



Historically Speaking...

Department of History Newsletter

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From the High Chair. . .

I have spoken to you in the past about the importance of global awareness and the study of foreign languages and cultures. I could not have imagined how frighteningly prophetic these thoughts would be until that fateful day on September 11, 2001. History can change with the explosive intrusion of a single cataclysmic event. To most Americans, what did Osama bin Laden, the Taliban, and even Afghanistan mean to them prior to 9/11/01? After that day, however, the world was different, fundamentally changed, and a new vocabulary of places and people flooded our televisions and computer screens night and day. Suddenly it did matter that a multiplicity of languages were spoken in far-off Afghanistan, and that warlords and tribal groups ruled over a dizzying mosaic of plain, valley, and mountain. Seemingly unimportant events conspiring in a troubled land ruled by misguided Islamic fundamentalists and foreign terrorists came home to us—we became students of global history overnight. A history lesson learned the hard way—a superpower cannot hide from the world and its problems. ‘Splendid isolation’ is no longer an option. And aren’t we so very thankful that we live in a country where the separation of church and state constitutes one of our most cherished freedoms?

“It was the best of times. . . .” This has been a very busy year, and the faculty continue to bring lustre to the department. Professor Fred Baumgartner was honored as the Social Science Historian of the Year; Professor Roger Ekirch received two awards recognizing his seminal article in the *American Historical Review*; Professor Amy Nelson won a Certificate of Teaching Excellence, one of only five awarded in the entire College of Arts and Sciences; and the team of Professors Dan Thorp, Marian Mollin, Kathy Jones, and Mark Barrow won a prestigious award from the Center for Innovation in Learning to create and test online interactive learning modules for the core U.S. history survey classes. Professor Ewing was co-organizer of a global history symposium for public school teachers in the region held at Virginia Tech last November, a wonderful and timely opportunity for outreach and continuing education. While Professor Thorp is off in New Zealand on a Fulbright Fellowship this semester, Professor Richard Hirsh has been admirably serving as acting associate chair of the department. Professor Randy Shifflett won a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to continue his work on “Virtual-Jamestown”. Be on the lookout for a film coming out at the end of this year—Professor James Robertson is the consultant for a film on the Civil War starring Robert Duvall. This year, the department designed and proposed a Ph.D in History focusing upon global and comparative studies and a new technology-based M.A. and Ph.D program called Clio-informatics (Clio being the Greek mythological muse of history). In addition, our efforts to form a History Alumni/ae Advisory Board are proceeding apace, and I am delighted to report that our very first board member is history alum Philip Shucet, the newly-appointed Commissioner of the Virginia Department of Transportation. More on Philip later in the Newsletter. Special thanks to Ron and Sue Crawford for their generous gift of stocks to the department and to Mac Banks, History '72, for his funding of the annual Banks Prize for the top graduating history major. Please pencil in the College of Arts and Sciences social science alumni/ae reunion scheduled to coincide with the Virginia Tech-Pitt football game on Nov. 1-2, 2002. The History Department will offer some informational presentations on the latest activities of the faculty. Come and join the fun.

“It was the worst of times. . . .” Well, it can’t get much worse. We have been hit with devastating budget cuts, hiring has been frozen, and major restructuring plans will result in the end of the College of Arts and Sciences.

After a month of uncertainty, the Provost has decided to split the College of Arts and

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Sciences into two colleges, one for the sciences, the other for the arts, humanities, and the social sciences. In a few years, the Department of History will belong to the College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences. The department is facing a flood of nearly 5,000 students per year pounding on our doors to fulfill the Board of Visitors' unfunded mandate to take an introductory U.S. history course before graduating. There is no hope of accommodating these numbers without additional resources from the college and the university. We will have to be creative. . . .and count on the kindness of strangers.

With sadness I report the deaths of two of our beloved retired colleagues, Professors Les Mellichamp in December 2001 and Bill Lane in January 2002. There are obituaries elsewhere in this issue, but I cannot fail to say a few words about them. Les taught our Intellectual European History course, was an old-world humanist and literary editor, and entertained our social gatherings with his music. I remember the uninhibited exuberance of a youngish faculty flat-footing to the music of Les and his local band, and a certain innocence that vouchsafed that we ought not to take ourselves too seriously. As for Bill, a sweet and decent guy who taught Latin American history and did some advising in his later years, he was always upbeat, down-to-earth southern friendly, and appreciated a good joke—and even a bad one. Both of these men survived the difficult publish-or-perish years of the 1980s with dignity and grace. They never doubted that the students and undergraduate education should always come first.

