

We Were “Doing” Place (Before Place was Cool)



Robert Weyeneth
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The first Keeper of the National Register of Historic Places turned 90 this month. He is well-known professionally and personally among those who worked on behalf of historic preservation in the United States in the 1950s and 1960s. William J. Murtagh is equally well-known to today’s generation of preservation teachers and students. He is the author of *Keeping Time*, the wonderfully readable overview of “the history and theory of preservation in America.” The book was first published in 1988 and is now in its third edition because of its enormous popularity in college courses on historic preservation, architectural history, and public history.

There is another significant birthday approaching: the 50th anniversary of the National Historic Preservation Act. Enacted in 1966, NHPA will reach the five-decade mark in 2016, just three years from now. The act established the National Register of Historic Places, a funding mechanism to promote preservation, a process for reviewing the effects of federal actions on historic resources, and eventually a system of state historic preservation offices, among other provisions. It is widely considered one of the most important achievements of the founding generation of the modern preservation movement. Some see NHPA more generally as a watershed moment in American thinking about the role of place in history and space in memory.

Usually these sorts of anniversaries catch me unawares. Too often they are also occasions for easy celebration and unexamined commemoration. But I am ahead of the game on this one, and I would like to use this perch to call on all of us who are involved in the enterprise of historic preservation (others

welcome, too, of course) to inaugurate a set of conversations over the next three years to assess the history, impact, and legacy of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966.

Here in the digital age the terrain is wide-open, as never before, for these conversations. Through posts on *History@Work* to the pages of *The Public Historian*, I can see multiple expeditions of discovery making their ways across the landscape, sometimes intersecting, sometimes skirmishing, sometimes re-supplying each other. I anticipate there will be points of convergence as we approach 2016, as well as diverse and distinct destinations. Let’s go for it.

Here are some quick thoughts:

- A 50th anniversary is an important occasion to mark. It is also a time for critical reflection.
- What stories from the trenches do educators have? Many of us who teach historic preservation use a nomination to the National Register of Historic Places as a term project assignment. At the University of South Carolina, my students have used the National Register very successfully to promote African-American heritage preservation. However, I’ll never forget a comment while working on a complicated project years ago: a sympathetic supporter announced that she thought the National Register was “racist.” She argued that because the criteria privilege the extant, African-American places are often dismissed as vernacular and vanished. Others who teach or write about historic preservation will have intriguing “war stories” of their own that can jump-start collective discussion.
- What stories from the trenches do practitioners have? How does NHPA look from the standpoint of historical consultants? Many of us who practice historic preservation have used the



The Omohundro Water Filtration Complex, a National Register of Historic Places site in Nashville, TN. Flickr user jstrengthphotography.

public process established by the National Register as a way to encourage acknowledgment, remembrance, and preservation of difficult and controversial pasts. Once upon a time, in an article in *The Public Historian*, I wrote about my own experience trying to do this in Centralia, Washington, which led to some conclusions about the challenges of undertaking public history projects in communities with historical secrets. Others will have fresher, more revealing stories about the utility and frustrations of doing historic preservation in public.

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Ottawa Annual Meeting Wrap Up begins on page 9



Participants came from more than a dozen countries for the 2013 NCPH-IFPH Annual Meeting. Courtesy of Serge Noiret.

We Were “Doing” Place (Before Place was Cool) (cont. from page 1)

- What stories do our colleagues have from the perspective of state and tribal government? We should catalyze a nation-wide conversation on the legacy of the 1966 act by reaching out to state, territorial, and tribal historic preservation offices, as well as to the National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers (NCSHPO).
- How does it look from inside the federal government? The National Park Service is the lead federal agency for technical information about historic preservation in the United States, and the National Register is housed within the NPS. The National Park Service will be marking its own birthday – the big 100 – in 2016.
- How does it look from the perspective of engaged citizens? To put on my National Council on Public History hat for a moment, let’s reach out to the world of historic preservation and make it more aware of the world of public history. Let’s

reach out to kindred organizations whose membership doesn’t always overlap with ours, even though it could. I’m thinking here of the National Trust for Historic Preservation but also of the many non-profit statewide and local preservation organizations. I urge NCPH members to get on the programs of national and regional preservation meetings, to get the word out about public historians and the interesting work we do; plus, NCPH could sponsor these sessions. I remember a National Trust meeting in San Francisco where a Bay Area resident stood up and announced that she had always thought of herself as a “community activist,” but as a result of the conference she realized she was also an “historic preservationist.” I’d like to see community activists and preservationists also think of themselves as “public historians.”

- Let’s get sessions, workshops, and field trips on the programs for the upcoming NCPH meetings in Monterey in 2014, Nashville in 2015, and Baltimore in 2016 that engage all these issues and the history, impact, and legacy of the 1966 act.

- From the immediacy of Twitter to the gravitas of *The Public Historian*, NCPH offers multiple platforms to catalyze and sustain conversation. This is a superb opportunity to begin symbiotic discussions through

History@Work, looking toward a distillation of salient issues in a set of articles or roundtable in a special issue of *The Public Historian* that could be published in the 50th anniversary year of 2016.



