



National Council on Public History
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2010 Election Ballot Candidate Biographies

Vice President

The Nominating Committee identifies one candidate for the position of vice president biennially. The vice president is automatically designated president-elect and, upon serving a two-year term, assumes the office of president.

Robert Weyeneth

University of South Carolina

I have been a faculty member at the University of South Carolina since 1992 and am currently director of its Public History Program. Before coming to USC, I taught at the University of Hawaii and in the Pacific Northwest and worked as an historical and environmental consultant. My service to NCPH includes three years on the Board of Directors, six years on *The Public Historian* editorial board, and chairmanship of three NCPH committees.

As a practicing public historian, I have undertaken a diverse range of projects: landscape histories of Honolulu's historic urban parks, community studies in Washington State, evaluation of Cold War sites in South Carolina, a history of historic preservation in Charleston, and an assessment of efforts to commemorate the modern civil rights movement throughout the United States. I have reported on three of my projects in the pages of *The Public Historian*, through an account of the challenges of doing public history in a community with an historical secret, in an analysis of the popular practice of the present apologizing for past injustices, and in reflections on racial segregation as an architectural and spatial system.

I bring to NCPH long experience in the trenches of public history (which includes only one death threat); leadership in identifying, preserving, and interpreting chapters of the past that are problematical or controversial; a record of training and graduating over 100 students in the USC Public History Program; and a commitment to expanding and broadening NCPH membership. University public history programs are doing first-rate work educating the next generation of professionals, but the future of NCPH as an organization depends on doing a better job with outreach to

practitioners at the local level. These folks are a natural constituency for NCPH but too often don't know that they are "public historians" or that NCPH exists. Our membership needs to reflect the diversity and inclusiveness that already characterize our research, exhibits, programming, site interpretation, film-making, and community history projects.

Board of Directors

The board manages and controls the business, property, and affairs of the organization.

There are three positions to fill on the Board of Directors. Please vote for up to **three (3)** candidates.

Benjamin Filene

University of North Carolina Greensboro

If given the chance to serve on NCPH's board, I would draw on my experience in history museums and in academia to help the organization build bridges between practitioners, educators, and community members.

From 1999-2006, I was an exhibit developer at the Minnesota Historical Society (MHS) in St. Paul. I was lead developer for *Open House: If These Walls Could Talk*, winner of a WOW Award for innovation and an Award of Merit from AASLH. From 2004-6, I served as senior exhibit developer, supervising the design and exhibition-development unit. Prior to Minnesota, I served for three years as exhibit curator at the Outagamie County Historical Society in Appleton, Wisconsin.

I prepared for my museum career by completing a PhD in American Studies at Yale. While that training has served me well, I was troubled by how cut off academia seemed from public life. In my own career, I have tried to blur that boundary. While at MHS, I published a book about public memory and roots music (*Romancing the Folk*, UNC Press). I have served since 2005 as contributing editor for the *Journal of American History's* exhibition review section.

In 2006, I was hired as associate professor and director of public history at the University of North Carolina

Greensboro. In making the move, a central concern for me was how to do public work from within the “ivory tower.” NCPH has been a key resource in achieving that goal, with its members providing inspiration, advice, and collaboration as I have led community-based public projects with my students, completed freelance exhibit work, and written about theory and practice in the field. I would welcome the opportunity to help NCPH continue to expand its reach and become the gathering place for public-minded historians of all stripes.

Michelle A. Hamilton

University of Western Ontario

I am currently the director of public history at the University of Western Ontario, London, Canada. Before coming to Western in 2008, I was a post-doctoral fellow at the University of Guelph working with the 1891 Census of Canada project. I have also worked in museums across Canada in curatorial, interpretative and collections management capacities including the Woodland Cultural Centre (Six Nations), the Glenbow Museum (Calgary), and the Museum of Ontario Archaeology (London). At Western, I manage our Medical Artifact Collection which is used to teach the history of medicine and public history.

I have an MA in public history and a PhD in history, focusing on topics that intersect in Canadian, Native and public history. My forthcoming book explores the role of the public, historical societies, professional anthropologists, and Native communities in the collecting of archaeological and ethnographic artifacts in Ontario in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

As the Ontario representative for the Public History group of the Canadian Historical Association and a member of the NCPH Ad Hoc International Task Force, I would like to facilitate more international involvement, particularly by Canadian public historians.

