

PUBLIC HISTORY *in a* CHANGING CLIMATE



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INTRODUCTION: A GOOD-ENOUGH PLATFORM *for* CHANGE

In [a television interview last year](#), American writer and neo-agrarian icon Wendell Berry spoke about the “dreadful situation” facing young people who are grappling with the cascading environmental, economic, and social challenges linked with runaway capitalism and anthropogenic climate change. Berry noted that the recognition of our big problems creates an expectation of equally big solutions, but added that our own answers and fixes have too often been part and parcel of those problems, because we’ve tended to impose them in a way that ignores the limitations and needs of the environments we inhabit. Real change, he said, means learning to listen in new ways to the non-human world and refusing to be rushed or impatient even while acknowledging the urgent need for action. “I think of them,” Berry said of younger people entering this arena, “and I say well, the situation you’re in now is a situation that’s going to call for a lot of patience. And to be patient in an emergency is a terrible trial.”

The idea of being patient in an emergency strikes me as useful for public historians to think about, but from the opposite direction. Rather than being impatient activists who need to be convinced of the value of patience, we tend to be inherently deliberate practitioners who haven’t collectively acknowledged that we are in fact in the midst of an emergency. Public historians understand that intimate knowledge of place and attachment to place—Berry’s key preconditions for acting ethically and in relationship with the ecosystems that sustain us—require time, meticulous attention, and the careful building of relationships with other people in particular places. We bring a number of crucial skills to climate discourse—an openness to interdisciplinarity and teamwork, an attention to the role of the social within “natural” processes, an ability to weigh and communicate various kinds of evidence about the past, an understanding of how to create accessible narratives that bring macro and micro levels together. But we are only just beginning to put those skills to work in a concerted way within broader efforts to understand the causes and address the effects of our rapidly-changing climate.

This born-digital collection is part of an emerging conversation within public history about how we might do that. It emerges from several years of discussions at annual meetings of the National Council of Public

History and elsewhere, along with a growing strand of material within the Public History Commons focusing on environmental sustainability. Most of the pieces in these pages originated as conference Working Group case statements or posts from the History@Work blog, with a handful of additional contributions. This collection also connects with the 2014 NCPH Annual Meeting theme of “Sustainable Public History” as well as with a Summer 2014 special issue of *The Public Historian* journal on the same theme, edited by Leah Glaser. The combined print and digital pieces make up the first in a planned series of hybrid publication projects by the journal and the Commons, under the series heading of “Explorations.” Future “Explorations” will take up other topics, while we hope that public historians’ discussions about environmental sustainability will be able to build on this 2014 attempt to capture where we are at present.

If I had to express my own sense of where that is, I would say we’re in a good-enough space for change. The “good-enough” concept comes from the work of psychoanalytical theorist D.W. Winnicott, who believed that children develop best when their parents and environments do not fulfill every possible need, but rather leave room to reach outward, to experiment, and to learn from encounter and experience. Good-enough spaces are profoundly transitional. Media scholar Elizabeth Ellsworth, applying Winnicott’s ideas to thinking about the physical spaces of learning, notes that the transitional environment holds us “not as a container would, not as a passive receptacle of what we already are; rather, it holds us in passage and accompanies us from one emergent space to another.”¹ Good-enough spaces are not perfect; not everything is in place yet. And that is Winnicott’s point: what we need are not perfect starting-places, but places where we can simply start, often in provisional and partial ways.

I see the public history field at the moment as very much a good-enough space in this sense. I see many people like myself and many of the contributors to this collection who are feeling their way into new territory, by no means confident about where they’re headed but impelled by both a sense of urgency and a conviction—paradoxical, unsettling, but in line with Wendell Berry’s notion of the importance

of patience in an emergency—that our particular skills of inquiring carefully and deeply into the past can serve a vital purpose in our troubled present.

In one sense, of course, this has always been the central purpose of public history. But the level of urgency is qualitatively different. Making the changing climate more central in our work requires a shifting of priorities that is often at odds with institutional and organizational practices and inertias. Many of us who are attempting this recentering find that it requires continual pushing against those forces, making time for emergent projects and conversations, challenging deep patterns in small and large ways. Our work environments are not always completely hospitable places for these efforts. But they are good enough. Their imperfections as sites of vision and action—the daily

demands that can seem so disproportionate to the looming awareness of environmental catastrophe—also create stabilities and platforms from which we can begin to make individual and collective change. We need many more of these beginnings, and more ways to hear the voices of those, like the many practitioners and scholars included in this collection, who have already started.

~ *Cathy Stanton* is Senior Lecturer in Anthropology at Tufts University and Digital Media Editor for the National Council on Public History.

From the field

People have a long history of causing environmental change and changing themselves to adapt to environmental changes and stop and repair the damage they've done. Public historians can tell those historical stories that can help us imagine creative ways forward rather than being paralyzed by fear about the future.
~ **Jon Christensen**,
University of California Los Angeles



A mini digital roundtable with ten thought-leaders in environmental public history

Adapting to climate change requires a renewed emphasis on social solidarity to replace the individualism of consumerism. Local history, creatively used, can provide sources for new social values and commitments.
~ **Diane Barthel-Bouchier**, Stony Brook University



The public gets stuck on whether or not to trust the science and scientists, and trying to understand how variability in climate and weather can happen within long-term change; public historians excel at dealing with variability (individual actions) against a backdrop of long-term change (history). Let's add local, regional, national and global history data and events to the climate science story to personalize climate change that encourage the public to see connections and their ability to participate for positive change.
~ **Sarah Sutton Brophy**, bMuse



The idea of the Anthropocene would seem to demand a broadening of the temporal parameters of what we call history, yet at the same time a close reading of the "great turn" of the last few hundred years. The challenge as I would see it to those who think of themselves as public historians is how an understanding of that turn--conventionally read and celebrated as a normative drive towards modernity and globalism--instead might be the basis for an alternative reading of contemporary social space and with it radically different models of an egalitarian, communitarian social justice necessarily linked to common ownership of renewable energy technologies and all that flows from that.
~ **Mark Levene**,
University of Southampton

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WITNESSING CLIMATE CHANGE

TOWARD A NETWORK OF ENVIRONMENTAL SITES OF CONSCIENCE

EDITOR'S NOTE: A 2010 Working Group at the NCPH conference explored the possibilities for creating "Environmental Sites of Conscience," a concept developed by the [International Coalition of Sites of Conscience](#) as a way to link past and present in service of a more just and humane future. In his case statement for the 2010 Working Group, David Glassberg challenged public historians to think very broadly about what might come under this rubric. We are pairing Glassberg's 2010 statement with an update from the ICSC on the current state of discussions about the project.

What might serve as an "Environmental Site of Conscience"?

