June 8, 2015

TO: Erika Zynda, Academic Affairs, Admin 246H
FROM: Micheline Nilsen, CLAS History, DW3261
RE: Faculty Research Grant 2015 – Activity Report

With support of the Faculty Research Grant awarded this past November, I travelled to Germany between May 9th and June 6th to conduct research for a book manuscript titled “From Turnips to Lawn Chairs: Allotment Gardens in Europe, 1920-1975.” A week was spent at each of the German National Library sites, first in Frankfurt (May 10-17) and then Leipzig (May 17-22). The rest of the time was spent in Berlin (May 22- June 5), dividing time between the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, the Garden Library (Gartenbaubücherei) of Technische Universität Berlin, and the Centre for Berlin Studies of the Berlin public library. All of these libraries are premier research institutions, and although they differ in character, holdings, and procedures, their service orientation and their facilities reveal a genuine understanding of researchers’ needs.

Prior to leaving for Germany, I had extracted from my research database a list (about 20 pages) of references I had been unable to locate or obtain in this country, and divided them among the locations where they were on record as being owned, or most likely to be findable. I worked systematically through the prepared lists and tracked down close to 90 percent of these sources. I also followed leads to additional sources from bibliographies and documents that surfaced in the course of research. I thus returned to the US with both primary and secondary sources to complete the redaction of the planned manuscript, expected by my editor in early September.

In addition to library research, I was able to visit allotment gardens in the three cities. These were unplanned, informal visits conducted when libraries were not open (Sundays and during the Ascension and Pentecost, bank holidays in Germany). In Leipzig, I visited the Kleingärtner Museum, or allotment gardening museum, met with two staff members and I was able to consult a rare periodical from the GDR era held in the museum archives. In Berlin, I also consulted the Landesarchiv Berlin (Berlin city archive) where the photograph collection provided additional insights on my research topic (for instance the vulnerability of allotment gardens during the construction of the Berlin walls as the gardens provided land areas easier to clear than more densely built city fabric). The archive also provided a good selection of potential illustrations for the book. I was also able to schedule a meeting with Gert Gröning, the foremost German expert on allotment gardens and a highly influential landscape architecture historian. Our conversation led to some additional sources and his answers to my questions opened insights that will be reflected in my final manuscript. Upon return to the US, an e-mail from him awaited me with additional references related to our conversation, fortunately accessible in this country.

The funding provided by the Faculty Research Grant enabled access to sources that are not available in this country and will have direct impact on the manuscript in preparation. I am extremely grateful for the opportunity to gain access to Germany’s finest libraries and to enjoy their facilities and services.