Spring 2014

Footnotes (Spring 2014)

Department of History

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Celebrating the success of our modern European graduate program

What could unite such disparate topics: German Protestant missionaries establishing model settlements in Ottoman Palestine in the late nineteenth century; Eastern European Jews negotiating with German military officials in devastated Poland during the First World War; one Latvian interwar dictator who got many of his ideas while living as an exile in Nebraska; Nazi race examiners in search of mythical “lost Germanic blood” in occupied Europe; and the Gestapo’s manhunts in the Rhineland at the end of World War II?

Besides the obvious fact that they are fascinating, the common denominator is that these topics are being researched by UT modern European history graduate students who have won major international and national fellowships. Professor Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius is very proud of his students, who since 2008 have won nine major fellowships, including two Fulbrights (Tracey Hayes Norrell to Poland, Jordan Kuck to Latvia), three DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service) fellowships (Jacob Hamric, Tracey Hayes Norrell, and Michael McConnell), two US Holocaust Memorial Museum fellowships (Michael McConnell and Bradley Nichols), a Berlin Program fellowship (Bradley Nichols), and a University of Tennessee Humanities Center fellowship (Bradley Nichols). In addition, Geoff Krempa, working on interwar ultranationalist plots, attended the Junior Scholars Training Seminar of the Woodrow Wilson International Center and won a US Army Military History Institute grant. Josh Sander, investigating Nazi plans for the Netherlands, won places in two summer seminars, hosted by the Center for Jewish History in New York and the Holocaust Education Foundation Summer Institute at DePaul University.

From the department head

The faculty of the Department of History is grateful for Tom Burman’s leadership as department head over the past six years. Taking over that role just when the world economy—and UT—faced a paralyzing recession, he led the department through some major challenges, the proverbial curse of “interesting times.” We have emerged stronger than ever, with a vibrant faculty recognized nationally for its track record in winning competitive fellowships. In this issue, you can see a sample of the fascinating and award-winning research we have recently published.

We are fine teachers, too, mentoring some outstanding graduate students, staying abreast of the latest thinking about effective undergraduate education, and helping a new generation of Tennessee students remember all that came before them. As the department’s new head, I am particularly thankful for all that Tom Burman did to make us one of the strongest humanities departments at the university, and I look forward to building on this legacy. Thanks for spending some time reading this newsletter and catching up on what we are doing. You will see why I am optimistic about the future of our Department of History.

Ernest Freeberg

Above, Jordan Kuck, Josh Sander, Michael McConnell, Vejas Liulevicius, Bradley Nichols, Jacob Hamric, and Geoff Krempa (photo by Kelli Guinn). Inset, Tracey Hayes Norrell, assistant professor of history and geography, Alabama A & M University
Tore Olsson is a historian of the twentieth-century United States, and he is delighted to join the department. He is particularly interested in the impact of the United States on the larger world surrounding it, and he explores that impact through the lens of food and agriculture. Food has always been a key vehicle of globalization. Christopher Columbus crossed the Atlantic Ocean in search of Indian spices. Olsson looks at the exchange of plants and animals as a window to how the United States exercised power on the global stage during the last 100 years.

Olsson’s current book project looks at the global campaigns known as the Green Revolution—the US-led, post-WWII attempt to teach so-called “scientific agriculture” to poor farmers in the Third World. The book will examine the circulatory path of plant scientists and agricultural experts from underdeveloped regions in the United States into Mexico, a country long understood as the birthplace of the Green Revolution. In Mexico, the application of US agricultural science followed and led, in the short term, to a year abroad as part of a reciprocal exchange between his university and Nankai University in Tianjin and, in the longer term, to an obsession that continues today.

He went on to earn a master's degree in Chinese language and ended up at the University of Muenster, Germany. There he studied the underprevalent second-century BCE political philosopher Ji Yi under Professor Reinhard Rummel, with support from the Heinrich Hertz Stiftung, a fellowship for non-Germans studying in Germany. After earning a PhD, Sanft held a two-year post-doctoral position at Kyoto University supported by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science. He then returned to teach for several years at the University of Muenster, where he completed the Habilitation review in 2011 (a process in German universities that requires the submission of a second dissertation and rigorous review of a candidate's scholarship and teaching).