I can imagine working with three kinds of environmental sites of conscience. One kind are the limited number of internationally significant sites where environmental catastrophes occurred, such as Three Mile Island in Pennsylvania, Chernobyl in the Ukraine, the Love Canal in New York, the Ninth Ward in New Orleans, or Bhopal in India. The U.S. National Park Service already administers one such site, the Johnstown Flood National Memorial in Pennsylvania. But most of these sites are not currently interpreted to the public. At these sites, the public interpretation would narrate the history of the disaster, with a focus on issues of environmental justice.

But I can imagine working even more with a second, much larger number of historic sites that exemplify the nation's past or present relationship with the environment. Rather than single out particular historic sites as environmental sites of conscience, I would seek to interpret the environmental dimensions of every historic site. For example, at the initial National Park Service Civic Engagement conference in New York City in December 2001, the Superintendent of Shenandoah National Park in Virginia discussed how her park interpreted the damage that acid rain from nearby coal-fired electric power plants caused to the flora in the park. This is a great opportunity to make visible to the

public the choices made every day between modern convenience and environmental quality. At Manzanar, in California, Japanese-Americans who were confined there during World War II recalled the dust storms that swept across the camp, the result of the depletion of water in the nearby Owens Valley by the Los Angeles Water Department. Industrial history sites such as the water-powered textile mills at Lowell National Historical Park are logical places to discuss the control of nature as well as the displacement of farmers (and fish) caused by the mill dams. So too are the historical remains of mining sites, such as the Anaconda copper open pit now full of toxic water in Butte, Montana. Living history farms are good places to demonstrate how land was shaped by agriculture over time, as well as to explore the environmental impact of different kinds of farming practices.

The third kind of environmental site of conscience is even more plentiful: exploring the historical dimensions of everyday

environmental sites. For five years in the 1990s, I conducted a monthly environmental history seminar for elementary and secondary school teachers called "Where We Live." Each month we met at a different site in Western Massachusetts and discussed what happened there, from agricultural to industrial sites, from protected woodlands to a municipal waste treatment plant, from an elite mansion with formal gardens to a local poor farm (still in existence as a homeless shelter).

We never met in the parking lot of a suburban shopping mall to discuss the history of sprawl, but that would have been an appropriate spot. This suggests that environmental sites of conscience can be not only a network of special places, but also a historical approach to the everyday environment.



One site near where I live is the Quabbin Reservoir. This was created during the 1930s to provide more water to the Boston metropolitan area, in the process flooding four western Massachusetts towns. The Quabbin is a good place to discuss issues of environmental justice—why were these towns sacrificed so that Boston could have more water—as well as a more positive message since the area has become an “accidental wilderness” full of wildlife that would not have habitat if the land surrounding the reservoir had not been strictly protected from development.

In recent years, environmental historians have focused not only on the relationship of humans and nature, but also on how the relationships among different social classes, ethnic groups, and regions are manifest in the environment. This social historical approach to environmental sites of conscience has great potential as a common interpretive thread as a network of sites develops.

~ *David Glassberg* is a Professor in the Department of History at the University of Massachusetts Amherst as well as serving as a member of the National Council on Public History Sustainability Task Force.

Environmental Sites of Conscience: An emerging network

While initially exploring the idea of an Environmental Sites of Conscience Network several years ago, the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience considered numerous factors including focus, global appeal, pressing need, and available funding. Ultimately, the Coalition shelved the project because of a lack of interest from member sites. As a site-driven organization, we were understandably hesitant to embark upon work in an area that sites were not eager to collaborate on.

However, 2013 marked a period of new interest in such a network. Building on a two-year partnership with the National Park Service, the Coalition is currently working to launch the National Dialogues on Stewardship and Conservation project.

The goal of the project is to examine how the use of dialogue might enhance civic participation at National Parks and promote stewardship of natural resources for future generations through the interpretation of historic place/cultural landscape and each site’s own history of conservation. This project will seed the development of new public

dialogue programs designed to engage visitors of all ages in pressing contemporary environmental issues for national parks. Among these: the conflict between individual interests and the collective good as it relates to common resources; the role of preservation in American identity and how this affects our relationship with natural resources; the tension between forging connections between humans and the natural environment while also protecting the environment from human behavior; and the environmental implications of using new technologies.

The planning phase of the project will convene four NPS sites and one US Site of Conscience alongside five scholars with expertise in dialogue, visitor-centered interpretation, and the intersection of history and resource use. Our aim during this phase is to establish best practice recommendations for dialogue at natural resource parks. The team will generate a suggested methodology and create a training curriculum for interpreting natural resource sites. Sites will pilot dialogue sessions to assist in evaluating the suggested methodology.

Though science centers continue to take the lead in exploring the role of dialogue for addressing current social and environmental issues such as climate change, these programs are rarely offered “in the resource” where a host of unique opportunities and challenges present themselves. The National Park Service has the ability to offer programs which examine the use of our resources throughout time, foster conversations on the evolving roles of stewardship and conservation, and use parks’ own enabling legislation and subsequent historical interpretation as a way to critically examine our contemporary relevance.

Ultimately this work may evolve into the Environmental Sites of Conscience Network. Current North American sites, including many indigenous sites, have expressed interest in the Network and if we move forward with formal launching of the initiative they will likely be joined by sites around the globe.

~ *Sarah Pharaon* is the North American Program Director of the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience.

The Quabbin Reservoir, shown on preceding page in 1992, offers a site where complex questions about environmental justice and habitat creation can be raised. **Photo credit:** [Peter Dutton](#)

ORAL HISTORIES *of* THE LAND

CREATING COMMUNITY DIALOGUES ON THE ENVIRONMENT

Doing public programs is never easy, but it is the most immediate and rewarding way to engage directly with your audience. This past semester, the Cooperstown Graduate Program's oral history project experimented with a new type of public program. Taking our cue from the statewide "[Community Conversations](#)" sponsored by the New York Council for the Humanities, which also provided funding for our project, we decided to use our large archive of oral histories as the basis for a series of dialogues about important environmental topics.

The "Community Conversations" model suggests using a primary source, or "shared text," on a certain topic to provide a starting place for conversation within a group of willing participants. Currently, the council trains facilitators and offers funding for dialogues on democracy and civic participation; the Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service; and the 9/11 National Day of Service and Remembrance. In our area of upstate New York, perhaps the most pressing public issue is stewardship of the environment and, in particular, the question: Is there any safe way to extract natural gas from the shale that lies beneath us? We decided that the theme of our programs, then, would be "Oral Histories of the Land: Community Dialogues about our Natural Resources."

Rural New York is in the midst of a large environmental debate, as the "hydrofracking" industry threatens to move into large swaths of the southern and central parts of the state. Consequently, natural resources, water use, and the importance of the land seemed to us to be ideal topics to address. These topics also aligned perfectly with our archive of oral histories, which Cooperstown Graduate Program students have been compiling since the mid-1960s. In partnership with the New York State Historical Association, which houses the collection, this community-focused and student-driven oral history archive is a valuable resource on the history of agriculture, New York State folklife, and rural living. Although the collection is very rich, it is underutilized. As a result, we are always looking for opportunities to get the recordings off the archive shelves and into the ears of the local community.

