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Special Focus: The Writing of History

This fall 2013 issue highlights the writing of history books. In a department known for the excellence of its teaching, professors also pride themselves on the quality and strength of their scholarship. In this issue, faculty members reflect on the challenges and joys of writing books that illuminate the past, build sophisticated arguments, and invite readers to delve into another time and place. We also share accomplishments of our students and alumni as a new faculty chair takes charge.
Historians write books. It is what we do.

UM’s history department has a particularly accomplished cadre of book writers. They not only write books, they think deeply about the joys, challenges, and opportunities of book creation. Their reflections tell a story of hard work, passion, and craftsmanship indicative of a community of scholars committed to illuminating the complexities of the past.

Each author begins with what they enjoy. For Anya Jabour, it is nearly everything: “the first glimmer of an idea,” the initial research, tracking down leads, researching again, mapping out ideas, crafting organizational frameworks, revising. Her list goes on. Linda Frey loves the “thrill of telling a story well.” Chris Pastore enjoys the challenge of “exploring the tensions” between “art and logic.” In addition to “being a research detective,” Dan Flores finds “having written” to be “the most fulfilling of all.”

In reviewing their responses, the primacy of story comes immediately to the surface. Mehrdad Kia describes it as a process of writing in a “style that is informative, educational, and captivating.” Pastore adds that other elements of narrative construction are equally important. He writes, “Character development, setting, word choice, rhythm, and pacing are all important tools to the historian’s trade.”

But writing captivating story demands hard work. Kyle Volk notes the challenge inherent in writing for as broad an audience as possible while at the same time “maintaining high analytical rigor.” He aims to convey “complex concepts and processes in plain English” and to braid and embed “analysis as seamlessly as possible within a story-driven framework.” To remain motivated for this kind of demanding work, he suggests that “the historian needs to care as much about the reader as herself.”

Other struggles abound. Jabour finds it challenging to work alone “without an immediate product” due to the often decade-long process of research, composition, and revision. At times, as is the case for Linda Frey, the challenge stems from searching for sources “in remote places and deciphering material that is written sometimes in code and only too often on papers that are disintegrating.” Kia has to discern between government propaganda and more reliable sources. Flores strives to create meaningful narrative out of (continued)
“the undifferentiated flux of information,” and Pastore notes how often writing history feels like “grappling for something that continually slips from one’s grasp.”

Despite these challenges, it is the book itself that makes the process worthwhile. Jabour points out that, unlike social media, books allows for “more scope for contemplation and reflection.” Pastore celebrates the complexity afforded by monographs that “develop rich context for their subjects, explore the nuances of causality and contingency, and show change over time in ways that make readers want to turn the page.” Such arresting narrative, according to Volk, allows for authors and their readers to “explore multiple topics, especially those that at first might seem disconnected, and also to examine an issue or topic over a long sweep of time.” Flores adds, “One has to hope that the fuller, more thoughtfully developed story will survive our inability to focus in the age of spectacle.”

In addition to writing books, historians in our department also tutor graduate students in the composition process. And so they have advice. Kia advises patience with “processing and absorbing the available material.” To foster that patience, Jabour encourages writers to celebrate smaller successes along with way whether that be getting through “five of thirty-seven” microfilm reels or reviewing “an entire year’s worth of correspondence.” Frey has even more practical advice. In addition to “write, rewrite, and then rewrite again,” she advises her students to read Orwell’s 1946 “Politics and the English Language” and “follow its dicta.”

Flores counsels boldness and originality. He suggests that writers aim to “say something no one else has said” and “to develop your own original relationship to the universe.” To that end, he adds, “don’t be timid.”

In the end, Pastore sums up the combined wisdom of this group of committed historians by noting the breadth of skills that come together in book composition. He observes, “Writing a history book requires artistry, logic, and persistence. As an artist, breathe life into your subject using vivid details. As a scholar, marshal your evidence with precision and care.”

“Breathe life into your subject using vivid details. Marshal your evidence with precision.”

There is one other piece of advice that acts as a fitting conclusion to these thoughts on the writing of books. It has to do with the most central component of any writing project. As a professor I once had said to me, “A writer writes.” And to do so, there is no better practical advice than what Pastore advises here, “As a writer, do a little every day. The subject will remain fresh in your mind, and the pages will slowly but surely begin to pile up.”