National Historic Landmark site San Carlos Cathedral in Monterey, CA. Courtesy of Monterey County CVB.

Our friends and colleagues in the academy have been making “the spatial turn” in their scholarship for a while now. This is a welcome trend. But preservationists and public historians have been “doing” place for years, back when place wasn’t so cool. Let’s take stock on how far we’ve come by putting the last 50 years into critical perspective. And let’s ask a final less-obvious question: could today’s enthusiasm for the possibilities of place-based humanities be connected in any way to the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966?

Robert Weyeneth is president of NCPH and director of the public history program at the University of South Carolina.



Hebrew Orphan Asylum, a National Register site in Baltimore, MD. Flickr user Baltimore Heritage.

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NCPH inspires public engagement with the past and serves the needs of practitioners in putting history to work in the world by building community among historians, expanding professional skills and tools, fostering critical reflection on historical practice, and publicly advocating for history and historians. *Public History News* is published in March, June, September, and December. NCPH reserves the right to reject material that is not consistent with the goals and purposes of the organization. Individual membership orders, changes of address, and business and editorial correspondence should be addressed to NCPH, 127 Cavanaugh Hall – IUPUI, 425 University Blvd., Indianapolis, IN 46202-5140. E-mail: ncph@iupui.edu. Tel: 317-274-2716. Join online or renew at www.ncph.org. Headquartered on the campus of Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis, NCPH is grateful for the generous support of the IU School of Liberal Arts and the Department of History.

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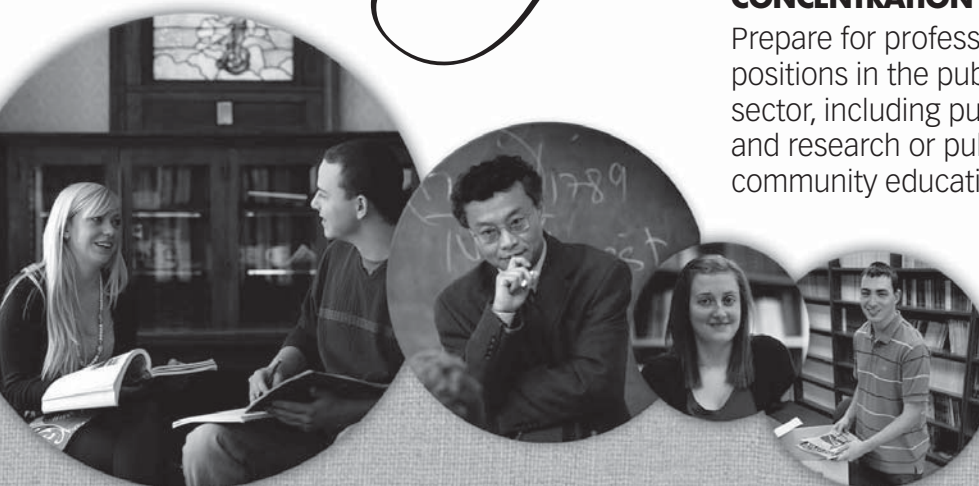
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Semi-Annual Report

Overview and Annual Meeting

In 2012, NCPH adopted a new five-year strategic plan and strengthened its relationship with the University of California at Santa Barbara (UCSB) to produce *The Public Historian*. Nearly half way into 2013, there has been substantial progress on both fronts. Of the long range plan's four main goals, the third—"fostering critical reflection on historical practice"—is of central importance to the journal and our now one-year-old blog, *History@Work*, and the larger digital framework, the Public History Commons, taking shape to house both. I would also point to the annual meeting itself as key to "fostering critical reflection." Indeed, the meeting advances each of the other three goals in the long range plan, as well: building community among historians, expanding professional skills and tools, and advocacy for public history. The Ottawa meeting was a success by many standards, as reported on pp. 9-11 of this newsletter, and certainly in the way it gets people talking about their work and other developments in the field before the conference, during the conference, and for weeks afterward. Despite U.S. federal government travel cuts due to Sequestration, attendance was NCPH's fourth highest ever. Canadians made up more than a third of the 550 participants, and there were representatives from 15 countries overall.

The Journal, the Public History Commons, and *History@Work*

NCPH and UCSB are working with two new institutional partners on *The Public Historian* (*TPH*): the University of Amsterdam is providing two International Consulting Editors, Manon Parry and Paul Knevel; and Rutgers University at Camden has hired a Public Historian in Residence who will be the *TPH* Co-editor starting September 1, 2013. Meanwhile, these new editors and Editor Randy Bergstrom and Managing Editor Sarah Case, Reviews Editor Patrick Ettinger, Digital Media Editor Cathy Stanton, and I have been meeting once or twice a month to coordinate publication efforts across *TPH*, *History@Work*, and other NCPH venues. With the help of the NCPH Digital Media Group, we are developing new pieces for the Public History Commons website and new linkages among social media outlets, such as NCPH's Facebook page and Twitter feed. This is a time of experimentation, a moment when many dozens of NCPH members are serving as editors, special editors, editorial board members, and regular contributors for these varied publications, which I believe will serve the field in very interesting ways. *History@Work* alone received more than 10,000 unique visitors in April, and 13.5% of those spent more than 15 minutes on the site.