Facilitating the dialogues was an adventure, but, somewhat to our surprise, fluid and poignant conversations occurred with relative ease.

Completing four programs in three months, with an average attendance of 20 people of varying ages and backgrounds, we were able to reach audiences in three different rural communities. We started each program by playing a small selection of oral history segments. Will Walker then served as facilitator for the dialogue, using both pointed and open-ended questions about the recordings to promote discussion. The questions prompted participants to reflect on what they had heard and to relate the oral histories to past and present environmental issues. The discussions varied from thoughts about water quality to detailed information about maple sugaring to comparisons of traditional uses of the land and contemporary resource extraction. One theme stood out, however, in all of the programs: our land is important. While participants often disagreed with one another on how water resources should be controlled or how resources should be harvested from the land, everyone seemed to agree that the land is the most essential resource we have.

Success is an understatement of the way we feel about these programs. Further interest from community members has encouraged us to continue thinking about possibilities for future programs and new ways to introduce the audience to our collection of oral histories. Gone are the days of collecting for collecting's sake; finding uses for these recordings that serve the community is the highest calling our project could serve.

~ *Haley Gard* is a graduate of the Cooperstown Graduate Program and former assistant in charge of the oral history project. *Will Walker* is Assistant Professor of History at the Cooperstown Graduate Program (State University of New York-Oneonta). This piece originally appeared on the [History@Work blog](#) on December 31, 2013.

Photo: A 2010 action by [Marcellus Protest](#) invokes the Pennsylvania Constitution.



The CACHE LA POUUDRE RIVER DIGITAL HISTORY PROJECT

USING DIGITAL ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY FOR COLLABORATION AND ENGAGEMENT

In Northern Colorado, as in the entire arid west, water resources are highly managed and simultaneously protected and squandered by communities. Regulation of river flows, water storage, and irrigation infrastructure supports agriculture and urban industrial water supply in the region. The Cache La Poudre River has played a pivotal role in the development of irrigation and water organization. In the nineteenth century, the State of Colorado led western states in the development of legal administration of water rights, and much of that structure began on the Cache La Poudre River. But in the latter half of the twentieth century, evidence proved that permanent alteration of hydrologic regimes produces detrimental and costly ecological effects that undermine the long-term viability of our life-sustaining freshwater ecosystems. Our ability to understand these interrelationships as a community and to make informed decisions about water use planning relies, in part, on a basic understanding of the history of agricultural-to-urban water transfer in the region and the resulting environmental and economic effects over time. As the world's population grows exponentially and freshwater supply continues to diminish, the urgency of this problem will become increasingly pronounced. Access to reliable, well-researched historical information about the problem is important both to inform decision-making and to document this subject for future generations.

The [Public Lands History Center](#) at Colorado State University recently embarked on a new digital history project that suggests how a topic related to sustainable resource management and planning can lead to collaborative opportunities with community stakeholders and scientists. Funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture through the Colorado Agricultural Experiment Station, "Agricultural Water Organizations and the Agricultural-to-Urban Water Problem on the Cache La Poudre River: A Digital History Project" will produce an educational website describing the shift of water in the Fort Collins area from rural-agricultural to urban, industrial, and recreational uses. Digital history projects can convey the inherent tensions and contradictions in management of complex cultural landscapes, and the qualities of flexibility and accessibility in digital media offer particular opportunities

for historians to stretch beyond our comfort zone.

Assembling a diverse range of expertise has been important to ensure rigor, accuracy, credibility, and engagement. Dr. Mark Fiege, an environmental historian and director of the Public Lands History Center, is the principal investigator for this website project. As the project manager, I have worked with Dr. Fiege to assemble an interdisciplinary team to research and build the site as well as a diverse group of community members, scholars, planners, and farmers who will both contribute information for the site and offer comments on its content and organization. The website will emphasize the collections in CSU's [Water Resources Archive](#), but it will also require that researchers reach out to these community stakeholder groups, including ditch companies, environmental advocacy groups, water districts, preservationists, and other interested parties. Historians are collaborating with faculty and students in other colleges, including geographers, engineers, watershed scientists, and library staff, to create the site's geospatial elements, which will provide visualizations of change over time in the watershed. This project may serve as the model for subsequent website projects that address related aspects of the environmental history of the Cache La Poudre River or similar questions applied to other Colorado watersheds. The team built the beta site in Wordpress and is in the process of moving it to its permanent home, a mini-site within the Public Lands History Center's new website, which is also being converted to Wordpress. Students continue to develop content and visualizations for the site, which will launch in late June 2014.

While it is impossible to predict the full reach and effects of the information we will provide in this site, our preliminary conversations with members of Northern Colorado's "water community" suggest that there has been a longstanding need for a concise presentation of historical information about the Cache La Poudre River and its changing use over time in a rapidly diversifying urban setting. It is our hope that this website will help citizens, policymakers, and managers understand the past as a means to address current and future water issues in Northern Colorado. So far, this experience suggests to us that public historians can and should complement the role of

mediators in contentious environmental disputes. Where stakeholders tend to understand and defend particular aspects of the larger story, historians can synthesize these separate pieces into a narrative that provides clarity and context for complicated issues. Engagement with our community's most difficult "sustainable growth" challenge provides daily reminders of what is important to our collaborators, what questions they most want answered, and what may be the potential opportunities for common ground. It is heartening to know that our collaborators and the community stakeholders are clamoring for this information and inherently grasp that improving the community's historical literacy will elevate the debate about how to manage water sustainably in our basin. In this respect, we view this project as a test of how successfully a fact based, well-documented history website can serve as one tool for solving contemporary resource distribution and management problems.

~ Maren Bzdek is Program Manager and Research Associate at the Public Lands History Center of Colorado State University. This piece is adapted from a case statement from a 2012 Working Group on "[Public History and Sustainability](#)" at the National Council on Public History/Organization of American Historians conference in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

VISIONS *of* WATER "GINIBIIMINAAŃ" AND THE USES OF ART IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

For decades, Indigenous people of North America have expressed concern about the rapidly changing environment that now affects the lands they occupy, resources they have accessed for generations, their livelihoods and their everyday lives. These changes range from melting ice in the polar regions, droughts that cause once fertile lands to become parched and barren, and affected waterways such as rivers, lakes, and streams that no longer provide the important resources they once did. In this essay, I look at a specific example of Native American art from the Great Lakes region and how it conveys concerns regarding climate change for the Indigenous people of this area.

This case study of an Indigenous art piece demonstrates how tribal people are making important statements about their interactions with and concerns about climate change and the environment in North America. Often conceived of and presented as the concept of environmental justice by activists such as Winona LaDuke, Indigenous peoples' perspectives about their relationship to the land is very different from those of many non-Indigenous people. For Native peoples, the land is—and has long been—a partner, rather than a resource. Water also serves this vital function.