Glenn Richard Bugh
Chair, Department of History

Alumni Spotlight . . .

Philip Shucet,
Class of 1972

Philip Shucet graduated from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in 1972, part of the University's centennial class. Philip was a member of the Corps of Cadets and served as the Regimental Scholastics Officer during his senior year. He focused his studies on Russian History, with minors in Russian language and English. Philip currently lives in Virginia Beach.

Armed with a degree in History, Philip's writing and research skills landed a job with the West Virginia Department of Highways writing environmental impact statements for highway projects. Philip discovered that his liberal arts education helped him work with engineers to explain highway projects to the general public and permitting agencies in non-technical terms. Working in West Virginia for 12 years, Philip's career there culminated in an appointment as the first non-engineer to become the state-wide Transportation Planning Manager.

In December 1985, Philip moved to Arizona to become the Environmental Planning Manager for the Arizona Department of Transportation. While in Arizona, Philip was able to work with engineers, local officials and the public to win approval of several controversial transportation projects. One of his more memorable assignments in Arizona was the archaeological recovery of human remains from an ancient burial site for medicine men. The dig



had to be completed to allow the replacement of a bridge washed away by a flood. Before the dig could begin, Philip had to record the exact procedures that would be followed. Once recorded, these procedures were played aloud by a tribal medicine woman who sought confirmation from "spiritual advisors" as to whether or not Philip was being truthful about the care that would be taken with any recovered human remains. Thankfully, the medicine woman pronounced the intentions worthy, and the project was permitted to proceed.

In 1989 Philip left government to join the private sector. During that time, Philip worked for the engineering firm of Michael Baker Jr., Inc, a company of nearly 4,000 people providing engineering and energy services on a global basis. As a corporate Executive Vice president, Philip had the opportunity to manage several major projects, as well as serve as President and General Manager of two corporate subsidiaries. His project work led him to many states, as well as to Germany, Israel, Japan and Denmark. In April, 2002, Philip accepted an appointment as Commissioner of the Virginia Department of Transportation. He states: "I am very excited about this new challenge. Strike another blow for victory for History majors from Virginia Tech!"

Philip is a member of Phi Alpha Theta, a Fellow in the Institute of Transportation Engineers, and a member of a new Advisory Board for the History Department. "Regardless of whether one chooses to work in academia, the public or the private sector, the complexities of today's world require the integration of liberal arts and humanities with the technical sciences" he says. "The added value of an education in history is the ability to learn from the past to influence the future."

Club Scene . . .

Phi Alpha Theta and the History Club were fairly active. Dr. Ochsenwald delivered a talk entitled "A Historical Perspective on the Attack on America," Dr. Robertson spoke about the upcoming film "Gods and Generals," and we organized a resume writing workshop through Career Services to help us develop more effective resumes. Phi Alpha Theta inducted 26 students and several students joined the History Club. New officers for 2002-2003 are: Rebecca Walker, President; Alexis Brown, Vice President; Matt Israelson, Secretary; and Craig Campbell, Treasurer. Congratulations to all our new members inducted in Spring, 2002.

The requirement for joining the History Club is an interest in history. Phi Alpha Theta, the History Honors Fraternity, requires students to have completed twelve credits in history with a GPA of 3.1 and have a 3.0 GPA overall. The next induction ceremony will be held fall semester. Qualifying students will be contacted.

Kirsten Davis, Phi Alpha Theta Co-President

Professors From the Past . . .

In response to requests from Alumni asking about their favorite professors, here are some updates.

Leslie Mellichamp responded to our request for the article on faculty from the past in November 2001. "I am responding to your request for news. By way of an economical reply, I enclose a copy of the back cover of a collection of poems published not long after my retirement from the history department in 1985. Of course, almost twenty years have passed since that was written. My daughter, Jean Milliken, took over *The Lyric* several years ago, and old age and Parkinson's Disease have overtaken me. I still garden a bit, make a little music, and write a little poetry." The back cover of the book of poetry states: "Leslie Mellichamp was born in 1921, the same year as *The Lyric*, the poetry magazine with which his name has been associated for thirty years, and of which he has been the editor since 1977. When not in the classroom teaching courses ranging from electrical engineering to intellectual history to Shakespeare, he could usually be found playing the bass fiddle with local bluegrass or jazz bands, or lying, often sober, under his 1953 Studebaker Commander. He gardens and cuts wood. Betsy, his wife of forty years, occasionally threatens to wash his mouth out with soap or to resign as managing editor of *The Lyric*—both with perfect justice. Their three children, Jean, Nancy, and David, are scattered from New Orleans to Vermont to Italy. He retired, unrepentant from the history department in 1985."

