Of Publication and Presidential Lectures

In this issue Professor Richard Drake reflects on more than a quarter century’s worth of Presidential Lecture Series programming. Professor Kyle Volk also shares insight into his newly released book, *Moral Minorities and the Making of American Democracy* (Oxford, 2014). Other features include Visiting Professor Gillian Glaes’s essay on why she returned to UM to teach, PhD Student Patrick O’Connor’s report on his current research, and a report from the Phi Alpha Theta conference. As always, please contact us with news of your accomplishments. We love to hear from our alums.
In 1987, President James Koch asked me to coordinate what he hoped would become a year-long lecture series at UM. It would be called the President’s Lecture Series with funding from his office. I had instructions from him to invite for the 1987-1988 academic year eight or ten important speakers representing the humanities, arts, and sciences. We thought that each speaker should give two presentations, a professionally pitched afternoon research seminar for faculty and students, and a town-gown evening lecture.

I chose for the logo of the series Raphael’s School of Athens, an iconic fresco of the Italian Renaissance celebrating the life of the mind. To continue that celebration in our own time and place seemed to me a worthy aim for the series. This choice did not inspire universal approbation. I learned from one perturbed critic that Raphael’s alleged masterpiece should be disqualified as our logo because not one female figure could be seen in it. This assertion seemed to me to emanate from an excessively severe school of art criticism. I gained, however, from that exchange of views about Raphael an immediate understanding of the potential for controversy in my work as the coordinator of the lecture series.

We have had plenty of controversy since, particularly over a principle that I have tried to make the animating spirit of the series: to choose speakers with outstanding professional credentials who have critical minds and are strongly inclined to go against the grain of establishment thinking. George Orwell called such individuals the awkward squad, a perfect name for them.

There are degrees of awkwardness, in the sense of the term meant by Orwell. I don’t think that the coordinator of a university lecture series should aim at sensationalism or controversy as ends in themselves, but, ideally, every lecture should have revolutionary potential, in the way we think and how we pattern our lives. The French Romantic painter Eugène Delacroix thought that the enemy of painting was gray. I think that the enemy of intellectual life is conformity. In his master work, Democracy in America, Alexis de Tocqueville identified the mass conformity of public opinion as the great danger in American life. As a critical institution, the university has a special obligation to be on high alert against this danger.

I have been fascinated over the twenty-eight years and now nearly three hundred speakers to observe how critical thinking has manifested itself in our series across the political spectrum, from left to right. Outstanding
left-wing speakers in the series include sociologist William Robinson and economist James Galbraith whose talks illustrated classic Marxist and progressive critiques of American military, economic, and political institutions. We normally assume that conservatives by definition support the status quo, but our series invalidates that assumption. Among conservatives, political scientist John Mearsheimer and historian Andrew Bacevich stand out as full-fledged members of the awkward squad. From a conservative Republican background in Mearsheimer’s case and a conservative Catholic background in that of Bacevich—both of them West Point graduates—we learned that the status quo in the United States abysmally fails the test of traditional American values.

The most famous scientist to speak in the series, the entomologist E. O. Wilson, had the best political joke of all our lecturers. He said that Marx was a genius. His ideas were incontrovertibly true, but for ants, not for humans. He went on to present us with an impassioned plea regarding the danger to the natural world resulting from the species degradation made inevitable by the insanely wasteful ways we misuse the resources of a planet now being brought to its knees.

Art and music have been well represented in the series. We have enjoyed many standout performances, but for sheer critical bravura the musician and music radio commentator, Miles Hoffman, gave the most intellectually challenging talk in this category, by asserting that the entirety of the avant-garde tradition in art and music had been an esthetic disaster for the Western world. He had an unparalleled knack for engendering the liveliest of discussions, once most of the people in the room had gotten over their indignant sputtering.

“every lecture should have revolutionary potential, in the way we think and how we pattern our lives”

PhD candidate Happy Avery was one of two recipients of the Hampton Research Grants awarded fall 2013. The funds helped support a research trip to the Hudson’s Bay Company Archives in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Happy reports she spent “a fruitful week” in the archives sorting through post journals and other company records for evidence related to her research on captivity and slavery in the fur trade economy of the Rocky Mountain West during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. She is also the first recipient of the Frederic G. Renner Scholarship for Western American History, a $2,000 award for the 2014-2015 academic year. The scholarship will support her tuition, fees, and some research in the coming year.