The "*Ginibiiminaan*" ("Our Water") poster by artist Wesley Ballinger features an image of a Great Lakes water-walker. Ballinger is a member of the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe of East Central Minnesota. The message of the poster focuses on protecting and caring for the water as the environment changes, but the images within it are not immediately recognizable to the average non-tribal person and require interpretation. The primary image central to the poster is a water-walker and her copper bucket. Over a period of several years, water walkers—women from the tribal community known as *anish*, or women keepers of the lake—did [a series of traveling](#) to make spiritual, personal and public statements about their connections to and concerns about the endangered waters in North America. The first one involved a group of elder women who walked around Lake Superior in Spring of 2003, then around Lake Michigan in 2004, following by Lake Huron in 2005, Lake Ontario in 2006 and Lake Erie in 2007. A return water walk

Photo: 1904 Flood on the Cache La Poudre River, Linden Street Bridge, Fort Collins, Colorado. Photo credit: Denver Public Library Digital Collection



around Lake Michigan occurred in 2008 and then the St. Lawrence River in 2009.

These water walks by women elders culminated in a 2012 trek that included the four cardinal directions and the bodies of water associated with them from the worldview of the Ojibwe (or Anishinawbe): the Pacific Ocean, the Atlantic Ocean, the Gulf of Mexico, and the Great Lakes. The 2012 poster “Ginibiiminaan” commemorates these voyages and the reasons why they need to happen. According to Sonya Atalay, these elderly women walked long distances out of their love for the water and to raise awareness about environmental degradation, bringing home some of the water in the copper pails from these four sources to Bad River in Northern Wisconsin that was then used in ceremony.

Tribes in the Great Lakes region have a reason to express their concern about environmental change. In February 2013, the “Keepers of the Water” website linked to [an article](#) discussing record-low water levels of Lake Michigan. Higher than normal temperatures and ongoing drought have brought Lake Michigan and the connected Lake Huron to a record low level for the second year in a row. Statistics on this body of water have been maintained for almost a hundred years by the Army Corps of Engineers and indicate that below-average water levels have been sustained for the past 14 years, with a culmination in the past few years of these record lows.

These changes have been caused by a convergence of factors, according to several scientific reports recently published. Although general precipitation in the Michigan area has increased by 12 percent over the past century and is trending upward according to [a 2011 NOAA report](#), decreased ice cover on the Great Lakes and accompanying higher water temperatures are leading to increased evaporation rates. The change in ice cover over all the Great Lakes has [declined by 71 percent](#) over the past 40 years.

For the Indigenous people of this region, what does this scientific data mean, and how does it manifest itself in their everyday lives and their concerns about their future and that of their descendants? Just as importantly, what do (and can) they do to change this? Water walks by women elders who sing songs to and for the water while they travel, and at the same time continue important cultural traditions while reminding both tribal and non-tribal people about this increasingly



Image: “Ginibiiminaan” (“our water”) poster by Wesley Ballinger. Used by permission of the [Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission](#) (GLIFWC).

critical issue, are one way to attempt to bring our world back into balance. The very title of this piece, *Ginibiiminaan*, or “Our Water,” sends a message to all who take the time to consider this common concern that true movement must occur for the necessary change to develop. This piece of art is not really readily accessible and in what most would consider a “public” (or publically accessible) space, such as a museum, educational institution or historic site. Yet it should be.

Concerns by Native peoples over the water that has been so central to Indigenous lifeways for thousands of years manifest themselves in a number of ways in today’s world. Political activism, the passing of laws to both protect bodies of and provide unrestricted access to their resources, and the production of films and exhibits are some ways Native people try to inform the broader public about their general concerns and specific situations that affect not only their lives, but the well-being of the general public as well. For example, the 2010 short film [Keepers of the Water](#) tells one story of pollution: that of Lake Athabasca and the community of Fort Chipewyan in Alberta, Canada from tar sands production. This is a powerful short film produced by the youth of this community which could have widespread impact if it were accessible to the public, much like *Ginibiiminaan* can and should be.

At public locations such as museums, historic sites, parks and even regularly accessed locations such as post offices, town halls and—especially—schools, a critical opportunity exists to engage people on an everyday basis and inform them of the specific concerns and cultural context of water for Indigenous peoples. In the Michigan and Great Lakes area, for example, featuring a specific piece of art such as the *Ginibiiminaan* poster is one way to share this message and educate the public. In other locations, the works of Native artists could be employed as effective forces of change. In addition to “historic sites” managed by federal, state or local agencies, public displays of Indigenous art pieces with these important messages should be more common, and definitely a part of our everyday consciousness.

~ *Rae Gould* is a member of the Nipmuc Nation and the Repatriation Coordinator for the Anthropology Department at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. This piece is adapted from a case statement from a 2013 Working Group on “The Challenge of Interpreting Climate Change at Historic Sites with a Conflicted Audience” at the National Council on Public History conference in Ottawa, Ontario.

From the field

On any site, find ways to make visitors aware of the way people’s lives were transformed by the dawn of the “paleotechnic” age of coal in the mid-19th century, and the “neotechnic” age of oil in the mid-20th century. Find ways to display and dramatize the fantastic increases in energy consumption involved, and invite visitors to contemplate the challenges involved in either replacing fossil fuels with something else at that scale, changing the way we live, or bearing the consequences of unabated carbon emissions and climate change.
~ **Brian Donahue**, Brandeis University

New work in 3D landscape visualizations, flyovers, and simulations (built using remote sensing, LiDAR, and other geospatial data) will be as critical to environmental action in the 21st century as the aerial view and the images of the whole Earth were in the 20th. These techniques allow people of all languages and literacy to see science at work and to visualize change over time in the otherwise inaccessible thresholds of climate change, especially northern and coastal landscapes.
~ **Josh MacFadyen**, Network in Canadian History & Environment/ Western University

One of the most important things that public historians should be doing to connect their work to the issue of climate change is to spearhead public programs and fora that raise questions about ways to address near-term and long-term solutions to our climate change problems. Let us discuss in detail historical analogs and antecedents that might help frame new policies. Historians can demonstrate the complexities associated with the problem, but suggest that such complexities require concrete approaches—not ideological stances.
~ **Martin Melosi**, University of Houston

I am very excited to see environmental history used as a resource to shape current policy. In my home state of Pennsylvania our Supreme Court [drew on the lessons of history](#) to find legislation weakening the regulatory oversight of fracking was unconstitutional. The debate on climate change will benefit from a historical perspective.
~ **Brenda Barrett**, Living Landscape Observer

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GET YOUR WIND FARM OFF MY HISTORIC SITE WHEN VISIONS OF SUSTAINABILITY COLLIDE

Off the east coast of Southern Sweden, a battle is raging between competing visions of sustainability. On the most unlikely of battlegrounds, bucolic Öland island, a desire to promote renewable energy has brought local officials committed to promoting a sustainable society into conflict with island residents, preservationists, farmers, environmentalists, and local business owners who believe that protecting the island's character and cultural resources is incompatible with a proposal to expand industrially generated wind power on the island.