Membership, Finances, and Development

The total number of NCPH members at the time of the Ottawa meeting had contracted to 1,070, after reaching 1,193 in April 2012 and 1,180 in April 2011. Likely, this is due in part

to our membership assistant position remaining empty for the first six months of 2012. The total operating budget revenues for FY2012 were \$216,011 and expenses were \$189,489. Although membership revenue was down, the final results of the Milwaukee meeting were better than we had anticipated and UC Press institutional *TPH* subscriptions and the Patron/Partner memberships were slightly up. The organization's reserve fund, NCPH's unrestricted endowment, as of April 1 was \$552,500 in Vanguard accounts, along with \$36,280 cash in our endowment savings account, for a grand total of \$588,780. Thanks to small and large gifts from members, the NCPH endowment is growing. Immediately prior to the Ottawa annual meeting, the Board of Directors began a new fundraising campaign to augment and interconnect the digital infrastructure for *TPH*, the Public History Commons, *History@Work*, and NCPH's Twitter feed and Facebook page. The board set aside \$18,500 from the 2010-2012 operating budgets' net surplus to help start this new Digital Integration Fund (DIF), and 100% of the board members made individual contributions or pledges. These commitments, plus what other members contributed or pledged at the Ottawa meeting, total more than \$7,000. Please help us reach the DIF goal of \$85,000 by giving today at www.ncph.org.

Committees

Many of the committees met in Ottawa and some have been convening by conference call. The executive office will be helping the Consultants Committee with a survey of the consulting community it has prepared for this summer. Co-chair Morgen Young will be leading a special attempt to liaison with consultants in Australia this fall. The New Professional and Graduate Student Committee is also working with the executive office on a survey. The Membership Committee is discussing regional, one-day conferences or similar events sponsored by NCPH, an idea which speaks to the long range plan goal "Extend(ing) NCPH's reach by endorsing local, state, regional, and international gatherings, projects, and workshops." The Curriculum and Training Committee is working on a best practices document for establishing a public history program and has begun to revisit the important matter of opening a conversation with public history employers about what they are looking for in public history graduates.

Outreach and Collaboration

NCPH continues to partner with the American Association for State and Local History (AASLH) on our respective annual meetings. Our two organizations have presented sessions on graduate training and employer expectations at each other's conferences. For the September 2013 AASLH conference in Birmingham, Alabama, Vice President Patrick Moore has organized an NCPH continuation titled, "Forging Business and Academic Alliances in Training Historians for the 21st Century Marketplace." NCPH is also lending its Poster Session model to AASLH for its Birmingham meeting and will

be organizing a reception. For the American Historical Association's (AHA) annual meeting next January in Washington, D.C., there will be an NCPH session, "A Place for Public History in Your Department," by Michelle McClellan, Patrick Moore, Rebecca Shrum, and Alexandra Lord. The panel will discuss the idea of every history department having a visible public history component, while not necessarily offering a degree or certificate in public history. I am chairing a different AHA session on a career pathways study. Finally, NCPH and the International Federation for Public History (IFPH) will be cosponsoring a comparative session at the AHA on Canadian and U.S. federal government historians working on Native American matters.

Advocacy

NCPH has an adroit Advocacy Committee which has been able to respond quickly to issues raised by the National Coalition for History, the Washington, D.C.-based non-profit educational organization providing leadership in history-related advocacy. As one of the core supporting organizations within the coalition, NCPH holds a seat on the NCH Policy Board, and it is my turn to serve as president of NCH for the year. The coalition's most immediate goal is to establish a history caucus in the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives. Last October, NCPH led an effort to urge the National Park Service to act on the Organization of American Historians (OAH)-NPS report, *Imperiled Promise: The State of History in the National Park Service*. NCPH joined with the AHA, AASLH, and OAH in a letter to NPS Director Jon Jarvis highlighting key recommendations from the report. While we did not receive an official response to the letter, we have heard that NPS associate directors are in conversation about *Imperiled Promise*. Late last winter NCPH was invited to participate in a conversation about creating a "unified voice to increase the profile of history and help American society see its value and relevance... perhaps a branding campaign for history." Representatives of several national organizations, state historical societies, and national museums met in Washington in February, then at the NCPH meeting in Ottawa in April, and at the American Alliance of Museums conference in Baltimore in May. NCPH representatives will continue to take part in the discussions.

NCPH at IUPUI

More of my time these days is devoted to advancing the relationship between NCPH and the Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) History Department, the wider university, and the public history community in Indiana. To that end, I am working with IUPUI public history professor Rebecca Shrum, Jeannie Regan-Dinius of the Indiana Division of Historic Preservation and Archaeology, and Erin Kelley of the Indiana Historical Society on a statewide project to build historical tours using the smartphone app developed by NCPH member and Cleveland State University's Center for Public History & Digital Humanities director Mark Tebeau.