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An Interview with Kyle Volk on Moral Minorities and the Making of American Democracy

Tobin Miller Shearer

Shearer: You regularly advise your students on the importance of developing “big” arguments. What is the “big” argument in your book?

Volk: I encourage students to ask historically significant questions and to engage in deep and wide-ranging research to answer them in compelling ways. Hopefully that leads to a significant historical argument that tells us something new and important about the past. With my project, I began asking how majority tyranny and minority rights became concerns of everyday Americans and not just elites. The book argues that conflicts spurred by the rise of Protestant moral reform drove the emergence of America’s lasting tradition of popular minority-rights politics in the mid-nineteenth century. As officials heeded demands to regulate Sabbath observance, alcohol consumption, and interracial contact, a motley but powerful array of moral minorities—Jews, Seventh Day Baptists, black northerners, radical abolitionists, liquor dealers, German immigrants, and others—objected, and they reshaped American democracy by questioning the era’s faith in majority rule and pioneering lasting practices to defend civil rights and civil liberties.

Shearer: What was the most challenging aspect of writing this book?

Volk: There were plenty of challenges, but one that sticks out is the digital turn in historical research. When I came to UM in 2007, I had done lots of research in traditional archives and spent many, many hours reading newspapers on microfilm. As I started to revise and expand the project, I found that I had—thanks to the rapid digitization of newspapers, books, journals, etc.—new access to so much more. I vastly expanded the research base and was able to find all sorts of information that I would never have been able to discover with more traditional research methods. This process took quite a bit of time. In the end, I think it was worth it.

Shearer: What was the most fulfilling?

Volk: It was discovering the everyday people who resisted the moralistic majorities of the mid-nineteenth century. Whether black New Yorkers combatting segregation in the streets of New York, Seventh Day Baptist farmers challenging Sunday laws, or European immigrants fighting alcohol prohibition, these people made the decision to question authorities they deemed tyrannical and unjust. That basic, often risky decision is the backbone of my book and of American democracy’s tradition of minority-rights politics. I’m glad I found these people and was able to recreate their history.

Shearer: To whom will the book appeal?

Volk: I hope that anyone who has ever found themselves in the minority will find something useful in my book. More concretely, Moral Minorities should
help readers think about the roots of phenomena that today seem to be almost natural parts of the political landscape. I show, for example, that moralized debates over gay rights, birth control, religion in schools, and racial prejudice are nothing new. Over 150 years ago, these types of issues burst on to the political scene and brought all sorts of people to take an active interest in public life. These issues and those who debated them—like they continue to do today—played essential roles in making the tension between majority rule and minority rights a hallmark of American democracy. And for those interested in modern-day rights activism—in how folks across the political spectrum organize to defend constitutional freedom and to achieve social justice—my book shows how this political tradition got started. But Moral Minorities is also an academic history that tackles fundamental questions of American political theory and practice. I hope political scientists, legal scholars, and a range of historians find it useful.

Shearer: What’s next?
Volk: Probably a few shorter essays first. I don’t want to rush into a new book project until I’ve had space to think through the questions I want to tackle next. But one possibility comes out of the course I’ve been teaching on alcohol in US history. I have more to say about this topic than what appears in Moral Minorities. I’m thinking about exploring the place of alcohol in debates over the meaning of freedom in the long nineteenth century—from the Revolution through the 21st Amendment. I’ve also started to research another project on civil and uncivil disobedience in the mid-nineteenth century. Regardless, I’m sure that moral issues and questions of disobedience, democracy, and personal liberty will remain central to my research agenda.

“I hope that anyone who has ever found themselves in the minority will find something useful in my book”
Chair’s Update

On behalf of the History Department, welcome to the start of a new academic year. With the fall semester now well under way and our customary Labor Day picnic behind us, we welcome back John Eglin, who returns to us from a year’s sabbatical at Yale, and greet a new incoming graduate cohort of three MA students and two doctoral students. The department’s ranks have been thinned of late by faculty retirements and departures, but our search for a new A. B. Hammond Professor of Western History is ongoing and we look forward to finding a worthy successor for Dan Flores by year’s end.