A.B. Hammond Chair in Western United States History

The Department of History at the University of Montana invites applications for a historian eligible to assume the A. B. Hammond Chair in Western United States History. The position is open rank. If hired at the rank of full professor, the hire will immediately become the Hammond Chair. If hired at the rank of assistant or associate professor, the hire will assume the Hammond Chair upon promotion to full professor. The successful candidate will teach undergraduate and graduate courses in areas of expertise and play an active role in the graduate program.

TO APPLY visit http://umjobs.silkroad.com for all job details and to apply online for full consideration. Screening of applications will begin November 1, 2013.
Our department continues to embrace its mission of training students to think carefully and critically about the world they inhabit.
I began my time here at UM with the unconscious assumption that the significant trials and accomplishments of graduate school would be measured quantitatively, in intellectual inputs and outputs. Works read, courses completed, and hours researched would slowly build my expertise; exams passed and pages written would demonstrate it. The past three years have no doubt been a period of growth for me, but not the solely cumulative exercise that I anticipated.

What’s been most striking about my time here has been a transformation in the way that I approach history both as a discipline and as a subject matter. The interpersonal rather than the personal aspects of my scholarly development have come to demand more of my mental energy. As an undergraduate, I communicated my knowledge of history in seminar classes, office hours, and term papers. However, in such instances I was always engaging with peers or professors. Now that I find myself with students of my own, I’ve discovered that there exists a wide gulf between demonstrating one’s knowledge of a particular subject and conveying knowledge of the same.

I recognize now that mastering a particular field or subfield is a fool’s errand, and how best to share with others what I’ve learned has become perhaps the most stimulating question I’ve encountered in graduate school. Increasingly, delivery fascinates me more than content in our peculiar world of articles, books, lectures, and workshops. I evaluate the importance of research and analysis, our department continues to embrace its mission of training students to think carefully and critically about the world they inhabit.

Thanks for taking an interest in our department. As always, we’re very interested in hearing from our alumni, so please pass along any updates or events that we can include in our newsletter. Best wishes for a successful year.

By Randall Williams

Doctoral Insight: What I’ve Learned So Far

New graduate students assemble at a bar-b-que hosted by Graduate Studies Director Jeff Wiltse. (l to r) Jordan Graham, Tim Ballard, Robert Rutherfurd, and Chelsea Chamberlain. Missing John Dunkum, Elizabeth Leon, Sisu Pan, and Kyeann Sayer.
presentations for their clarity, language for its concision, and arguments for their logical structure. I’ve come to appreciate the demanding task of explaining a complex argument or subject to an unfamiliar audience while maintaining important nuances and foregoing the temptation to simplify. Learning to think seriously and critically about this particular challenge has been one of the unexpected pillars of my graduate education.

Student News

Articles

Honors
Rosalyn LaPier (Blackfeet/Metis) (ABD) has been appointed to the EPA’s National Environmental Justice Advisory Council (NEJAC). She will serve from September 1, 2013, to August 31, 2016, and represent “indigenous communities.” She attended her first meeting in Atlanta, GA, September 10-12.

Happy Avery was awarded a Bertha Morton Scholarship for the 2013-14 academic year in the amount of $3,000. The Morton Scholarship is UM’s most prestigious award for graduate students and is given only to those who have demonstrated excellence in academic performance, research, and creative activities.

The Harry Fritz Fund for Student Achievement—UPDATE!

In the past year, alumni and friends of the History Department have graciously contributed over $15,000 to the Harry Fritz Fund for Student Achievement. This fund honors the impressive career of Professor Emeritus Harry Fritz and will be used to support the academic enrichment activities of UM students. We are more than halfway to our initial fundraising goal of $25,000! We would like to thank those who contributed to the Fritz Fund this year:

Mike Allen
Summerfield “Sam” Baldridge
Ann & Tom Boone
Bob Brown
Robert & Joan Egan
Harry Fritz

James F. Gore
Donna & James Koch
Jim Leik
John W. “Jack” Manning
Jerry & Susan Woodahl

To give to the Harry Fritz Fund for Student Achievement, please send a check payable to “UM Foundation—Fritz Fund” to Professor Kyle G. Volk, UM Department of History, 32 Campus Dr.—LA 260, Missoula, MT 59812. Thank you for your support!
Alumni Updates

Editor’s note: We’re pleased to offer a collection of personal reflections and updates from our alumni. We invite future submissions of more of the same.

