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## **HISTORIANS LOOK TO CAPTURE COLUSA'S COVID-19 EXPERIENCE**

### *Crowdsourced Archive of the People, by the People, and for the People*

TEMPE, Arizona – Jul. 5, 2020 – Often overlooked by academic researchers, rural towns have become a focal point in understanding the human response to COVID-19. A team of historians from Arizona State University have developed an interactive archive, where everyday people can record their COVID-19 experiences and secure a spot in history. *A Journal of the Plague Year*, taking its name from the famed Daniel Defoe novel, breaks down the academic barrier between researchers and subjects, creating a space for the global community to freely place images, videos, and stories in the archive. Historians hope that a crowdsourced archive will address silences that often plague academic research, including rural perspectives. Dr. Mark Tebeau, a history professor at Arizona State University and project co-founder, states, “Archives contain vast silence. They don’t tell us the story of non-elite folks outside the middle class, folks who aren’t white. They may touch on them. They may hint at them. But we need to do a better job.” It is for this reason that historians are reaching out to rural inhabitants to record their pandemic experience.

Colusa County, with an estimated population of only 21,547, has become a valuable case study for historians around the world because of local submissions to the archive. From school closures to county-issued health guidance, these moments in the county’s history are now preserved for generations to come. Unlike New York, Los Angeles, or other large metropolitan areas, Colusa County faced different challenges as the pandemic spread. With an economy largely rooted in agriculture, many residents did not have the luxury of working from home or simply halting business, students in remote portions of the county lacked the internet connectivity necessary for e-learning, and widespread opposition to Governor Newsom’s stay at home orders renewed the rebel spirit of a county infamous for its support of secessionist states during the American Civil War. Historians working on the project, including Arizona State University graduate student and Colusa native, Alex Hinely, urge individuals to not discount their own experiences. Contrary to other archival projects, *A Journal of the Plague Year* is not looking to record every news headline and groundbreaking moment but rather individual reactions and understandings.



*Princeton High School Drive-In Graduation* is just one of the many Colusa County items submitted to the archive.

These everyday occurrences help historians document the spread of information, track shifting perspectives, and understand regional variations. From memes to journal entries, historians working on the project assure contributors that nothing is too small or insignificant to contribute. Those interested in contributing to the archive can visit [covid-19archive.org](https://covid-19archive.org). There, individuals will find an easy-to-complete form asking for some simple information about your item. In minutes, one can reserve their place in history forever. Anonymous submissions are also welcome. Rarely are historical events recognizable in the moments they occur. As rural Americans yearn for a sense of normalcy and life as they knew it, take a moment to record these experiences. From photographs of the mundane moments at home to recollections of the economic stressors placing local establishments in jeopardy, all are valuable to history. For additional information about *A Journal of the Plague Year*, please visit [covid-19archive.org](https://covid-19archive.org) or contact Alex Hinely at [achinely@asu.edu](mailto:achinely@asu.edu).