a local rugby match to show this. This unexpected lesson made an impression that I could not have duplicated without the experience of traveling to New Zealand then.


Finally, of course, it was enlightening to walk the streets and parks of New Zealand and to talk to its citizens. It is the friendliest country I have ever visited, and I had the good fortune to meet organic farmers, educators, descendants of World War I veterans, international businessmen, and others. It was one of the most valuable trips I have ever taken, professionally and personally. Thank you for making the trip possible.

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