Öland is a rugged and beautiful strip of land surrounded by the Baltic Sea and linked to the mainland by the six-kilometer long Öland bridge. The island is dominated by a limestone plateau, sandy beaches, and a three-kilometer-wide swath of arable land along the southwest shore called Västra Landborgen. This place has supported human settlements for over 5,000 years. It is now a popular summer tourist destination and a favorite getaway of the Swedish royal family who maintain a palace, Soliden, on the island.

Due to its relative isolation and limited development, portions of the island retain much of their medieval historical character. Today, the island's farming communities continue to reflect land use patterns established approximately a thousand years ago, including linear villages and a continued division of agricultural lands into "infields" and "outfields." The limestone plateau, *Stora Alvaret*, remains largely undeveloped and home to a unique and diverse island ecosystem. In 2000, UNESCO's (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization's) World Heritage Committee recognized the island's transcendent value as a cultural resource by inscribing the "[Agricultural Landscape of Southern Öland Island](#)" on its list of World Heritage Sites.



Öland is also special in another way: its strong winds and the flat, open landscape of its limestone plateau make it an ideal site for generating wind power. Wind power has been actively developed in Sweden, particularly since the nation adopted a new [national energy policy](#) in 2009 that focused on achieving "ecological sustainability, competitiveness and security of energy supply." In 2012, Kalmar

County officials adopted a bold [Island Sustainable Energy Plan](#) that sought a fifty percent reduction in carbon emission by 2020.

To reach those goals, local officials are planning new industrial wind farms on the island—including one that will position a pair of 150-meter tall wind turbines within the boundaries of the World Heritage site. In response to [concerns raised by UNESCO](#) about the impact of the project, the county governor of Kalmar convened a meeting with "local and regional decision makers" as well as the local World Heritage site's Management Council. At that meeting, all parties invited to the meeting concluded that the project would have no impact on the World Heritage property. However, some local residents disagreed, and a group of 112 Öland residents petitioned UNESCO protesting that the project posed a serious threat to the World Heritage site. In a letter written to UNESCO World Heritage

Centre director Kishore Rao, the group noted that UNESCO had recognized Öland as a site where "land use has changed little since the Stone Age," a standard they felt should be maintained. They also felt that Sweden had ignored its treaty obligations under the [World Heritage Convention of 1985](#) that required signatories to take legislative and administrative measures to protect cultural and natural resources.

The petitioners also raised concerns about the impact the wind farm might have on heritage tourism. They cited a survey that showed that the World Heritage Site had surpassed Öland's beaches as the most attractive draw for tourists. As Fritz Eriksson, the first signatory of the letter to UNESCO, explained to a reporter from [Swedish Radio](#), "People come for the untouched nature and the stunning scenery. So reasonably, Öland will be worse off if the tourists do not come."

After evaluating the wind farm project, UNESCO officials concluded that placing the turbines within Öland's World Heritage site would "destroy the actual reason that justified the inclusion into the list." If the project were completed, UNESCO warned, "The Agricultural Landscape of Southern Öland will be at high risk to lose the grounds of its nomination and Outstanding Universal Value." Nevertheless, the project continues to move forward.

The case of Southern Öland provides a rather dramatic case where visions of heritage preservation and renewable energy development collided, but it is certainly not unique. Other communities have faced similar challenges, including the World Heritage sites of [Mont-Saint-Michel](#) in France (where an off-shore wind project was blocked by the French courts), and Britain's [Jurassic Coast](#). In the United States, the [Cape Wind](#) project proposed for Nantucket Martha's Vineyard has generated a fierce legal and political struggle that has spanned more than a dozen years. Cape Wind's Construction and Operation plans received [approval](#) from the US Department of the Interior's Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, Regulation and Enforcement in 2011 despite a determination by the [Advisory Council on Historic Preservation](#) that the wind farm would negatively affect thirty-six historic sites and districts, and six resources of cultural and religious significance to the region's Indian tribes.

The many compelling arguments in favor of renewable energy projects makes opposing them challenging. Renewable energy is widely

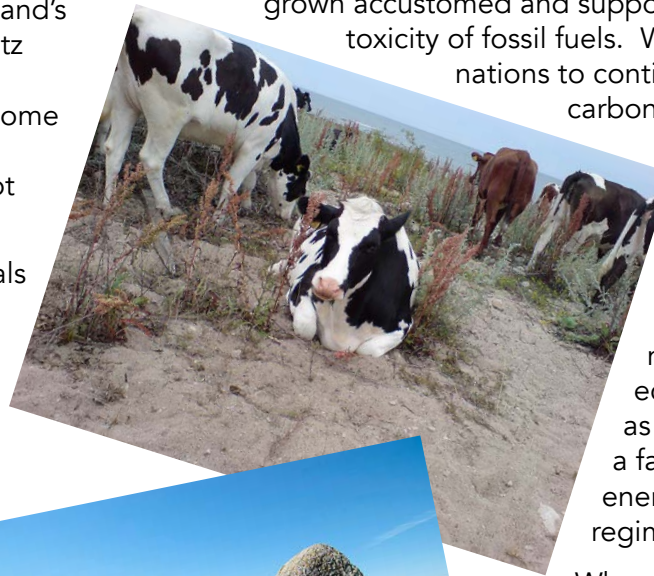
viewed as an environmentally friendly source of power that enables the comfortable standard of living to which modern societies have grown accustomed and supports energy independence without the toxicity of fossil fuels. Wind turbines and solar panels also allow nations to continue generating energy while reducing carbon emissions, something particularly

important for nations such as Sweden that are signatories to the 2005 Kyoto Protocol, and that also must comply with the European Union's nation-specific targets for reducing carbon emissions set in 2007 (targets that are now being [reconsidered](#) as a result of the economic downturn). Commentators such as [Thomas Friedman](#) have also argued that a failure to embrace clean and renewable energy strengthens authoritarian, oil-rich regimes.

When such policies are embraced by powerful political leaders and multinational energy corporations, the rhetorical, financial, and political power behind such initiatives can be considerable. Advocating for the protection of cultural resources when the alternative is framed as ensuring national security, protecting the environment, and safeguarding the future of the planet is certainly a daunting challenge.

So how should historic preservationists respond to these threats to cultural resources, particularly when preservationists themselves may favor the development of renewable energy resources? Is there a way to reconcile the competing demands of cultural heritage preservation and renewable energy development?

