

Vincent L. Femia

Smithsonian Institution and American Philosophical Society
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Academic Appointments

Smithsonian Institution

2025–2026 Research Associate, Smithsonian Library and Archives

Princeton University

Feb 2025– Postgraduate Research Associate, Department of History
Aug 2025

Education

Princeton University

- 2025 Ph.D. in History, Program in the History of Science
Dissertation: “Magnificent Distances: The Rise and Fall of the Capital City of Science, 1862-1920”
Committee: Michael D. Gordin (advisor), Alison Isenberg, Keith Wailoo, and Kate Masur
- 2021 M.A. in History, Program in the History of Science
Examination Fields: Modern Science (Michael D. Gordin), Urban History (Alison Isenberg), American History, Reconstruction to World War I (Emily Thompson)

University of Cambridge

- 2018 M.Phil. in History and Philosophy of Science and Medicine (first class)
Dissertation: “Forecasting Doom: Scientific Prophets, the Emotional Regime of Science, and the Accommodated Uncertainty of United States Congressional Testimony, 1963-1988”

Kenyon College

- 2017 B. A., magna cum laude with High Honors
History major, Physics minor, and Music minor
Honors Thesis: “An Amateur in Decline: Richard Christopher Carrington and the Social Network of Amateurs and Professionals in the Royal Astronomical Society”

University of Oxford

2016 Visiting Student, Hilary and Trinity terms (history and philosophy of science)

Awards and Grants

- 2024-2025 Dean's Completion Fellowship, Princeton University
- 2024-2025 Smithsonian Predoctoral Fellowship, Smithsonian Institution.
- 2023-2024 The Philip G. Terrie '39 Fellowship, Princeton University.
- 2023 Dean's Fund for Scholarly Travel, Princeton University (travel to History of Science Society Conference, Portland, Oregon).
- 2019-2024 University Fellowship in the Humanities and Social Sciences, Princeton University.
- 2017 Curtis A. Seichter Award, Kenyon College (demonstrated excellence in the study of history).
- 2016 Landon Warner Research Grant, Kenyon College (travel to the Royal Greenwich Observatory Archives at the University of Cambridge Library).
- 2016 Book Prize, University of Oxford, from the Master of St. Catherine's College, Professor Roger Ainsworth (for performance in Pre-Islamic and Islamic Science class).
- 2013 Distinguished Academic Scholarship, Kenyon College (four-year, merit-based scholarship).

Publications

Book Manuscripts

Under review *Magnificent Distances: The Rise and Fall of the Capital City of Science, 1862-1920*. Under peer review with Yale University Press.

Articles in peer-reviewed journals

- 2026 "The Natural History of Nations: Simon Newcomb and the Forging of a Postwar American Science." *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 25, no. 2 (2026): 157-182. First View online publication January 12, 2026:
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537781425101333>.

- 2025 “Through the Looking Glass of the Coming Kingdom: Science, City, and Authority in Anita Newcomb McGee’s Anthropology, 1888-1897,” *Isis* 116, no. 2 (2025): 233255.
- 2022 “In a Toxic City Beautiful: Harvey Washington Wiley, the Model City, and the Authenticity of Science in the Nation’s Capital.” *Journal of Urban History* 50, no. 5 (2024): 1063-1089. Advance online publication on September 29, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00961442221124627>.

Other academic writing

- Forthcoming Co-author with Brenna Holland and Adrianna Link. “Introduction” to *Science and Society in the Age of Revolutions* (American Philosophical Society Press/University of Pennsylvania Press). Edited volume for the *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*.
- In preparation Co-editor – *Science and Society in the Age of Revolutions* (American Philosophical Society Press/University of Pennsylvania Press). Edited volume for the *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*.
- 2024 “How to Study the Village Virus: Sinclair Lewis and the Small-Town Science of Yearning,” *The Metropole*: Official Blog of the Urban History Association. April 3, 2024. <https://themetropole.blog/2024/04/03/how-to-study-the-village-virusinclair-lewis-and-the-small-town-science-of-yearning/>
- 2023 “Astronomy on the Flats: How the Moons of Mars and the Death of a President Altered the Late Nineteenth-Century Washington, DC, Landscape.” *The Metropole*. Official Blog of the Urban History Association. March 8, 2023. <https://themetropole.blog/2023/03/08/astronomy-on-the-flats-how-the-moons-ofmars-and-the-death-of-a-president-altered-the-late-nineteenth-century-washingtondc-landscape/>.

Public engagement

- 2026 “Science at Sea: Nathaniel Bowditch and the Making of Maritime America.” *American Philosophical Society* (blog), May 8, 2026. <https://www.amphilsoc.org/news/science-sea-nathaniel-bowditch-and-making-maritime-america>.
- 2026 “The Engineers: The Sellers and the Making of Philadelphia.” *American Philosophical Society* (blog), March 9, 2026. <https://www.amphilsoc.org/news/engineers-sellers-and-making-philadelphia>.