Allison Badger
Following my 2003 graduation, I worked as a research assistant for Dan Flores and as a research historian for the Heritage Research Center, where I’ve continued to work. While Dan had me tracking down artwork and obtaining publishing rights for his 2010 book, Visions of the Big Sky: Painting and Photography in the Northern Rocky Mountain West, my work for Heritage Research focused on researching land and water issues. I think I spent more time traveling to various libraries than in Missoula!

Since I was living in libraries, I decided I was meant to be a librarian. In 2008 I began working on a masters degree in library science through the University of North Texas’s distance learning program. After graduating in 2010, I moved to Helena to work at the Montana State Library as a digital services technician and, in 2012, as a librarian for the Office of Public Instruction. Additionally, I am an active member in the Montana Library Association, where I chair the Technical Services Interest Group and assist with training other catalogers. When I’m not working, I’m involved with several book clubs, skiing or spending time with friends at my favorite brew pub!

Steve Medvec
Thank you very much for this newsletter. I enjoyed it.

I once wrote to Linda Frey when I was doing my PhD in Political Science at Temple University (1990-1996) as I had been taking a History course in the French Revolution and the professor was a devotee of the Annals approach, so I inquired of Linda as to her views on the Annals approach.

I am a graduate in History-Political Science in 1972, member of Phi Alpha Theta (1970) and also Pi Sigma Alpha (under Forest Grieves), specializing in International Relations and East Europe/former USSR. I once worked as a contract translator of Polish for the Agency (primarily in the Economics sphere as I had taken also a lot of Economics at UM principally with Tom Powers) and am a member also of the Association of Former Intelligence Officers (AFIO).

I have my MA in Political Science from UM in 1977 and was a Fulbright Scholar to Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan, Poland (1973-1975), where I met and married beautiful Alexandra, a historian of the Prussian partition of Greater Poland (1772 -1918); my name is on the Circle of Scholars in front of Main Hall.

I have been in recent correspondence with Harry Fritz about Lewis & Clark (he recommended a lot of books, including his own very helpful one) as I was a guest lecturer to the Freemasons in Philadelphia in March on this subject (both Lewis & Clark were Freemasons, although William Clark did not join until 1809, after the Expedition; I am not a Freemason, a Roman Catholic). I have been asked to give this lecture at least twice more to other groups off-campus. It is a labor of love for me as a native of Great Falls, but it is not traditionally a subject of Political Science. It is amazing to me how little Lewis & Clark are either known or studied in this part of the country.

I was just in Harrisburg for the annual "Student Lobby Day" at the Pennsylvania Capitol, which is very ornate. Every year I take four highly selected students from various disciplines to discuss funding issues and general matters in higher education in Pennsylvania. Our Governor, Tom Corbett, has been

(continued)
slashing the education budget here since 2011 and is very unpopular with an approval rating of 30 percent, 11 percent among women. I sent to Harry various postcards of Pennsylvania for his History classes (show-and-tell, if he chooses).

I am also the founder and co-sponsor of the Pennsylvania Alpha Nu Chapter of Pi Gamma Mu, International Honor Society in the Social Sciences (Political Science and Sociology here only as the other Social Science disciplines). Criminal Justice, Psychology, and tangentially History have their own honor societies on campus. I attended the Triennial Conventions in Atlanta in October 2008 (including visiting the house in which Margaret Mitchell wrote Gone With The Wind, which I have read subsequently) and in Washington, DC, in October 2011.

Thank you and best wishes from Pennsylvania. I was last on campus in August 2008. I miss the Rockies.

Zoe Ann Stoltz

After I returned to school at the age of 45, many folks asked what I could possibly do with a history degree....and at my age! Since then, I have discovered that with a history degree, I could do anything!