Yes, but it will require even greater levels of political engagement, particularly at the earliest stages of project development. As Richard Wagner, director of Goucher College's historic preservation program, has noted, preservationists need to gain a seat at the table. They need to play a role when sustainable energy plans and legislation are drafted at all levels of government. In the case of wind and solar projects, they need to advocate for cultural and historical resources when developers



Bay off of

are considering sites for prospective projects. They need to work with environmental organizations and other stakeholders to educate local planning offices, elected officials, energy companies, and developers about the value of cultural and historic resources, and to build an ongoing consensus that projects should be developed at a scale, and in locations, that are compatible with protecting cultural and natural resources. Everyone at the table needs to believe that there are some sites that are simply too precious to compromise, even in pursuit of renewable energy.

Historic preservation advocates also need to muster strong arguments in defense of the preservation ethic. These arguments need to be based on aesthetics and economic arguments, as well as the value of preserving communities' sense of place. However, historic preservation advocates need to clearly articulate the value of historic preservation in building a sustainable society. For historic structures, such arguments may focus on the legacy investment of money, energy, and natural resources in existing structures; the potential for historic structures to provide affordable housing; or the way that restoration projects can create jobs for local businesses and craftsmen. Historic landscapes, especially those of pre-industrial agricultural societies, must also be viewed as precious cultural resources that can be studied to reveal lessons about sustainable land use techniques, construction methods, technologies, and patterns of social organization that might be worth emulating or adapting to contemporary societies.

Historic preservationists also need to demonstrate that all renewable energy projects are not created equal. Some can be constructed with minimal impact on a region's environment or quality of life. However, large-scale industrial wind turbine projects require significant amounts of clearing, blasting, and leveling to create turbine pads, access roads, and power lines. They also have the potential to create noise and traffic that can dramatically alter a region's ecosystem and soundscape. Such projects can often be driven less by concern for the environment than by the promise of profits to be reaped by large-scale projects underwritten with generous public subsidies. The rush by energy corporations to capitalize on government economic incentives without full consideration of the impact that renewable energy projects can have on communities, cultural, and natural resources has led groups in [North America](#) and [Europe](#) to aggressively oppose wind farms and to even pursue local moratoriums on wind development.

In the absence of good policy and process, preservationists and communities must identify the sites of greatest value for protection and work to mitigate the impact of renewable energy development at other locations. When projects are underway that threaten significant cultural resources, preservation coalitions must decide if they will take steps to stop a project. Such fights are hard, but on occasion, they can be won.

One example is the case of Dutch Corner in rural Bedford County, Pennsylvania. A large wind farm project slated for Evitts Mountain threatened to undermine a historic landscape encompassing more than 30 historic farms and related buildings, leading to the site's listing on Preservation Pennsylvania's 2010 "[Pennsylvania at Risk](#)" list. By building a coalition of local and national organizations, creating a National Register Historic District, winning passage of a strong local preservation ordinance, and blocking efforts to weaken the ordinance and shrink the historic district's boundaries, community members mounted a vigorous campaign to stop the project.

Yet the factor that ultimately stopped the wind farm, according to Iberdrola Renewables spokesman Paul Copleman quoted in the [Pittsburgh Post-Gazette](#), was the end of federal tax credits for renewable energy projects at the end of 2013. The site was saved, but it is hard to know what the outcome might have been if federal tax policy had not changed.

Ultimately, the best way to advance a vision of a sustainable society that values clean energy development and the protection of cultural resources is to establish public policies at the local, state, national, and international levels that recognize the value of both and establish frameworks for how they might best be balanced in decision-making. This is a matter of public education but, more significantly, a matter of political advocacy. Political leaders responsible for policy making need to recognize that heritage preservation does not need to be viewed only as an obstacle to energy development initiatives but rather as a complementary and essential component of a sustainable society.

~ *Steven Burg* is Professor of History & Chair of the History and Philosophy Department at Shippensburg University of Pennsylvania. In the fall of 2013, he received a Fulbright Scholar's grant to study approaches to historic preservation and public history in the Kingdom of Sweden. This piece originally appeared in two parts on the History@Work blog on [February 3](#) and [February 10](#), 2014.

PUBLIC HISTORY *and* SUSTAINABILITY

THE URBAN CONTEXT

The documentary [The Pruitt-Igoe Myth](#) (2011) traces the rise and fall of the public housing project of Pruitt-Igoe in St. Louis, Missouri, which opened in the early 1950s and was demolished in the early 1970s following years of decline and neglect. As the title suggests, the filmmakers sought to disentangle important myths associated with public housing in the twentieth century: that government subsidized public housing was intrinsically problematic and that the low-income minority residents (in this case African Americans) were themselves largely responsible for the decline



of public housing projects. Through interviews with former residents and researchers, the filmmakers demonstrate that the failure of the Pruitt-Igoe project was in fact the result of a perfect storm of larger historical forces affecting American cities in the postwar period, pressure from powerful outside interest groups, long-standing racial tensions, and counterproductive (some would say inhumane) public policies at the local, state, and federal level. Although both city planners and residents had high hopes for Pruitt-Igoe when it opened, the community was neither economically nor socially sustainable in the long-term because the bulk of social and economic resources in Missouri and St. Louis were directed elsewhere during the 1950s and 1960s. These resources went to subsidize the growth of middle class suburbs and suburban office parks—and thereby supported urban to suburban population shifts, “white flight,” and the shredding of St. Louis’s tax base. In an ironic

twist, activists, scholars, and planners alike have since argued that suburban sprawl is ecologically unsustainable and that creating sustainable urban/suburban landscapes will be the focus of economic development, regionalism, and historic preservation in the twenty-first century.

I would like to propose that public historians addressing sustainability issues ought to ground their work in an ethic of social inclusion and social equity. Such a stance would accord with both the NCPH’s [Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct](#) and the consensus on sustainability that emerged

from the 1987 Brundtland report, “[Our Common Future](#),” and the Earth Summit in Rio in 1992. An emphasis on ecological, economic, and social sustainability follows the “Three E’s” in contemporary sustainability: ecology/environment, economy/employment, and equity/equality.

As our studies of history demonstrate, deep divisions both in the U.S. and throughout the world are the result of long-term historical forces and trends (such as the rise of industrial capitalism to name one prominent development). Mindful of this legacy, illustrated in the microhistory of the Pruitt-Igoe community, I would argue that making connections between public history and sustainability necessitates an attention to issues of power, agency, and privilege, especially in the urban context where divisions between groups and populations can be

quite striking. In the contemporary effort to create sustainable cities and communities, there is a risk of replicating or reinforcing social injustices and social inequalities that have flowed from rigid systems of control over space and resources (natural, public, economic, social, and cultural). These systems of control have affected urban populations differently based on a variety of factors, such as race/ethnicity, class, gender, gender, sexuality, and age.

Equally troubling have been the processes of marginalization and erasure in American cities that have contributed to sanitized versions of the past. Current residents have either forgotten or misremembered past injustices. Traces of these processes are sometimes visible in the cityscapes created by the complex history of urban renewal and in the landscapes littered with the detritus of deindustrialization. However, a close study of urban history and urban communities reveal that in fact urban communities, including ethnic and working-class communities, have a long-standing history of addressing environmental as well as economic and social inequalities.