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Actions of the NCPH Board of Directors

Between the fall 2012 and the spring 2013 board meetings, the board met by conference call and took the following actions:

- In conjunction with the University of California Santa Barbara, accepted the proposal from the Mid-Atlantic Regional Center for the Humanities (MARCH) at Rutgers University-Camden for supplying a co-editor for *The Public Historian*. MARCH will hire a Public Historian in Residence whose primary responsibility will be to serve as co-editor. The arrangement will be for a two-year term through December 2014, with a possibility of a three-year extension.
- In conjunction with the University of California Santa Barbara, accepted the proposal from the University of Amsterdam for supplying two international consulting editors for *The Public Historian* for a two-year term.
- Adopted a formal resolution of appreciation for Managing Editor Lindsey Reed to mark her retirement at the end of 2013. Reed had joined the staff of *The Public Historian* as assistant editor in 1980. The board acknowledged that Reed had managed every aspect of the journal's production and brought not only keen editing and high standards, but innovative efforts that expanded and improved the journal, making her a major contributor to the intellectual vigor and diversity of the field of public history.
- Approved the Minutes of the Spring 2012 Board Meeting in Milwaukee, the June 2012 Board Meeting by conference call, the Fall 2012 Board Meeting in Indianapolis, and the November 2012 Board Meeting by conference call.
- Reviewed the outcome of the 2012 financial year and the status of the 2013 operating budget. The former finished with a surplus of \$26,000 due to strong attendance at the Milwaukee conference and reduced expenses for the year because of a part-time staff position that remained unfilled for six months. The budget for 2013 was projected with a slight deficit.
- Voted to create a retired membership category, eliminate the additional fee for international members, and increase membership dues later in 2013.
- Reviewed preliminary plans for the 2014 Annual Meeting in Monterey, California.
- Voted to make it a policy that all presenters for the NCPH Annual Meeting must preregister for the conference within six weeks of receiving their acceptance from the Program Committee.
- Discussed with Digital Media Editor Cathy Stanton the growth of *History@Work*, the collaboration between the Public History Commons and *The Public Historian*, and new services and resources for public historians stemming from further integration between these various digital venues. There were more than 140 pieces posted on *History@Work* in its first year covering a wide range of public history venues, practices, and perspectives. Unique visitors to *History@Work* reached 7,000 in March and more than 10,000 in April.
- Approved the launch of the Digital Integration Fund (DIF) campaign to raise \$85,000 for improving and interconnecting the NCPH blog *History@Work*, the Public History Commons portal website, digital aspects of *The Public Historian*, and NCPH's other social media venues. The DIF will be seeded with \$18,500 from the surplus in the previous two years' operating budgets. In addition, all members of the Board of Directors made personal pledges to the DIF.
- Discussed forming a task force to explore how to align graduate and undergraduate public history programs with the needs and expectations of public history employers through development of best practices documents for training public historians. In addition, the board discussed whether the task force might also be asked to develop a statement of minimal professional qualifications for directing or managing a public history institution or agency.
- Reviewed the progress that the board, executive office, committees, and members have made in achieving the goals and objectives of the NCPH 2012-2017 Long Range Plan.
- Met for one hour in joint session with the Editorial Board of *The Public Historian* to discuss the DIF campaign, digital integration between NCPH publications and communication venues, and future coordinating efforts between the Editorial Board and the Board of Directors.

On Thursday, April 18, 2013, the NCPH Board of Directors convened during the Annual Meeting in Ottawa, Ontario, and took the following actions:

Making a DIF (Digital Integration Fund)!

Picture a digital public history hub where you can...

- find out about exciting new projects happening around the globe
- read online offerings and multimedia articles from *The Public Historian*
- keep up-to-date with news and announcements from the field
- post comments and queries
- browse a virtual library that will connect you with works in progress, the public history blogosphere, gray literature, experimental projects, and much more!

NCPH is well on its way to creating this lively central gathering-place for practitioners, scholars, and their many publics. If you've visited us at the Public History Commons, if you're among the thousands of people who read NCPH's *History@Work* blog each month, or if you've been following us via social media, you've already seen some of what we've been building. But we're just getting started—and we need your help as we take the next steps:

- building the Public History Commons into a more multi-purpose online venue with additional features and functions
- expanding possibilities for peer review and critical reflection in the digital public history realm
- strengthening our lines of communication and collaboration, all the way from the gravitas of the journal to the immediacy of Twitter

The good work we've done so far has been accomplished by NCPH's small staff and dedicated volunteer editors, along with support from *The Public Historian's* editorial offices at the University of California Santa Barbara, the Mid-Atlantic Regional Humanities Center at Rutgers-Camden, and the University of Amsterdam, plus technical assistance from the Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New

Media. Now that we've laid the groundwork, we have a clearer sense of what kind of digital infrastructure we need to build to integrate our efforts more fully. Building it is beyond our current in-house capabilities—but with your help we can reach our goals in the next few years.