Cynthia Koch

Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum

I am honored and pleased to be asked to run for the board of NCPH because this is an organization that seeks to improve professional practices and foster among young people the profession of public history. When I first began working in public history, more than thirty years ago, there was no name for this field. Now I am gratified to know that there are many others who share my interest in helping people of all ages—in school and out of school—to understand the principal themes of American history and apply them to their daily lives. I think that the central problem facing NCPH (and all history educators), is to convey to our fellow Americans how important historical understanding is to the conduct of our democracy. If there is better understanding and appreciation, there will be better

attendance at historic sites and museums, better funding from public and private sources, improved teaching of history in our schools, better preservation of our historic resources, and the list goes on and on.

I now work for the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum and I feel there is no better statement of the importance of public history than the words FDR declared when he dedicated our nation’s first presidential library in 1941: “A nation must believe in three things. It must believe in the past. It must believe in the future. It must, above all, believe in the capacity of its people so to learn from the past that they can gain in judgment for the creation of the future.”

Michelle Lanier

North Carolina State Historic Sites

As curator of cultural history with North Carolina's State Historic Sites, I use my background as an oral historian and folklorist to connect communities around the state's rich heritage. I also bring the ethical issues of public history and documentary work into the classroom, as an instructor since 2000, with Duke University's Center for Documentary Studies. My ethnographic research on contemporary Gullah burial traditions, completed through UNC-Chapel Hill's Curriculum in Folklore, paved the way for me to become one of North Carolina's liaisons to the federal, Gullah-Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor. I also work in a supportive capacity with the North Carolina African American Heritage Commission. My guiding vision is to increase diversity in public history by encouraging interdisciplinary exchange, advocating for the reflection of holistic communal memories, and honoring the power of story.

Santi Thompson

South Carolina Digital Newspaper Project

I am a 2008 graduate of the University of South Carolina (USC), where I received two Masters degrees in Library and Information Science and in Public History. Since graduating, I have worked in the Digital Collections Department at USC's Thomas Cooper Library. I am currently the project manager for the South Carolina Digital Newspaper Project, funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities.

As a graduate student, I worked to increase the amount of primary source materials relating to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer/Questioning (LGBTQ) communities in South Carolina. I was a co-founder of the LGBTQ Archival Collection at USC and continue to volunteer with the project to ensure that LGBTQ materials are included in South Carolina's historical record. For my efforts, I received two awards from NCPH (the 2008 Student Project Award and the 2009 New Professional Award).

Outside of the university, I volunteer with the South Carolina Pride Movement, an organization dedicated to supporting and advocating for the LGBTQ communities of South Carolina. I serve as the vice president of the organization and am a member of the board of directors. With other members of the LGBTQ community, I am currently completing a digital public history project, which aims to document the history of LGBTQ Columbia, South Carolina.

Finally, let me convey how honored I am to be considered for a position on the board. While I do not have the amount of professional experience as some others, I feel that my recent departure from graduate school and my journey to enter (and sustain myself in) the profession gives me a valued perspective. If elected, I will try my best to remind the organization of the needs of new professionals and of those who are sometimes overlooked for a variety of reasons.

Anne Mitchell Whisnant

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

My involvement in NCPH as a member, conference participant, student project award committee chair, and program committee member has been critical to my professional development as a historian. I am honored to be nominated to run for the NCPH board, where I might give back to an organization that has inspired and nurtured me.

I am director of research, communications, and programs for the Office of Faculty Governance at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where I received my PhD in History in 1997 and now also hold an adjunct faculty appointment in History. In 2008 I introduced UNC's first-ever permanent public history course.

Building on my 2006 book, *Super-Scenic Motorway: A Blue Ridge Parkway History* (UNC Press), I also do contract research and writing for the National Park Service and serve as the scholarly adviser for "Driving through Time: The Digital Blue Ridge Parkway in North Carolina," a new public history project of the UNC Libraries. I also chair an OAH- and NPS-sponsored study of the state of history in the National Parks and am active in several organizations that support the National Parks.

If elected, I would work to further enhance NCPH's role in grounding the historical profession in its mission to serve the public good through fostering public understanding of and engagement with the past. I would like to focus on projects that further integrate and "mainstream" public history into graduate and undergraduate curricula and into the profession. I want to help maintain NCPH as a welcoming home and an

educational resource for both new and experienced public historians. Finally, I am intrigued by the transformative possibilities of digital history and would like to see NCPH continue to provide opportunities for its members to learn to make effective use of new technologies.

Nominating Committee

The Nominating Committee identifies, determines the eligibility of, and recommends to the Board of Directors persons to be considered for elected offices of the organization.

There are two positions to fill on the Nominating Committee this year. Please vote for up to **two (2)** candidates.