He returned to the United States and spent a semester at the Institute for Advanced Study (Princeton), followed by a semester teaching and doing research at the University of Minnesota. Last year he taught at the University of Utah. In his debut essay at UT (fall 2012), he taught History of China: China to 1600 and Studies in Asian History: The Death Penalty in a Cross-Cultural Context.

Sanft is interested in how political and government processes worked in China during the time when the Chinese empire was first taking shape. He makes use of transmitted historical and philosophical texts, as well as the works of agricultural experts from underdeveloped regions in the United States into Mexico, a country long understood as the birthplace of the Green Revolution.

News from the Center for the Study of War and Society

Vejas Gabriel Laičuvičius, director of the Center for the Study of War and Society since 2008, reports that together with UT Libraries, the center has won a National Archives grant to digitize its World War II oral histories. In addition, the late Colonel John Bradley McKinney bequeathed to the center a generous gift of $100,000. The center hosted a workshop with Joachim Tauber of the Nordost Institut in Germany. For the first time, the center’s interns won an undergraduate research award in UT’s Euhèca competition. The center’s AfterWar research seminar meets regularly. To receive the center newsletter and e-mail updates on events, please call 865-974-0128 or e-mail csws@utk.edu.

Happy man

Steve Ash on writing, teaching, life, and retirement

By Catherine Higgs

Steve Ash is a happy man. He fell in love with the history of the Civil War—the subject of his scholarly work—at age twelve in 1950. This youthful obsession led to a still greater love. While a student at Gettysburg College in the late 1960s, he fell in love with Joanie. They will celebrate their forty-fourth wedding anniversary in June 2014.

When Steve and Joanie graduated from college, they headed to Washington, DC, where both worked for the Social Security Administration. The jobs paid well but neither could imagine a lifetime as bureaucrats. After eighteen months, they hit the road in a Volkswagon bus. After a year playing at being hippies, boredom struck. Steve decided to try to turn his childhood love of the Civil War into a career as a historian.

The UT history department snapped him up into its graduate program. Knoxville and UT became Steve’s third love: “When I come here in 1973, I felt for the first time like I’d found myself. I was happy; it changed my life.” Joanie took a job as a newsreader for WYXY radio. For twenty years, she was one of the most recognized personalities in Knoxville, beloved for her humorous interactions with the station’s DJs. She retired in 1994 and opened a business that takes travelers on guided tours to China. The next year the UT history department hired Steve as an assistant professor after a decade spent as a freelance historian and a journeyman lecturer at East Tennessee colleges.

By 1995, Steve was an established author and editor. He quickly became known as a great mentor of UT National Alumni Teaching Award 1990. For Steve, it was mutual admiration. “I really loved teaching undergraduates, inspiring them to love history,” he says.

For graduate students, Steve’s goal—with red pen and Strunk and White in hand—was to train them to become publishing historians. So far, four out of the ten PhD students Steve supervised have published their dissertations as a first book.

Steve, meanwhile, published seven books while carrying a full teaching load. A Year in the South (2002) became a bestseller and prompted the funniest e-mail on the best office door in the history department: a plea from a young man asking Professor Ash to synopsize the book for him before he attended class that afternoon at a different university. That offer Steve captures the essence of what he challenged his students to do over beers, rock and roll, good bourbon, jokes—good and bad—and his friends.

In retirement, he will continue to write—his eighth book, A Massacre in Memphis, was published in 2015. Joanie will travel. Steve’s friends will look forward to joining him as often as he invites us, for a drink on the Cumberland strip. Knoxville and UT are home.

The University of Tennessee Humanities Center Fellowships for 2013–2014 include three historians: Thomas E. Burman (see “Faculty fellowships,” page 4), Jacob Latham, and Christopher Magra.

Jacob Latham is completing a manuscript, The pompa circensis and the Urban Image of Rome: Ritual, Performance, and Urban Space from the Late Republic to Late Antiquity, which examines the procession that preceded the immensely popular chariot races in the Circus Maximus—one of Rome’s three great pomerium—together with the triumph and the funeral procession. This spectacle attracted enormous crowds, offering an unparalleled opportunity for public merriment, political patronage, and religious devotion as it conducted the gods from the temple of Jupiter to the circus where the wild contents entertained one and all.

