



# Andrew Carnegie Free Library & Music Hall

For Immediate Release  
Contact: Maggie Forbes

## **Changing of the Guard at Capt. Thomas Espy Post.**

Diane Klinefelter is retiring from her position as Espy Post Curator and Social Historian at the Andrew Carnegie Free Library & Music Hall. Local archivist and historian Jon-Erik Gilot is poised to take her place.

Ms. Klinefelter, a passionate student of history and a professional genealogist, has served as Curator since 2006 when she became Library Director at the ACFL&MH. (She retired from the Directors role in 2015 but has remained active with the Espy Post, authoring two books on Civil War veterans.

The Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) a veterans' group of the Union Armed Services, was founded in 1866. Members of the Capt. Thomas Espy Post No. 153 of the Grand Army of the Republic forged an agreement with the Library Commission to custom furnish a second-floor room in the ACFL&MH facility, to hold their meetings and house their relics. Espy Post veterans met in the room from 1906 until the last members died in the late 1930s. When that happened, the Library essentially locked the room and forgot about it for 50 years.

Of the more than 10,000 GAR posts in the United States, from Portland, Maine to Portland, Oregon, the Espy Post has been documented by scholars as likely the most intact GAR post in the country.

During her tenure, Ms. Klinefelter played a critical role in positioning the Espy Post – both regionally and nationally – as the national treasure that it is. As steward of the Espy Post's collection of artifacts and manuscripts, she oversaw their safekeeping during the Post's meticulous and ambitious restoration that was completed February 2010. She registered the Espy Post manuscript collection with the Library of Congress. Under her leadership, the Library's diverse Civil War collection became the largest public library collection in Allegheny County. And, over the last almost 15 years, Ms. Klinefelter has developed a rich array of outstanding Civil War programming for that has dramatically raised the profile of the Espy Post

Of all her accomplishments, what may satisfy Ms. Klinefelter most is serendipitous encounters with Civil War enthusiasts who do a double take when they learn her connection with the Espy Post. When she asked a question at the end of a recent webinar, the Rhode Island presenter said "Wait, are you from the library with the rare GAR post?" Klinefelter admits, "I'm always tickled – okay deeply gratified -- when I realize how far awareness of the Espy Post has spread."

Amongst the many relationships Ms. Klinefelter has forged in the Civil War community is that with Jon-Erik Gilot, who as an Espy Post intern from 2009 until 2012 (before during and after the Post's restoration), while earning his Masters in Library & Information Science from Kent State.

Since 2012 Ms. Klinefelter and Mr. Gilot have maintained their professional connection.

Now widely published, Mr. Gilot is active in the Civil War community, as a contributing historian with *Emerging Civil War* (a public history-oriented platform for sharing original scholarship related to the American Civil War). He is active with numerous historical organizations and is an archivist and records manager in Wheeling, West Virginia. The Espy Post Curator is a part time position, which lends itself to remote work.

"Having worked with numerous public and academic libraries in my previous career, the Carnegie Carnegie stands head and shoulders above the rest in terms of physical setting and ambiance," said Gilot. "Events of the past several years have demonstrated that how we remember and interpret historical events - especially the Civil War - is highly relevant in today's society. The Espy Post offers a rare place for quiet contemplation of our bonds with historical memory, and I look forward to sharing those stories with ACFL&MH patrons near and far."

ACFL&MH Executive Director Maggie Forbes describes the transition as personally bittersweet. "However, Diane's passing the baton to Jon-Erik is a stunning example of her professionalism and stewardship of the Espy Post."

###