Over the past year, as in every year, members of the department maintained a vigorous publishing record while garnering awards and accolades in the fields of teaching and research. Kyle G. Volk is this year’s recipient of the Helen and Winston Cox Educational Excellence Award, becoming the fifth active member of the department to earn that distinction, and Anya Jabour received the George M. Dennison Faculty Award for Distinguished Scholarship. Doctoral candidate Randall M. Williams won the Graduate Teaching Award from the UM Center for Teaching Excellence and Ph.D. student Patrick O’Connor was selected as the inaugural recipient of the George M. Dennison Doctoral Fellowship. You can read more about the recent accomplishments of History faculty and students in the pages that follow.

We hope that this newsletter brings you closer to the intellectual activity taking place in our small but vibrant department. As always, we welcome news and updates from alumni and friends of the department and we invite you to follow the department on Facebook. Best wishes for a successful year, and thank you for your continued support of the University of Montana History Department.

- Robert Greene
After I finished my degree, I went on to graduate school and decided to pursue a career as a historian. With the realities of the academic job market, it was always a long shot for me to return to Montana as a faculty member. My advisor at Wisconsin used to joke with me that I would end up teaching in Mississippi. With all due respect to Mississippi, as a lifelong westerner, I was not amused. But Mississippi was not in the cards for me. Somehow, instead, I made it back to Montana. From 2006 until 2014, I was the modern European historian at Carroll College in Helena, Montana. It was a tremendous experience, but after eight years there, it was time for a change. When I decided to step away from my role at Carroll earlier this year, I found myself unpacking my boxes in a familiar place: on the hall of UM’s history department.

Why did I want to come back? The siren of public education was an important factor. I believe in UM’s mission to serve the population of Montana and beyond by providing students with the opportunity to pursue an affordable, world-class education. As a research-focused university, UM allows scholars like me to continue our important work on projects of all kinds while encouraging us to think creatively about how to best instruct students in a twenty-first century world. With UM’s global emphasis, students here are encouraged to study abroad just as I did while hundreds of international students call this campus home every year. The history department here reflects these values and in coming back, I wanted to be a part of this exciting and lively campus culture. I am also delighted to bring an expertise in global history and classes such as Modern Africa and the Cold War in Global Perspective to the mix.

So what has changed here at UM since my days as a student? Well, in short, everything and nothing all at the same time. I opened my first email account in the basement of the Liberal Arts building. It was kind of a bust, as so few people had accounts that I had no one to email. Now, I am teaching an entire class online. That same year, I asked a friend of mine who was building UM’s first website what, precisely, a website was. Now I can video conference in a colleague in Ghana to give a guest lecture in one of my classes. Although a few of my favorite faces are gone, there are new faces that bring the same kind of energy and enthusiasm to campus that their predecessors did. And much is still the same. Students still eat at the Zoo and they still study at the library, albeit while plugged into iPhones, laptops, and iPads. The faculty are still committed to providing students with an outstanding academic experience while continuing their work as scholars in the field. So, in returning to UM and coming, I suppose, full circle, I look forward to finishing my current book project while providing the kind of classroom instruction that I had as a student. And hopefully, one of these days, I will take the time to play Frisbee on the Oval.
Entering Grad Student Cohort on Reasons for Choosing UM

William Blasingame
I chose UM’s History Department due to the wealth of faculty whose interests complement my own. Moreover, I felt the small department size would offer me ample opportunities to be incorporated into the workings of the department and allow me to cultivate productive rapport with the outstanding faculty.

April Gemeinhardt
I decided to attend the University of Montana because of the professors and range of courses. I spoke on the phone with Jeff multiple times, and his enthusiasm really spoke to me. The professors of the program seem to genuinely care about their students, and the program sounded amazing.

Dan Kamienski
The personal call from Jeff and the warm welcome on my visit with Kyle, Jeff, and Mike made the choice easy. I was excited to move to Montana, enjoy the landscape, and return from my sojourn in a big city to read books on books on books!