Bob Weyeneth maps out the future of NCPH's Digital Publications during the Annual Meeting

The Digital Integration Fund will raise \$85,000 to support design, programming, and production expenses for NCPH's growing digital publishing and communications initiative. The NCPH Board has helped start the DIF with \$18,500, using approximately half of the NCPH Operating Budget net surplus in 2010-2012. All of the board members at the Ottawa annual meeting made personal contributions for the launch as well. Currently we have more than \$25,000 toward the \$85,000 goal.

Help us show why public history is at the leading edge of both the digital and public humanities by making a DIF today! Please go to www.ncph.org and make your donation to the campaign.

Thank you Digital Integration Fund Contributors!

The following have donated or pledged to donate to the Digital Integration Fund. Many of them have committed to making gifts for each of the next three years.

Chuck Arning	Evan Kutzler
Marianne Babal	Allison Marsh
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Why I Made a DIF Pledge

Dee Harris



NCPH is a friendly and welcoming professional organization that has made a real difference in my career. As a graduate student attending conferences, I came into contact with professionals from across the globe, gaining invaluable advice, career guidance, and collegiality from these colleagues. As a practicing public historian today, I find that NCPH offers so much more than a once-a-year conference. I read the newsletter and email news services to gain quick access to trends in the field; and appreciate *The Public Historian*, which gives our field a peer-reviewed academic journal where practicing public historians can publish their work or learn about the work of others.

But, why did I “make a DIF?” I made a pledge to the DIF campaign because I believe that NCPH is in the perfect position to expand our services to meet the needs of the digital age. *History@Work* brings together the best of public history into one central location—making it available to our field and the general public alike. Where else can you learn about institutional wabisabi, the role of blogging in the academic feedback cycle, and how to apply for a grant from the National Trust—all in one location? I see a strong future for this web-based resource, providing new connections to the Public History Commons that will inform our work and world. But as we all know, growth can't happen without financial resources. I hope you all will join me in helping to “Make a DIF!” and pledge your support today.

Highlights from Ottawa Working Groups

Four working groups which met during the NCPH conference in Ottawa have provided summaries of their discussions. If you are interested in creating a working group for the 2014 NCPH Annual Meeting in Monterey, proposals are due July 15. (See the call for proposals at <http://ncph.org/cms/conferences/2014-annual-meeting/>.) NCPH working groups are seminar-like conversations of 8-10 people during the annual conference that explore, in-depth, a subject of shared concern and work toward a common purpose.



"Teaching Public History" group. Courtesy of Serge Noiret.

Teaching Public History

In line with recent discussions about international practices in public history (best embodied by the newly created International Federation for Public History [IFPH]), this working group gathered historians from North America, Europe, Australia, India, and South Africa. We focused on three issues: the links between theory and practices, internationalization, and the future of public history teaching in different parts of the world.

Although particular in its international composition, the working group was by no means the first attempt to deal with teaching. Our first intention is, therefore, to connect with other groups and individuals interested in teaching. We feel there is a need for establishing a permanent international committee to support and connect public history programs around the world. The IFPH has already expressed an interest in hosting such an international committee on teaching. Such a committee would work on an inventory of public history programs and would leave room for heritage, historic preservation, museums, and digital humanities programs. The inventory would be associated with documents and forums on "best practices" and "doable projects" for public history teaching. These tools appear

particularly useful for three reasons. First, they could help us discuss the diversity of definitions and practices in public history (state-sponsored, community projects, post-colonial or post-conflict societies). Secondly, the committee could foster newly created public history programs around the world. For instance, the working group discussed the possibility to propose "mentors" (experienced Public History programs) to help designing masters or undergraduate courses in public history. Finally, by providing links for public history projects the committee wishes to highlight themes and issues for possible collaboration between programs around the world. Anyone interested in participating in the committee or in the discussion should contact me at thomas.cauvin@eui.eu. —Thomas Cauvin

Teaching Digital History

Our discussions during the in-person portion of the working group centered on three key areas: course design, the place of the public in digital history, and the learner outcomes for students who specialize in digital history. Discussants delved into the differences between teaching "digitally inflected" versus "digitally centered" courses with a consensus forming that offering a mixture of options within a program may be the best approach. The "inflected" courses can serve as a gateway to a "centered" course that allows for greater concentration on the theory behind digital history as well as additional hands-on experience.

Those who focused on digital "public" history raised the issue that while technology could be harnessed to involve a wider public, it is most often employed as a means to reach a broader audience or interpret information in new ways. Finally, those who discussed learner outcomes concluded that it was impossible to mandate a base set of skills that would need to be mastered, since the type of skills needed is directly related to the project being pursued. However, students do need to learn the state of the field, to know the potentials of employing different technology, and be able to communicate with technical partners, such as programmers and designers.