Christopher Magra’s second book is Poseidon’s Curse: Naval Impressment and the Atlantic Origins of the American Revolution, in which he argues that the British navy’s policy of pressing men and ships into service around the Atlantic to support commerce threatened merchants’ property and profits. Labourers also resented the navy’s uncompetitive wages and limited employment options. Both groups viewed British actions as a danger to economic freedom, and merchants and workers around the Atlantic signaled their resentment toward British impressment.

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Steve Ash’s most recent book is *A Massacre in Memphis: The Race Riot That Shook the Nation One Year after the Civil War* (2013). It is the first book-length study of the historic, three-day-long Memphis riot of 1866 during which rumors of a plot to murder forty-six black men, women, and children; assaulted, robbed, and raped many others; and burned down every black church and school in the city, along with many dwellings. One of the most sensational events of the post-Civil War era, the riot spurred Congress to take action to protect the South’s ex-slaves and helped launch Radical Reconstruction.

In spring 2013, Ernest Freeberg published *The Age of Edison: Electric Light and the Invention of Modern America*, a history of the social and cultural impact of electric light. The Washington Post has called the book “a captivating intellectual adventure that offers long-forgotten stories of the birth pangs of the electrical age that are amusing, surprising, and tragic.” Freeberg has been sharing his findings with audiences across the country, appearing on National Public Radio and C-Span.

Catherine Higgs is the author of *Chocolate Islands: Cocoa, Slavery, and Colonial Practice* (2012), which traces the early-twentieth-century journey of the Englishman Joseph Burtt to the Portuguese colony of São Tomé and Príncipe—the chocolate islands—through Angola and Mozambique, and finally to British Southern Africa. The English chocolateier Cadbury Brothers had hired Burtt to determine if the cocoa it was buying from the islands had been impoverished by slave laborers forcibly recruited from Angola—an allegation that became one of the grand scandals of the early colonial era and which echoes still in the early twenty-first century.

In *Bloody Breathitt: Politics and Violence in the Appalachian Mountains* (2013), Robert Hutton offers an account of the intersection of power and brutality between the Civil War and the Progressive era in one tumultuous community. In the late 1880s, Breathitt County, Kentucky, seemed to be the quintessential “feud” locale, a remote mountain anomaly bereft of New South progress. In fact, Breathitt County’s violent history reflected events far beyond its borders. “Feud,” and all it entailed, was only one of many deceptively simple names for killing that continue to distort the causes of violent death all over the globe.

Ana Jefferson is co-author of *Daily Life in Colonial Latin America* (2013), a book in the Greenwood Press daily life series. Chapters explore people’s daily activities in the areas of work, school, affective life, home life, religious practice, celebrations, and resistance and rebellion. The book summarizes recent monographs on the colonial experience, supporting them with anecdotes from the authors’ archival research in Guatemala. Preference is given to the experiences of Africans and their descendants, the least-studied of the peoples of three continents who came together to create Latin America.

Robert (Jeff) Norrell has published a novel, *Eden Rise* (2013), which in Tom McKeen’s hands, a white college freshmen, returns to his Alabama home in 1965 and here notices how bitter the civil rights conflict that splits his family, his town, and his own identity. McKeen’s powerful family is not prepared for the effects of the Selma march. John Gregory Brown, writer-in-residence at Sweetbriar College, says Eden Rise offers a dramatic and beautifully written examination of racial injustice and violence in the South during the tumultuous 1960s, and that Norrell “demonstrates that he’s not merely a profound, insightful historian, he’s a first-class novelist as well.”

Denver Phillips is the author of *Acolytes of Nature: Defining Natural Science in Germany, 1770–1850* (2012). Phillips’s book offers a history of the concept “science” within German-speaking Europe, exploring how changes in German culture and society affected ideas about scientific knowledge. The Germans started using a modern concept of science several decades in advance of other European nations, and Phillips’s research explains the reasons for their precocious adoption of this category.

In *Arms of Heaven: The First Crusade and the Quest for Apocalypse* (2011), Jay Rubenstein retells the story of the First Crusade in a way that draws forth the apocalyptic motivations and beliefs that underlay the unprecedented brutal battles that it spawned. In 1096, tens of thousands of warriors from France, Germany, and Italy, marched east with the goal of reclaiming the city of Jerusalem for Christendom. Their mission, later known as the First Crusade, reached its culmination four years later and in the process inaugurated a new kind of warfare: holy, unrestrained, and apocalyptic.