What then, might be the connections between public history and sustainability in the urban context? What might be the role of public historians? From one perspective, we might recall the roots of the public history movement in the latter decades of the twentieth century, and conceive of public history as a form of social work or social action, to borrow a phrase used by Patricia West in her closing remarks at a 2011 symposium at the University of Massachusetts Amherst on the future of the field. If the purpose of public history work is to play a role in public affairs, then public historians can contribute to more sustainable urban communities and cities by contributing our knowledge of history and public policy, community-based research methods (such as oral history), and a commitment to collaboration, shared authority, and reflective practice. This methodological approach can foster an attention to power, agency, and privilege.

~ *Melinda Marie Jetté* is Associate Professor of History and Public History Program Coordinator at Franklin Pierce University and a member of the National Council on Public History Sustainability Task Force. This piece is adapted from a case statement from a 2012 Working Group on "[Public History and Sustainability](#)" at the National Council on Public History/Organization of American Historians conference in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

SOUNDBITE HISTORY RECONSIDERED A REVIEW OF "THE ULTIMATE ROLLER-COASTER RIDE"



I am generally not a fan of sound-bite history. In this age of information overload and attention deficits, however, I suppose we must consider ways of packaging history in short, audio-visual formats in order to reach a larger public audience. Richard Heinberg's 2010 Post Carbon Institute video, "[The Ultimate Roller Coast Ride](#)," is a worthy effort in this regard. A creatively animated survey of "300 Years of Fossil-Fueled Growth in Five Minutes," the video opens and closes with the distinctive bass line from the late Lou Reed's "Walk on the Wild Side." The disturbing environmental message of another Reed song, "The Last Great American Whale," might have better served the purposes of this production, which is to frighten us about the grim future we face barring radical changes to our energy lifestyle.

Heinberg, an American journalist and educator who is a Senior Fellow of the [Post Carbon Institute](#), packs a lot of information into 300 seconds. He discusses the energy transitions in history from wood to coal to oil, notes the technologies that ushered in the energy-intensive

industrial revolution, and lists the long-range environmental effects that have brought us to “the verge of collapse!” But such a compressed narrative as this cannot avoid sweeping statements that work against historical understanding, which is about breaking down generalizations, questioning simple explanations, and shading in nuances.

There are many problematic historical claims in this film. For example, the environmental movement was not “born” with the energy crisis of the 1970s, as the narration asserts, but gathered strength well before it. Oil companies did not move to “drill in miles of seawater because the easy oil is gone,” but started drilling off the edge of the continental shelf in the 1980s when oil was in abundant supply. The erosion of demand from the economic crisis of the late 2000s made it appear that global oil production “stalls out” in 2010, when this video was made. In the three years since, though, it has continued to grow, buoyed mainly by breakthroughs in unconventional oil development in North America.

Heinberg’s larger point about the “end of easy oil” has some validity. The history of the oil industry, however, is replete with examples of “hard” oil becoming “easy” oil. In the late 1950s, many people in the industry considered drilling in more than 50 feet of water impossible. Now, drilling in several thousand feet of water is routine. Where many kinds of subsurface petroleum traps were once undetectable before applying the drill bit, now geoscientists can visualize them with 3-D seismic imaging before ever puncturing the surface. Finding a way to extract oil and gas from shale and tight sandstones was long considered hopeless. Now it is the basis for the revitalization of the industry in the United States and potentially around the world. Proclaiming the end of easy oil, as the video does, essentially assumes a cessation in technological development.

Heinberg does credit the importance of technology to the history of energy and industrialization, mentioning such notables as Faraday, Tesla, Drake, Daimler, Haber, Bosch, and the Wright brothers. But his tour ends in the early 1900s, omitting a century of energy innovation that generated broad-based wealth and economic benefits.

Moreover, Heinberg fails to mention the progress in energy conservation and efficiency achieved by many nations in recent decades. The United States consumes as much crude oil today as it did in 1979, despite having an economy six times as large and a population that has grown by 50 percent. Yet according to this presentation,

the last half of the twentieth century apparently has known only environmental destruction and misery – global warming, mass pollution, ocean acidification, species extinction, and the loss of ancient forests and topsoil – exacerbated by the depredations of globalization and financialization.

Of course we should be mindful of the purpose of this video and its intended audience. It is not meant for academic peer review. Rather, Heinberg packages history in a way that will shock people into awareness about the energy challenges facing human civilization. “It’s amazing how far we’ve come in 300 years, just three human lifetimes,” he states near the end of video. He is not interested in documenting how far we have come, however, but in emphasizing that we’ve come too far.

I applaud the effort to raise consciousness about the need for action on energy issues, especially toward greater efficiency, conservation, and reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. I do not agree, though, that the lesson of energy history translates into alarmist warnings of scarcity and societal collapse that are imminent without swift alterations to deeply entrenched energy systems. Heinberg’s wishful thinking about the need to “learn to live without fossil fuels” and “adapt to the end of economic growth as we know it” only contributes to the noise and hyperbole that polarizes debates on energy. Short, online films such as this can be a useful medium for combining history with advocacy. But for those seeking practical, expert analysis of the problems, I would steer them instead to the videos featured in the Rational Middle Energy Series.

The sobering lesson that history has taught us is that energy transitions take time, decades at least. To imply otherwise, as Heinberg’s video does, undermines the search for workable solutions. Speeding up history will not hasten the next transition. Fossil-fueled growth, regardless of how seriously we attempt to transition away from it, will last a lot longer than 300 years. It certainly takes longer than 300 seconds to explain.

~ Tyler Priest is Associate Professor of History and Geography at the University of Iowa. This piece originally appeared on the History@Work blog on [January 27, 2014](#).

RETHINKING *the* REFRIGERATOR

THE SURPRISINGLY SUSTAINABLE PAST

While teaching classes in material culture studies, I got in the habit of using historic artifacts to think about our changing relationship with the environment. But nothing made this lesson clearer to me than a 1950s Hotpoint refrigerator.

When I acquired the refrigerator it was over 50 years old and looked it—there were dents, scratches, and rust decorating its exterior. Inside was a layer of grime, somehow impossible to remove. I had bought it in an act of desperation, having just purchased a foreclosed house without any appliances. The refrigerator was only \$85 and came with a stove of the same vintage. I lived with those appliances for many years while my husband and I waited to rebuild the kitchen.

Over time, I came to love the old stove. It had built-in storage areas and well-designed gas burners. But my relationship with the refrigerator was much more strained. It worked perfectly well. In the main compartment, food stayed cold; in the freezer, it froze. But I worried that I was creating an environmental disaster. Refrigerators are high electricity users. They stay on 24 hours a day and they draw a lot of power. In the 1930s, when electric refrigerators were introduced to the home market, electricity companies promoted their purchase over competing gas models because electricity promised larger profits for the industry. Likewise, General Electric, one of the first companies to engineer home refrigerators, took on the expensive work of research and product development because of the potential to make profits in both product and utility sales.