Looking to the job market, it is important that students who wish to pursue a career related to digital history to assemble a portfolio of digital history projects and document what their individual contributions were, and how these contributions contributed to the team's project. Since almost every digital history project is a team effort, demonstrating how one can contribute positively to a team project is key.

Looking forward, the group voiced support for the development of an NCPH White Paper on digital history in public history programs that could be used by programs to educate their colleagues and administrations on the field of digital history, and also to advocate for additional resources and staffing. Additionally, such a document might provide a "best practices" model for programs looking for guidance in developing digital history content, courses, or programs.

—Jon Berndt Olsen



One Working Group meets another—touring the dairy barn at the Central Experimental Farm. Courtesy of Cathy Stanton.

Public Historians and the Local Food Movement

The "Public Historians and the Local Food Movement" Working Group held its meeting at Ottawa's Central Experimental Farm, a visit that enriched our thinking about some of the ways that public historians do and might intersect with both agricultural practices and public interest in food and farming. Participants came to the table with a very wide range of backgrounds in interpretation, training, research, advocacy, and community organizing. Some key ideas that emerged from our discussions included: the importance of challenging the class distinction between manual and intellectual labor; how to use tangible/physical experiences of growing and cooking food as a way to develop stronger questions that can inform our work as historians; the need for long-term commitment to food- and farm-related projects; how to educate ourselves and others about the complex realities of farming, agricultural policy, and marketing food; and ways to use public historical spaces and legitimacy to create new forums where people can connect across various class, political, and occupational boundaries. On the thorny question of how our work

continued on next page →

Highlights from Ottawa Working Groups (cont. from page 7)

might relate to advocacy and activism, we concluded that historians' essential neutrality is a gift that can help us to raise the most useful possible questions within a confusing and politicized realm. While this year's discussions weren't open to conference-goers, look for more ideas, panels, and tours to come out of this Working Group next year in Monterey! The co-facilitators of the group, Michelle Moon and Cathy Stanton, are also working on assembling a published "toolkit" that draws on the wealth of experience from this group and other public historians working on food issues. —Cathy Stanton



"Exhibiting Local Enterprise" Working Group.

Best Practices for Establishing a Public History Program

Although the number of public history courses and programs has been growing for some time, the recent trend toward pragmatism in higher education has accelerated the process dramatically. History Departments across the country, hoping to demonstrate that a history degree is practical for job seekers, have begun to establish new public history and digital history tracks. The National Council on Public History welcomes the new attention and respect our field has received. At the same time, our members are concerned about the growing number of assistant professors asked to found and expand public history with little support.

At the Annual Meeting in Ottawa, a group of public history educators met to discuss these trends and to develop a working draft of guidelines and recommendations for departments considering an expansion into public history. The group took into account existing Best Practices Documents available on the NCPH website as well as the Joint Report on Tenure and Promotion for the Engaged Historian. We outlined a series of issues, questions, and recommendations that we believe Department chairs and University administrators should consider before hiring a public historian. A summary of our discussion can be found on the NCPH *History@Work* blog (February 11, 2013.)

The NCPH Curriculum and Training Committee intends to continue development of this document, and we would like your feedback. Are there questions we should add? Are there other topics we missed? Do you have an idea about how guidelines and recommendations should be organized and delivered? How can we make sure this document is useful both before a new program is established and immediately after? We welcome your thoughts at the Public History Commons.

There is tremendous value in offering public history courses within an existing program. Any student can benefit from the unique approaches and emphases of public history. A few course offerings, however, do not constitute a program. A program in public history, whether graduate or undergraduate, implies a rich set of course offerings, institutional support, and opportunities for public engagement that produces graduates who are competitive for positions in museums, archives, and government.

Before establishing a public history program, departments should consider the following:

- Can your department, college, and community support a Public History program? Not every department should! Watch out for "red flags."
 - Are there sufficient humanities institutions in your community to support vibrant internships and partnerships?
 - Are there skills courses on your campus in other departments--grant-writing, graphic design, etc.--that are open to your students without prerequisites and can these count towards the PH degree?
 - Does your university support interdisciplinary studies including team teaching? Departmental and college collaborations?
 - Does your university have resources, such as graphic design and IT support?
 - Is your university willing to tenure and promote on the basis of non-traditional public history scholarship?
- Which basic competencies in public history do you hope to offer? Museum studies? Oral History? Preservation? Archiving? Digital History?
- Given the many different competencies of public history, it is unlikely that a single hire can carry a program. Has your institution considered making a cluster hire or thought about establishing a 2-3 tenure track faculty to create and manage your public history program?
- Is your department and institution ready to explicitly endorse the NCPH/OAH report on Tenure and the Public Historian, and include language from the report in contracts and hiring letters?
- Is your department ready to offer a half-time administrative release as well a summer stipend for the person who will direct your public history program?
- Public history programs need a budget--is your institution ready to provide one? Public historians may need specialized equipment, frequent travel, guest experts, public promotion, and funds for student travel and development. In this era of austerity it is not realistic to expect a public history program to produce its own funding through grants and contracts. Departments should commit to a substantial, annual budget to be used at the discretion of the director of the public history program.
- Departments should consider writing a mission statement for their PH program in consultation with the faculty member(s) involved with the program before starting the program and should get administrative endorsement of that statement, and revisit it periodically.
- The mission statement should clearly articulate your program's particular definition of public history and how it relates to the larger culture of your department and university and include a set of goals for the program.
- Are you prepared to support graduate students in public history? Graduate students in public history require different forms of support other than teaching assistantships if they are to get the skills and experiences they will need to succeed on the job market. Departments must be ready to offer assistantships or similar support to students engaged in internships or other public history work. Grad students should also have opportunities for travel funding and other professional development.