(Editor's note: Sadly, Dr. Mellichamp passed away on December 18, 2001.)

Anastasia Sims (1984-87) is alive and well and living in Statesboro, Georgia, where she is Professor of History at Georgia Southern University. She has written one book, *The Power of Femininity in the New South: Women's Organizations and Politics in North Carolina, 1880-1930* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1997) and served as co-editor for a collection of essays *Negotiating the Boundaries of Southern Womanhood: Dealing with the Powers That Be* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000). Currently she is working on a biography of Juliette Gordon Low, founder of the Girl Scouts of the United States.

Robert G. Landen was associated with Virginia Tech during two separate periods. Dr. Landen writes: "First, the time from the summer of 1967 to the summer of 1969 when I gave up a position at Dartmouth to serve as the first permanent "head" of the Department of History (note: History was part of a large, service-oriented, Department of Social Science until 1966 when it became a separate department and was administered by Professor Bill Mackie as "acting head" until I joined its faculty); second, the years from the fall of 1988 to July 1995 when I returned to Blacksburg as Director of the center for Programs in the Humanities and Professor of History and Humanities. After leaving Virginia Tech for the first time in 1969, I continued to teach courses in modern Middle Eastern history, published a number of scholarly books and articles about the area, and participated in academic conferences. But, during most of the nineteen years until my second arrival in Blacksburg in 1988, my primary focus was on discharging a succession of academic administrative positions in a number of universities. After

retiring from my second term at Virginia Tech in 1995 I was appointed Professor Emeritus of History and Humanities at the University. My wife, Tricia, and I, both undergraduate alumni of the College of William and Mary, moved back to Williamsburg later in 1995. There, we have kept more than busy with alumni and other activities at William and Mary, redoing a "mature" home, gardening, raising family pets, taking painting and other classes, volunteering at Colonial Williamsburg, sojourning frequently to our second home on North Carolina's Outer Banks, and laboring upon my major on-going project: writing a scholarly history of the Persian/Arabian Gulf region in modern times."

Jere Link, former assistant professor in history and humanities, taught at Virginia Tech 1989-1991. While teaching German History, he team-taught Humanities as well. During his stay in Blacksburg, Jere won a grant to do archival work in Germany one summer, attended two conferences, and read a paper on the German Schiller Fund, 1859-1917, a charitable foundation for needy writers, their widows and orphans. Jere left Tech to accept a position at an Atlanta prep school. At Westminster, Jere has found the advantages of an endowment of ca. \$200,000,000; also, his metier, teaching bright adolescents. He is even reconciled to survey courses. At Westminster, Jere teaches Philosophy and Russian History electives, and, like Tech colleagues, has had to adapt to the teaching of World and Global History. Jere is serving his fourth year as chairman of his department of 21 teachers. He is the proud single father of Zach, 78 pounds (half-Chow, half-Shepherd). News from the B'burg crowd will be much appreciated at his e-mail address:

jereLink@westminster.net.

Herbert Winnik: "I was a professor at Virginia Tech from 1965-1969. I left to go to St. Mary's College of Maryland, a small liberal arts state college. I was a professor there from 1969-1999 and am now retired. I served as acting department chair, and president of the Faculty Senate two times as well as on numerous committees. I reside in Leonardtown and would be happy to hear from some of my colleagues during those years."

Arthur Hirsh: "I have been in Vienna now for 1.5 years and I'm enjoying it immensely. It's a beautiful, very safe city, with incredible cultural institutions and a large international community. There are many international organizations located here including the UN, OSCE, and OPEC to name a few. At the Webster-Vienna campus that I direct we offer Bachelor and Master degree programs to 400 students from 60 different nations, so we are very much an international community as well. (You can find out more about us at our webpage: www.webster.ac.at). Webster has a network of such campuses in Europe (London, Geneva, Leiden, as well as Vienna) and Asia (Shanghai and Thailand) as well as the main campus in St. Louis, Missouri. If anyone is passing through Vienna or wants to say hello, they are welcome to contact me."

Voula Saridakis: "I finally defended and finished up my Ph.D. in Science and Technology Studies. The title is 'Converging Elements in the Development of Late-Seventeenth Century Astronomy: Instrumentation, Education, Networks, and the Hevelius-Hooke Controversy'. Also, I am currently a Visiting