I am the Reference Historian for the Montana Historical Society Research Center. During the course of my work week (I use the term loosely) I may assist a 6th grader in researching the Fur Trade as well as help a prize-winning author locate facts on cattle brands. When I am not assisting researchers, I conduct research for off-site patrons and explore Montana’s history for creation of outreach programs and classroom visits. My outreach programs often promote the classroom use of primary documents and I recently participated in the creation of a homestead kitchen exhibit. Colleagues and I are also preparing for the creation of a “Montana” cookbook, using information from Montana sources, featuring Montana trends and tastes.

What can you do with a degree in history? Have the time of your life with Montana’s history and people!

Ginny Summey

Life has been quite the whirlwind since leaving the University of Montana in May, 2012! Last summer I returned to my home state, North Carolina, to work on my PhD at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG). After the initial ups and downs often accompanying life transitions, I quickly felt at home in UNCG’s history department. I entered the PhD program with four other wonderful colleagues and we all became fast friends (although nobody can replace my MA cohorts at Montana).

I am now starting the second year of my program and continue to enjoy life in Greensboro. With comprehensive exams in one year, I find myself spending many hours at my favorite downtown coffee shop poring over books and JSTOR reviews.

My MA thesis on Elreta Alexander Ralston will also eventually become my dissertation, which makes having her archival collection at the UNCG library extremely convenient. My first article on Alexander Ralston also appeared in the July 2013 edition of the North Carolina Historical Review (thanks in no small part to the amazing instruction I received from Anya Jabour and Tobin Miller Shearer).

I hope everybody at UM has a wonderful fall semester and GO GRIZ!
Nichole Sgarlato

‘Suck it up, Buttercup’ – part of Nichole Sgarlato’s coda
By Alice Miller
[excerpted from the Missoulian, July 29, 2013]

Nichole Sgarlato didn’t let on she had an inoperable, golf-ball size brain tumor and remained optimistic until her death July 4, family and friends said.
The wife, daughter, sister, aunt, roller derby girl, retro fashion lover, home chef, champion for the underdog and friend to many, died at the age of 27 from a secondary infection in her fight against glioblastoma, a type of brain tumor that can cause progressive memory, personality or neurological deficits.
Those who knew Sgarlato said she was always cheery, a supportive friend and an individualist.
“She was always really sunny, and she’s always had a lot of confidence,” said Melanie Causby, Sgarlato’s mother.
“Vibrant, vibrant. She was just vibrant,” Causby said.
“Everyone that’s ever met her has said she can bring out enthusiasm in anybody,” her husband Colin Sgarlato said.
“She was the most genuine person I’ve ever met,” he said, adding she was better known by her maiden name, Mikko-Causby.
Even as she struggled through her cancer after her diagnosis in March, she focused on others instead of herself. While she fought the infection that killed her, she encouraged her husband.
“She was still telling me, ‘Suck it up, Buttercup,’” he said.
She didn’t focus on statistics that said she would be dead within five years.
“We both made such an effort to really just focus on what we’re doing now,” he said.
Sgarlato, originally from Georgia, first fell in love with Montana as an AmeriCorps volunteer in Terry.
As a child, Sgarlato could recite information about dinosaurs and ocean critters, but as she grew, her interest shifted to history and feminism.
Some of that interest probably came from meeting and learning about strong women in Montana, Causby said.
It was in Terry that Sgarlato also fell back in love with Colin.
The two had grown up together and dated on and off in high school, Colin Sgarlato said.
They reconnected over photos of their Boston terriers that were posted on Facebook, he said.
“She loved dogs,” he said.
“The dogs were with her every moment of every day when she was home.”
The couple moved to Missoula about three years ago so she could do graduate work and he could finish his schooling at the University of Montana.
During her graduate work, Sgarlato gravitated toward teaching.
“She really fell in love with teaching,” said Amy Arnett, Sgarlato’s sister.
She always wanted to know everything about everything, Arnett said.
“Even her cancer was that way,” she said.
Sgarlato made friends easily, and Missoula was no different.
“I’ve never met anybody like her, actually,” said Sarah Trueax, who skated with Sgarlato in the Hellgate Rollergirls.
“She really knew how to be in the moment with everything,” Trueax said.
Sgarlato, who went by Joan Jolt at the rink, was a good teacher for other roller derby skaters and would often give them tips or show them a new skate technique.
“She could do pretty much everything effortlessly,” Trueax said.
“She was a really good, patient teacher,” she added.
Sgarlato never lost her individuality. She forged her own way.
“She definitely followed her passion,” Sgarlato’s father Gary Causby said.
“She did exactly what she felt she needed to do,” he added.
Alumni News

Articles

Book Contracts
Michael Dax (MA 2013) has been offered a book contract by the University of Nebraska Press for his thesis, "Grizzly West: The Story of the Failed Attempt to Reintroduce Grizzly Bears to the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness."