—Denise Meringolo, Larry Cebula, and Jon Taylor

Ottawa Annual Meeting Wrap Up

Engaged. Inspired. Informed. Connected. These are some of the buzz words we heard from participants in the 2013 NCPH conference in Ottawa, “Knowing Your Public(s).” Thank you to every one of our 550 colleagues who attended the event and who cultivated a conference of meaningful conversations, interactivity, and collaboration. Here are some quotes from attendees about the impact of the experience:

“I really enjoyed this conference. It really motivated me to see such a varied group of people so passionate about public history. I was impressed by the collaborative atmosphere that encouraged discussion rather than competition.”

“I enjoyed meeting people who work in the field in so many different areas of interest and from so many different countries.”

“I found that, far more than any of the other history organizations I’m part of, the NCPH members are interested in supporting one another’s work; there is a general understanding that collaboration is key to what we do. I felt refreshed and reinvigorated...even at the end of the spring term!”

“One of the best NCPH conferences I’ve attended. Great range of sessions, great program.”



West Virginia University graduate students out on the town in Ottawa.

The 2013 meeting took place April 17-20 at the Delta Ottawa City Centre in Ottawa, Ontario, and featured a track of sessions from the International Federation for Public History. Partnering with the IFPH brought participants from over a dozen different countries

and contributed to the over 60 sessions, workshops and working groups that were offered.

Approximately 40% of participants responded to a meeting evaluation emailed out on Saturday at the end of the conference. We are happy to report that 96% of those who completed the evaluation were satisfied or very satisfied with their conference experience and 97% felt that the meeting was well organized.

Some of the criticisms of the meeting centered on costs for meal events and a lack of snack breaks. To this end, NCPH is looking into securing sponsorships to provide snacks and more frequent coffee breaks for Monterey to address your wants and needs while avoiding a substantial increase to the meeting registration fee.

While 93% of survey respondents indicated that the content of the sessions was engaging and relevant to their work/interests, there were some critiques of the format of the sessions:

“Often presenters read papers and sessions were less interactive than they could have been.”



Conversations between sessions.

“A few of the sessions I attended needed to move away from the show and tell model.”

In a response to such comments, the 2014 Annual Meeting Program Committee is encouraging a wider variety of session formats in the 2014 Call for Proposals now available on the NCPH website. These formats include Experiential, PechaKucha, Point/Counterpoint, and Structured Conversation, all of which are described in the call.



Public Plenary. Courtesy of Serge Noiret.

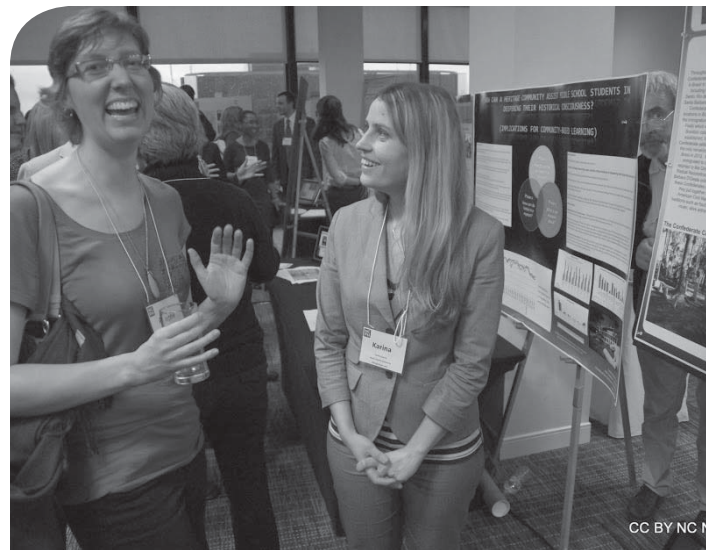
The 2013 meeting featured a unique public plenary presentation from Italian historian of technology Vittorio Marchis, which drew approximately 300 attendees including over 50 members of the local public. The presentation generated lots of positive reaction onsite, but received more mixed reviews in the evaluation, ranging from, “The presentation at the public plenary was very relevant to the notion of making abstract historical theories (the social construction of technology, essentially) understandable and relevant to a diverse audience....” to “The public plenary was not enjoyable at all. I expected greater analysis not a collage of visual materials,” and “Public plenary was different...it made me laugh, but I’m uncertain what I gained from the experience.” If you too are struggling to make sense of Vittorio Marchis’ *Machine Autopsy*, or if you’re curious about what you missed, we would encourage you to read Cathy Stanton’s *History@Work* post about it <http://publichistorycommons.org/a-machine-autopsy-in-ottawa>