Jared Norwood
I chose UM’s History Department due to the small, comfortable nature of the department. The faculty within the department possesses a wide range of specializations that complement my research interests perfectly, thereby allowing me to produce meaningful scholarship of the highest order.

James Vaughn
Academically, I was attracted to the History department at UM because the research interests of several faculty members intersected with my own. The department also has a strong placement record. Once accepted I was very excited to come to Missoula, where I could experience the outdoors in a way that was impossible where I grew up.
Inaugural Dennison Fellow Reflects on Research

Patrick O’Connor

I am honored to receive the George and Jane Dennison Doctoral Fellowship, which provides funding through the 2016-2017 academic year and relieves me of teaching duties during spring semesters. The resources and time provided by the fellowship will prove invaluable as I transition from a schedule of course work to dissertation research.

My work examines the complex politics of social reform in American cities during the early twentieth century. Many historians view this period as formative in the making of “modern” America, a time in which urban populations boomed and diversified, communication and transportation became more efficient, and the state developed mechanisms for managing the drastic changes underway. Along with these seismic shifts, however, came a stream of unexpected questions about the experiences of everyday existence. For example, the most recent stage of my project, which I presented at the Northwest Phi Alpha Theta conference in April, examines the proliferation of anti-spitting movements throughout the United States in the first years of the twentieth century. By 1900, public spitting had been a ubiquitous, if disgusting, feature of American life for decades. The floors of rail cars, theaters, and workspaces were often covered in small ponds of amber tobacco spit; bystanders had little recourse but to turn up their nose at the responsible parties.

A convergence of forces, however, such as increasingly dense urban populations and the advent of the germ theory of disease, changed the stakes of public spitting. Law enforcement and public health agencies began taking it upon themselves to police spitters and by 1910 hundreds of communities had outlawed the habit. Some men – blame for public spitting almost exclusively fell on men – complained that their right to enjoy public space had been violated; others simply continued to spit wherever they pleased. The resulting conflicts forced reformers, municipal governments, and the thousands of individuals affected by anti-spitting ordinances into a contentious debate over the balance of individual rights and community welfare.

At first glance, historical questions about a topic like spitting seem trifling. I would respond that for turn-of-the-century Americans, who lived in a society where tuberculosis claimed more lives than any other cause, and where streets, sidewalks, and buildings were covered in potentially infectious spit, the issue was enormously significant. Moreover, the questions raised by anti-spitting remain relevant for contemporary Americans who continue to wage a decades-long campaign against public smoking. As my research has shown, when notions of health and individual rights clash, the mundane can become gravely consequential.

I am extraordinarily grateful to George and Jane Dennison, the Department of History, and the UM Foundation for the opportunity to continue this project. I look forward to deepening my questions throughout the dissertation process and sharing my insights with everyone in the years to come.

Patrick O’Connor
Faculty News


On April 26, 2014, Professor Emeritus David Emmons presented an invited paper, “A Tower of Strength to the Movement”: Father Michael Hannan and an Irish Workers’ Republic,” to the Ernie O’Malley Symposium at Glucksman Ireland House, New York University. He also gave an invited paper, “Savage Twins: Indians and Irish on the Border,” at the American Conference of Irish Studies Western Regional conference in Santa Fe, October 25, 2014. Due to a very handsome gift to UM from Sam Baldridge, the Irish Studies program will be able to appoint a visiting scholar in the field of Irish/Irish American culture and history for one semester’s teaching every other year. The visiting position will be named for History Professor emeritus David M. Emmons. The position’s full title will be the David M. Emmons Visiting Professor of Irish Studies.

Professor Linda Frey served as commentator for “India, Indies, Indians: Frontiers of Empire and the Prehistory of American Foreign Relations” at the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations, in Lexington, Kentucky, on June 21, 2014. She also served as chair for “Nationalism and Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century,” at the Consortium on the Revolutionary Era, 1750-1850, held at the University of Mississippi, Oxford, on February 21, 2014. Dr. Frey has also been appointed to three advisory boards: the series advisory board for Politics and Culture in Europe, 1650-1750, Ashgate; Consejo Asesor, Magallicana: Revista de Historia Moderna; and to the Advisory Board for Honor and Obligation in Liberal Society: Problems and Prospectives.