Students from Visiting Assistant Professor Bradley Naranch’s class: “Darwin & This World” participate in a field excursion in Gates of the Mountains – Merriweather Canyon, Lewis & Clark, Mann Guich Fire, in May 2013. (l to r) Bradley Naranch, Casey Panarese, Natasha VanCleave-Schottland, Rachel Petek, not pictured – Jordan Clutter.

Lockridge Workshop Schedule

Fall Semester 2013

10/4 – Sam Rostad, PhD Student, University of Notre Dame
"Skipping a Grade? Black Monks and the Arts Course at Medieval Oxbridge, c. 1300-1500"

10/18 – Jon Hall, PhD Candidate, UM
"‘Dogs of Character’ and ‘Curs of Low Degree’: A Canine Conundrum in the Early Republic"

11/1 – Pat O’Connor, PhD Student, UM

11/15 – Thomas Andrews, Associate Professor of History, University of CO, Boulder
“Animals and the Plight of the Five Civilized Tribes: How Pigs, Deerskins, and Horses Unsettled the Southern Backcountry, 1600s-1830s”

3/21 – Randall Williams, PhD Student, UM

Spring Semester 2014

2/7 – Sorn Jessen, MA Student, UM

2/21 – Jeff Meyer, MA Student, UM

3/7 – Cathleen Cahill, Associate Professor of History, University of New Mexico

Employment
Ian Stacy (PhD 2013) has garnered a post at Whatcom Community College in Bellingham, WA.

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Faculty News

Articles


———. "Prostitution Politics and Feminist Activism in Modern America: Sophonisba Breckinridge and the Morals Court in Prohibition-Era Chicago." Journal of Women's History 25, no. 3 (Fall 2013): 143-166.


Books

Book Contracts
Dan Flores has signed a contract with Basic Books for his forthcoming book Coyote America: A Natural and Supernatural History.


Documentary Appearance
Dan Flores appeared in several scenes with Anthony Bourdain in an episode on Northern New Mexico in the second season of his Parts Unknown show on CNN on September 29, 2013.

Grants
Tobin Miller Shearer and Rob Saldin (Political Science ) were awarded a National Endowment for the Humanities-sponsored grant to bring "Created Equal: America’s Civil Rights Struggle to UM."

Honors
Bill Farr’s book, Blackfoot Redemption: A Blood Indian’s Story of Murder, Confinement, and Imperfect Justice (University of Oklahoma Press 2012) won the Great Plains Distinguished Book Prize for 2013. He will deliver a lecture on the book, receive a $5,000 award, and be presented with the Distinguished Book Prize medallion at The Center for Great Plains Studies at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln on October 16, 2013.

Linda Frey was inducted into the Masséna Society in spring of 2013 in recognition of her work in Revolutionary and Napoleonic European history.

Anya Jabour was one of twenty-five participants in a Summer Institute sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities at the Newberry Library in Chicago in June and July 2013. The Institute, "Making Modernism: Literature and Culture in Twentieth-Century Chicago, 1893-1955," provided useful background for her current project on Chicago-based educator and activist Sophonisba Preston.
Breckinridge (1866-1948).

Tobin Miller Shearer garnered the 2013 Helen and Winston Cox Educational Excellence Award from the College of Arts and Sciences. Since 1996, four other History Department faculty have also won the award: Robert Greene, Anya Jabour, Pamela Voekle, and Jeff Wiltse.

**Presentations**


Flores, Dan. September 26, 2013 the annual Pilster Lecture, Mari Sandoz Society, Chadron State University, Chadron, Nebraska.


Pavilack, Jody. “From Chilean Coal Miners to Henry A. Wallace: Progressive Visions of the Postwar World,” Provost’s Distinguished Scholar series, University of Montana, October 30, in the UC North Ballroom at 6 pm.