Meghan Bishop

Tryon Palace Historic Sites and Gardens

Growing up in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, introduced me early to the concept of public history and its many facets. The road that began with skinned knees at Pickett's Charge developed into a career path which has taken me, currently, to Tryon Palace Historic Sites and Gardens in North Carolina. Along the road, I earned an MA in public history at IUPUI, and gained experience in preservation at the Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana, in state and local history at the Indiana Historical Society, in living history at Conner Prairie, and in small museums and museum education at several other institutions.

With professional experience at three small museums—the Shriver House in Gettysburg and the Morris-Butler House and Indiana Medical History Museum, in Indianapolis—and volunteer experience at several others, I am an advocate for small museums and the challenges they face, as well as the hard-working professionals who make them successful.

This past year I received the NCPH Historical Research Associates, Inc. New Professionals Award and attended the 2009 NCPH meeting in Providence. My paper there was one of several on remembering and interpreting slavery—a common challenge to many historic sites not only in the South, but the North as well, including three of the sites at which I have worked. As a new voice in public history, I represent the rising generation of museum professionals, and the energy, optimism, and creativity we bring to the field.

Kathy Corbett

Public History Consultant

I have been an active NCPH member since attending my first conference in 1982, shortly after joining the staff of the Missouri Historical Society. During 20 years at MHS I was education director and later director of exhibit

interpretation. Although I also taught at local universities and published in St. Louis history, working for and with the public has been the focus of my professional life.

Much of what stimulated that focus came from my association with the NCPH organization and its membership, including many professional and personal friendships. I twice served as local arrangements chair for NCPH conferences, was a member of the board, chaired the Awards Committee, and am currently serving as co-chair of the 30th Anniversary ad hoc Committee. In 2006 I was honored to share the J. Wesley Johnson Award with Dick Miller for our article in *The Public Historian* on the practice of public history.

Over the past 30 years NCPH has become a dynamic organization with an evermore diverse membership. We are academics, professional staff, entrepreneurs, students, and retirees. Each have specific concerns, but what brings us together and makes NCPH unique is a conviction that the operative word in public history is public. I would welcome the opportunity to help further the NCPH mission by serving on the Nominating Committee.

Bethany Fleming

Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center

I am honored to be considered for the NCPH Nominating Committee. I have been a member since I first became involved in public history and would be honored to work on advancing the goals of the NCPH and the field. It has always been important to me to make history relevant and engaging for the average person. I feel privileged to work in a field where this is the norm.

For the past eight years I have had the amazing opportunity to be part of two museums which have built new facilities and created successful, engaging exhibitions. As the curator at the Geneva History Center in Geneva, Illinois, I led the team that created the center's core exhibition exploring how Geneva came to be and where it is going. The exhibition won awards for excellence from the Illinois Association of Museums and the American Association of State and Local History. Almost five years ago I joined the team creating the new Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center. We aimed to tell the history of the Holocaust through Midwest survivors and liberators, using their stories to

teach the lessons of history that can help transform our world today.

Though the content matter of the exhibitions and museums have been varied, it has always been gratifying to see history made relevant for people today. By offering enriching and engaging spaces for visitors to explore and understand and then create dialogues from what they have learned, we can expand the conversations out beyond the museum walls. As a member of the NCPH Nominating Committee, I would work to continue advancing the goals of making history and museums welcoming and relevant to today, providing avenues for dialogue and discussion, and places to spur innovative contributions to our society.

Elizabeth Fraterrigo

Loyola University Chicago

Having been a member of NCPH for the past decade, I am pleased to have this opportunity to serve the organization. I am a graduate of Loyola University Chicago's joint doctoral program in American History and public history, a combined program of study that nurtured and gave coherence to my longstanding interests in such issues as public memory, the built environment, and the contested process of historical interpretation. Since beginning graduate school in the 1990s, I have enjoyed engaging in a variety of public history activities both in the field and within the framework of the academy, working on museum exhibitions and other interpretive projects as a curator and consultant as well as serving as a public history educator. From 2004-09, I taught U.S. history and public history at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Currently, I am assistant professor of history at Loyola University Chicago. As a public history educator, I have established and supervised internships and crafted courses in partnership with museums and community organizations that emphasize reflective practice, collaboration, and community engagement. As a member of the Nominating Committee, I will strive to identify candidates for the board and committees who will reflect the diversity of NCPH membership, address the pressures facing cultural institutions and public history programs in a troubled economy, and chart a course for the organization as it embarks on its next thirty years.