Professor Emeritus Harry Fritz reports that on June 28, 2014, he stood on “The Corner That Started the 20th Century” in Sarajevo, Bosnia, precisely 100 years after the assassination of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife Sofia. He adds, “I escaped unharmed.” From July 19-24, 2014, he ran a 6-day seminar for the Smithsonian Institution on “The American West” in Chautauqua, New York. He presided over six 1.5-hour presentations plus three 1-hour informal discussions. Professor Fritz adds, “Otherwise, I sleep late, drink wine, read books, grill steaks, play golf poorly, watch DISH TV, and travel.”

Visiting Professor Gillian Glaes participated in the 2014 Curt C. and Elise Silberman Faculty Seminar at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum where they focused on “Teaching about the Holocaust in the Soviet Union: Perpetrators, Collaborators, Bystanders, and Victims” from June 2-13, 2014, in Washington, D.C.

Professor Anya Jabour presented the following papers:


“‘A Tempest in a Teapot?’ Debating Women’s Rights at the Pan American Conference in Montevideo, Uruguay, 1933,” Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations, June 20, 2014, Lexington, Kentucky;

“An Activist Academic: Sophonisba Breckinridge, Social Work, and Social Reform,” Western Association for Women Historians, May 1-3, 2014, Pomona, California; and


She also was the fall 2014 recipient of the Paul Lauren Undergraduate Research Mentorship Award.

Paul Lauren, Regents Professor Emeritus, delivered a series of invited lectures in Beijing at the largest law school in China this summer. For one week he presented lectures on human rights before advanced law students. For another week he presented lectures before Chinese law professors on how to teach human rights.

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Publications by Faculty and Graduate Students


_____. “What If the Fourth of July Were Dry?” OUPblog, July 4 2014.

Students & Faculty Garner Awards at 2014 Phi Alpha Theta Northwest Regional Conference

(Left to right) Eva Cloud, Chelsea Chamberlain, Kayla Blackman, Patrick O’Connor, Whitney Bugni, Blake Reynolds

Representing the University of Montana History Department, I co-organized this conference, which had over 160 participants from schools in Alaska, Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and Montana. Robert Greene, Harry Fritz, and Jeff Wiltse joined me in bringing eight UM students to the conference.

We did well (again) with paper prizes:

* Chelsea Chamberlain (MA student) was awarded the “Harry Fritz Best Paper Prize” for her paper, “Disguising Dependence: Scientific Philanthropy and Disability in the Gilded Age”;

* Patrick O’Connor (PhD student) was awarded the “Best Graduate Paper” for his paper, “The Right to Spit: Contesting Public Spitting in Washington, D.C., 1903.”

There were over 120 student papers presented, and a panel of faculty members from the region determined that our two students gave two of the best. In addition, Clinton Lawson (PhD student) and Kayla Blackman (MA ‘14) were also nominated for paper prizes.

Finally, Professor Jeff Wiltse gave a splendid keynote address at the conference, “From Swimming Pools to Music Saloons: Researching the History of American Public Life in the Age of Digital Newspapers.” - Kyle Volk
History Department Scholarships 2014/15

Edward Earl Bennett Memorial Scholarship
   Awarded to Nicholas Green and Hugh Kingery

Harold E. Blinn Scholarship
   Awarded to Sydney Hayward

Helen J. Olson Scholarships
   Awarded to Leah George

Jules A. Karlin Endowment
   Awarded to Eamon Ormseth

Jules A. Karlin Scholarship
   Awarded to Ryan Clouse

Paul Lauren Human Rights Scholarship
   Awarded to Kathleen Hodges

Robert O. Lindsay Scholarship
   Awarded to Nicholas Green

Scott Allen Meyer Memorial Scholarship
   Awarded to Cyrus Turbak

Summerfield Baldridge History Scholarship
   Awarded to Whitney Bugni, Ryan Clouse, Kathleen Hodges, Hugh Kingery and Jennifer Pepprock

Faculty News: continued from page 10

Professor Tobin Miller Shearer participated in the National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Institute, “Finding Mississippi in the National Civil Rights Narrative: Struggle, Institution Building, and Power at the Local Level,” at Jackson State University, Jackson, MS, from June 8-27, 2014.