- 2025 “The Surveyors: Andrew Ellicott, Benjamin Banneker, and the Boundaries of Nation and Knowledge.” *American Philosophical Society* (blog), December 22, 2025. <https://www.amphilsoc.org/news/surveyors-andrew-ellicott-benjamin-bannekerand-boundaries-nation-and-knowledge>.
- 2025 “The Healer: Elizabeth Coates Paschall on Market Street.” *American Philosophical Society* (blog), November 3, 2025. <https://www.amphilsoc.org/news/healerelizabeth-coates-paschall-market-street>.
- 2025 “The Making and Memory of Jane Colden.” *American Philosophical Society* (blog), September 8, 2025. <https://www.amphilsoc.org/news/making-and-memory-janecolden>.
- 2025 “The Collector: James Logan and His Library.” *American Philosophical Society* (blog), August 18, 2025. <https://www.amphilsoc.org/news/collector-james-logan-and-hislibrary>.
- 2025 “Science at the Roots: The Age of Revolution.” *American Philosophical Society* (blog), June 30, 2025. <https://www.amphilsoc.org/news/science-roots-age-revolution>.
- 2025 “Isis June 2025 – Author Interview Vincent L. Femia,” *History of Science Society*, June 3, 2025.
- 2022 “The Cold War Over DC Ice Cream.” *Washingtonian Magazine*. April 2022.
- 2022 “Republicans’ anti-democratic, anti-Black plans for D.C. are a 19th-century throwback.” *The Washington Post*. March 2, 2022.

Conference Organization and Presentations

- 2026 Moderator – “City of Knowledge: Science, Place, Power.” Session 4, May 14. American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, PA.
- 2026 Moderator – “City of Knowledge: Science, Place, Power.” Session 1, February 26. American Institute of Physics, Washington, D.C.
- 2026 Organizer – “City of Knowledge: Science, Place, Power.” Four-part panel series exploring DC’s scientific history as part of the Smithsonian Institution’s Semiquincentennial programming.
- 2026 Invited – Interview hosted by Joshua Levy and Elizabeth Novara for the Library of Congress’s “Made at the Library” series, covering two of my published journal articles. Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. March 11.

- 2025 “That Half-Bohemian Life: Making the federal Scientist in the Capital City, 1865-1887.” Urban History Association (UHA) Conference. Los Angeles, CA, October 9-12.
- 2025 Invited – “Through the Looking Glass of the Coming Kingdom: Science, City, and Authority in Anita Newcomb McGee’s Anthropology, 1888-1897,” talk given to colloquium series at the National Museum of American History. Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. May 20.
- 2024 Organizer – Phunday, MIT-Harvard-Princeton Annual Graduate Conference in the History of the Physical Sciences, Cambridge, MA, April 12-13.
- 2023 Organizer – Phunday, MIT-Harvard-Princeton Annual Graduate Conference in the History of the Physical Sciences, Princeton, NJ, April 28-29.
- 2023 “Farm to Diagram: Science, Mobility, and the Middle West in the Capital City.” History of Science Society (HSS) Conference. Portland, OR, November 9-12.
- 2023 “We Live Inside: Anita Newcomb McGee, Anthropological Time, and the Confounding Cosmology of the Koreshan Unity.” Phunday, MIT-Harvard-Princeton Annual Graduate Conference in the History of the Physical Sciences. Princeton, NJ.
- 2022 “Such is Life in This Vale of Disillusionments: Forging a Landscape of Science in the Late Nineteenth Century,” Presentation to Fellows in the Princeton University Mellon Initiative in Architecture, Urbanism, and the Humanities. Princeton, NJ.
- 2022 “Science for the Nation in Bricks and Mortar,” Program Seminar in History of Science. Princeton University. Princeton, NJ.
- 2022 “The Disciples of Minerva: Bethel Literary and the Politics of Science in the Nation’s Capital.” American Political History Institute Graduate Conference, Boston University. Boston, MA.
- 2020 “To See Inside a Hollow Earth: Anita Newcomb McGee, Koreshan Science, and an Anthropology of Belief.” Program Seminar in History of Science. Princeton University. Princeton, NJ.

Teaching Experience

- Fall 2023 HIS 298: Information Revolutions, TA to Prof. Matthew L. Jones, Princeton University.

Fall 2022 HIS 368/SPI 364: Making Post-Pandemic Worlds: Epidemic History and the Future, TA to Prof. Keith A. Wailoo, Princeton University.

Fall 2015 PHYS 107: Astronomy: Stars and Galaxies, TA to Prof. Paula Turner, Kenyon College.

Other Employment and Curatorial Experience

American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, PA.

2025–2026 Lounsbery Research Assistant. Writing blog series (“Science at the Roots”), podcast scripts, and conducting background research for Makematic educational videos for the Center of the History of Science’s “America’s Scientific Revolutionaries” project. Leading a year-long digital, interactive mapping project of Revolutionary-era Philadelphia, called “The Scientific City.” Co-editor of the volume that results from the APS conference, “Science and Society in the Age of Revolutions,” published by APS Press/UPenn Press. Conference held September 25-26, 2025.

Urban History Association and Princeton University, Remote

2023 Co-manager of book exhibit, Urban History Association Conference, Pittsburgh, PA.

Meridian International Center, Washington, D.C.

2018-2019 Cultural Programs & Exhibitions Intern, Meridian Center for Cultural Diplomacy.

National Air and Space Museum, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

2016 Paid Intern. Research assistant for senior curator Dr. David DeVorkin.

National Air and Space Museum, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

2015 Volunteer Intern. Worked with Dr. David DeVorkin on the project “Appraisal of the Earth and Planetary Sciences Collections”; and with Dr. Geneviève de Messières at the Phoebe Waterman Haas Public Observatory.

Organizations and affiliations

2023-present Urban History Association, Member.

2018-present History of Science Society, Member.