Ottawa Annual Meeting Wrap Up

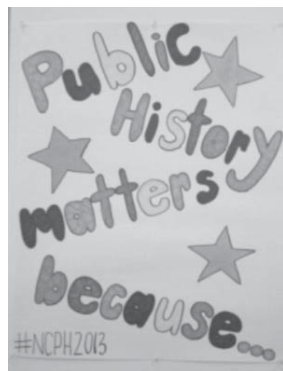
The Ottawa conference also featured our most popular poster session to date, with well over the 150 attendees we expected stopping by to hear about the latest public history projects. While the room was quite crowded, we see this as a positive sign that our emerging public historians are putting out top quality work that is of great interest to the field. We are arranging for expanded space in Monterey—so keep an eye out for the Call for Posters this fall!

All of us at NCPH consider the Ottawa meeting to be a huge success thanks to our wonderful Program and Local Arrangements Committee members; the many volunteers we had both onsite and before the meeting; all of our sponsors and exhibitors; and all of you who took the time to present your work with colleagues during a session or working group; as well as those attendees whose questions, comments, Twitter feeds, and conversations helped us explore the significance of audience in public history.

We are now turning our attention to creating a dynamic and invigorating meeting for 2014 in Monterey and finding ways to address the suggestions you shared with us in the 2013 meeting evaluations to improve the NCPH conference experience. Please continue to share your suggestions with us at nph@iupui.edu.



Poster Session and Reception. Courtesy of Serge Noiret.



During the Ottawa conference, two Carleton University students coordinated an interactive table in the Exhibit Hall to get people talking about the importance of public history.

Meghan Lundrigan,

a second-year Public History MA student, and Shari Rutherford, a second-year MA student in the School of Canadian Studies, asked conference goers to complete the phrase, "Public History matters because..." Participants submitted via twitter, in videos, and by creating their own signs.



[Left] ...it changes the way publics encounter the past, and the way historians practice...FOR THE BETTER!



[Middle] ...it makes the past relevant to the present... Non-historians' interpretations of the past shape the conditions of the present



[Right] ...it challenges accepted Wisdoms.

Thank You Again 2013 Annual Meeting Sponsors!

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Ottawa Annual Meeting Wrap Up



Digital Drop In Geniuses. Courtesy of Ioana Teodorescu. Courtesy of Cathy Stanton.



Conference-goers enjoying the beautiful scenery and atmosphere of Ottawa.



The Future of Publishing and Social Media - An Open Forum.



Diefenbunker Canada's Cold War Museum & National Historic Site Tour. Courtesy of Ioana Teodorescu.



Awards Breakfast and Business Meeting.



Speed networking.



Participants gather in the hotel lobby during Thursday's fire drill.

Congratulations 2013 Award Winners!

During the Awards Breakfast and Business Meeting in Ottawa NCPH President Bob Weyeneth and Vice-President Patrick Moore presented awards to our 2013 winners. A full listing of awards for 2013 and guidelines for 2014 award nominations are at www.ncph.org.



Meg Southern, Celia James, Amanda Noll, and Laura Keller pose with President Bob Weyeneth as they receive Graduate Student Travel Awards.



Shawna Prather, Ellen Kuhn, and Ashley Wyatt pose with President Bob Weyeneth as the three women from University of North Carolina at Greensboro receive the Student Project Award for their work on the Terra Cotta Community History Project.



Bob Weyeneth and Denise Meringolo, author of *Museums, Monuments, and National Parks: Toward a New Genealogy of Public History* and winner of the NCPH Book Award.



Bob Weyeneth with Yolanda Chavez Leyva, University of Texas at El Paso, one of the winners of the Outstanding Public History Project Award for "Museum Urbano at 500 S. Oregon."

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2014 NCPH Call for Proposals



2014 NCPH Annual
Meeting

Monterey Convention
Center

Monterey, California

March 19-22, 2014

Monterey is one of California's most naturally beautiful and historically rich cities, where nature and culture intersect in fascinating and challenging ways. It is an ideal place to explore issues of **"Sustainable Public History."**

- How can we use history to promote a better relationship with the environment?
- How can we ensure that our own work is sustainable and that the collections, institutions, and knowledge we build today will endure for generations?
- Recognizing that disparities of wealth and power undermine sustainability, how can we use history to ensure social justice?
- How can public historians connect local actions to global developments, particularly around processes like climate change or economic decline and redevelopment?
- How can our work inform vital public debate on these processes?

Developing Your Proposal

We welcome submissions from all areas of the field, including teaching, museums, archives, heritage management, tourism, consulting, litigation-based research, the military, and public service. See the NCPH website at www.ncph.org for details about submitting your proposal.

Proposals are due by July 15, 2013.