

Proposal

Title – New London: A Town Forgotten

Program of Study – History

Presentation Type – **Choose one of the following:** Print Poster with video supplement.

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Category – **Choose one of the following:** Creative/Artistic.

Abstract:

New London is a town that has been forgotten by most history books; to the extent that it has been erased from the map. New London is a town that only exists in the memory of those who have chosen to keep the memory alive. Most of the history of the town exists in legends, myths, and other unscholarly attempts to keep the memory alive. Only recently have elements of New London received recognition in modern scholarship. In *Buying into the World of Goods*, Ann Smart Martin recounts the world of material culture through the lens of the shop opened by the Scottish immigrant, John Hook. Additionally Dr. James Siddons has produced volumes on the history of the New London Academy, a notable educational institution that still exists in some form today.

Most of the mentions and accounts of New London have been recorded by amateur historians trying to keep the memory of the near-forgotten town alive. Notably, Daisy I. Read produced her work *New London Today and Yesterday*, but was published posthumously by her family. Claude Thompson's work is used by the Friends of New London to give a synopsis of the history of the town. Both of these sources lack academic citations that would cement their work in academia and ease expansion of research on New London in the future. Both list books and

archives where they found information, but do not indicate from where the source originates. This is a major problem when approaching New London. What are the facts of New London? Should this town be viewed in context of legends and folk traditions passed down by people who remember? These are some serious questions when trying to find out the story of New London. The story of New London is essentially that of a town in the Blue Ridge Mountains, which held great potential to become a great city of commerce but was slowly forgotten.

This work focuses on two prominent stories from New London. The first is the narrative of how New London grew to great prominence but faded away in the nineteenth century. The second story focuses on the Revolutionary War period when Patrick Henry visited the town to come to the defense in the case of *Hook v. Venable*. This story is interesting in its own right because it follows the convoluted relationships between the Patriots and Loyalists on the backcountry. Sadly, this is the last really exciting story that came out of New London. After this point it dwindled into obscurity, with occasional moments in the sun, but was largely eclipsed by Lynchburg.

Christian Worldview:

My historical lens, in large part, was shaped by the words of John Fea, in his book *Why Study History*. In the book Fea discusses how mankind is made in the image of Christ and how historians should treat historical figures as they were made in Christ's image. He clarifies that historical figures should be seen with understanding, or empathy. It is not that one wholeheartedly agrees with the works of historical personages, especially the notorious ones, but one of humility. If the Christian historian can see them and understand the reasoning behind the thought process he can, in many ways, redeem them.

Redemption is a large part of this project. The goal was to set out and redeem the town that has been forgotten. This is not the story of a forgotten town that held no great figures, this is the town that was believed to be the next great city in America. Thomas Jefferson placed his Poplar Forest home near New London, Patrick Henry tried a case in New London, and it existed on the colonial crossroads going west. There is a lot to redeem from this story. I set out to tell the story about how New London changed throughout time, but the town taught me that its stories were more than just a backdrop for historical movements. The town does not look like much; it shows no signs that it could have ever been a bustling colonial center. However, my historical lens of redemption allowed me to see through that and to the story that lay underneath. Just as vinyl siding now covers the colonial tavern in New London, the town needs to be freed from its modern trappings to expose the beauty held within.