Communication and Cooperation in Early Imperial China challenges longstanding notions of the Din dynasty, China’s first imperial dynasty (221–206 BCE). Using new information afforded by the expansion of Chinese archaeology in recent decades, Charles Sault concentrates on cooperative aspects of early imperial government, and especially on the communication necessary for it. Sault links together events and actions that past scholars have viewed as separate and explains them as comprising a set of early media for mass communication over the whole of the realm, toward the goal of successful governance.

Recent books by faculty

**Africa** (2012), which traces the early-twentieth-century journey of the Englishman Joseph Burtt to the Portuguese colony of São Tomé and Príncipe—the chocolate islands—through Angola and Mozambique, and finally to British Southern Africa. The English chocolateier Cadbury Brothers had hired Burtt to determine if the cocoa it was buying from the islands had been impoverished by slave laborers forcibly recruited from Angola—an allegation that became one of the grand scandals of the early colonial era and which echoes still in the early twenty-first century.

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The James K. Polk Presidential Papers Project

By Tom Chaffin, director and editor of the Correspondence of James K. Polk

The James K. Polk Presidential Papers Project is pleased to announce the publication of Volume 12 (January–July 1847) of the Correspondence of James K. Polk. This latest installment in the Polk series, published by the University of Tennessee Press, documents a critical seven months in one of America’s most transformative presidencies.

A former Tennessee governor and congressman, Polk was the eleventh US president (1845-1849). Many of the new volume’s letters chronicle his prosecution of the Mexican War, a conflict that, along with his 1846 acquisition of what is today’s Pacific Northwest, increased by one-third the size of the United States. The letters—gathered from the Library of Congress and other repositories, most of them until now unpublished—also lift the veil on the personal life and business affairs of one of the most private men ever to occupy the presidency.

While many letters document the Mexican War, others reveal less familiar foreign-policy interests under Polk, including Hawaii, Cuba, and Europe. Still others concern Polk’s business and personal affairs. Volume 12 also introduces several editorial changes to the series—including the inclusion of birth and death dates for all individuals identified in the volume’s notes. Another change concerns additional information on slaves referred to in the volume’s letters.

As I write in the volume’s introduction, much of the correspondence in the Polk series—letters in earlier volumes, those in the new volume, and those to appear in future volumes—deals with Polk’s purchases and sales of slaves. “Until themselves these letters tend to yield few details regarding the identities of the slaves. Moreover, the extant Polk historiography, most of it focused on policy issues, also tends to shed scant light on the identities of these individuals.”

To bring more light to such matters, assistant editor Michael Cohen and I located and acquired photocopies of many primary-source documents—sales contracts and probate-court records, in addition to Polk’s letters—related to Polk’s business affairs. These documents allow us to in this and future volumes to present essential biographical information for many of the slaves—including, in many instances, birth and death years. Through this research, we hope to enhance the value of this series to social historians and to historians of the African American experience.

Two more volumes are planned to complete the Polk Project. Michael and I have resumed the Polk Project’s canvass for unlocated letters. The project works from copies of original documents; thanks to the Internet and other media (and sheer happenstance), many letters to and from Polk can be and have been located since the series’ original documents canvass, conducted during the 1960s. Thus, Volume 12 contains and future volumes will include letters located during this renewed search. Our plans also call for Volume 14—the final installment of the series—to include a compendium that publishes in full, or otherwise summarizes, letters located too late for inclusion in their chronologically appropriate volumes. Finally, we’re pleased to announce that the Polk Project has launched a new website: polkproject.utk.edu.

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Your donation to the Department of History will be used to help a dynamic and accomplished faculty in its mission to produce groundbreaking research, to train a new generation of professional historians, and to extend the benefits of an excellent liberal arts education to more citizens of the state.

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The UT history faculty: (front row) Monica Black, Dan Feller, Chad Black, Margaret Cook Andersen, Laura Nenzi, Ernest Freeberg, (second row) J. P. Dessel, Tore Olsson, Lynn Sacco, (back row) Luke Harlow, Jay Rubenstein, Charles Sanft, Jacob Latham, Bob Bast, Catherine Higgs, and Vejas Liulevicius