In the last thirty years, refrigerators have become more efficient, encouraged by regulatory programs such as the U.S. Department of Energy's conservation standards and voluntary labeling programs like [Energy Star](#) which help consumers choose more efficient models. My refrigerator clearly did not benefit from these innovations, and the fact that it was old meant that the gasket around the door was brittle and cracked, allowing cold air to escape.

But when I hooked my refrigerator up to an electricity meter, I discovered something surprising. It was drawing only about as much electricity as a modern-day refrigerator. I'm a historian, not an engineer,

but I suspect two explanations, both of which illustrate how our culture supports high energy consumption.

First, the interior of my 1950s refrigerator was smaller than that of a modern unit. Household size has been on the decline for much of the last fifty years, but consumption encouraged by the convenience food industry has been on the rise. Indeed, many of my friends commented on the size of the refrigerator, saying that they would need more space for soda and other drinks.

The second explanation for the low energy draw was that my fridge didn't have an automatic defroster, a convenience feature that became popular in the 1960s and 1970s. Having lived without an automatic defroster, I can tell you that defrosting the freezer isn't such a big deal. In my climate, it can be done just once a year and it is a good opportunity to discover forgotten items. But defrosting becomes significant when a home life of comfort and ease becomes the marker of a middle class lifestyle. Like hanging the clothes out to dry or washing dishes by hand, defrosting the freezer is the kind of manual labor whose absence symbolizes prosperity and progress.

I did get rid of the 1950s refrigerator when we rebuilt the kitchen and I was able to bring my energy draw significantly lower by purchasing a small unit without automatic defrost. But I still think about my old refrigerator. By allowing us to compare past practices with those of our own, history (and in this case an old appliance) helps us recognize the ways in which our domestic "needs" are culturally constructed. Rising expectations, so elegantly exposed by the historian of household technology Ruth Cowan in her book *More Work for Mother*, have often led to rising energy use. For us to reduce energy use, change must be more than technological. It must be cultural too.

~ Briann Greenfield is Executive Director of the New Jersey Council for the Humanities. This piece originally appeared on the History@Work blog on [July 18, 2013](#).



The big-little conundrum

A CONVERSATION WITH
REBECCA CONARD
& CATHY STANTON

CS: I've been really interested in questions of timescale in relation to both "sense of history" and environmental stewardship, so I was fascinated by your comment about this in [the History@Work post](#) about the NCPH sustainability survey. It seems that people are more likely to take environmental stewardship seriously if they have a sense of their own place in the much longer sweep of past and also future generations. I'm wondering how this might connect with the idea of "Big History" and other efforts to extend our historical timescale beyond the relatively recent past that a lot of public historical projects tend to focus on.

RC: There seem to be at least a couple of interrelated issues in the question of how we get to Big History, or how to shift the focus from the relatively recent past to a long view that connects various pasts to an imagined future. One involves connecting local or group pasts to a common future in ways that pay attention to cultural diversity, (i.e., do not dismiss or marginalize cultural identities and values), and another is to mind the line between history as parable and history as propaganda. Right now, I don't have any brilliant ideas about where to begin, but I have a kind of faith that it can be done. This past week I gave a talk on the 1906 Antiquities Act, which reminded me that it all began with an 1882 petition to Congress from the New England Historic Genealogical Society, a Boston-based group that somehow developed a burning concern for the "ancient" pueblos in the Southwest that were falling victim to relic-hunters. They didn't know much about the ruins, except that they were older than Boston, or the people who had built them, except that living Pueblo Indians were their descendants. The example isn't perfect, but it's kind of amazing to think that the seed of cultural resources management was planted by a bunch of Bostonians thinking way beyond their ken.

CS: Of course, those old Bostonians have also now been roundly critiqued for operating out of a set of assumptions about cultural evolution and the supposed march toward modern civilization. And I think this speaks to your point about trying to envision a longer sweep of time and a common future in a way that goes beyond

MORE TO READ...

There's a case to be made that a good deal of the writing now being done and resources produced on global climate change and environmental sustainability could be classed as "public history." Historical thinking—on both the scale of the industrial era and the much longer timespans that take us into the realm of what is sometimes termed "Big History"—is an essential aspect of our collective attempts to understand how the planetary atmosphere has warmed to the point that the ability of humans and many other species to survive is called into question. The title of a Spring 2014 conference at Western University makes this point succinctly: "The Climate is History."

At the same time, the nature of the questions and problems associated with climate change makes them inescapably public, and a smaller but still considerable sub-set of this new research and writing relates directly to questions about public reception, debate, and engagement. (For examples of both types of sources, see the rich bibliographic sections of "Past Actions, Present Woes, Future Potential: Rethinking History in the Light of Anthropogenic Climate Change," a model university syllabus from the Rescue!History network.)

We've begun compiling a narrower [list of sources](#) in the Public History Commons that brings together materials from or within the professional fields occupied by self-identified public historians. The list is a work in progress, and additions are welcome.

A few entries are included from fields that have their own significant centers of gravity outside of public history *per se*: for example, the extensive work on "green buildings" and adaptive reuse from the worlds of planning, design, and architecture; the quickly-growing literature on "sustainable tourism," which focuses on the effects of climate change on what is now one of the world's largest economic sectors; and the study of climate change and national parks, which tends to emphasize the natural sciences but has important implications for cultural and historical parks and public history practitioners.

[Our list-in-progress](#) includes blogs, websites, and other short-form, multi-media, and born-digital work; "gray literature," white papers, and action plans; and scholarly books and articles. Please contribute using the "Comments" function below the listing.

those older, hierarchalizing assumptions (which still make themselves felt in problematic ways within public historical consciousness) without falling into the opposite trap of ignoring the present-day legacies of older exclusions and assumptions. It has seemed to me that if we're going to do that, there has to be some common framework for thinking about the big "isms" that have combined to produce our runaway climate (industrialism, capitalism, nationalism, globalism). But those are such vast and contentious topics, and public historians tend (probably wisely) to approach them, if at all, through smaller, specific, "relatable" stories. That's an understable approach, but I wonder if it also works against building larger shared analyses that might help move our collective civic conversations further along.

RC: I agree on the need for a common framework to stimulate conversations that move us to think beyond those smaller "relatable" stories. But I'm not as worried about the contentious nature of the big "isms" associated with climate change as I am in the tendency to approach big stories and big ideas in top-down fashion. This runs counter to so much of what is good about public historical practice. We've learned to listen to audiences, or at least try, and although we may not always like what we hear, we know that understanding the audience is essential to meaningful communication. However, it does seem as though respect for (fear of?) the agency of audience makes public historians hesitant to take on controversial topics and complex issues, so maybe we need to start by examining our own reservations. Something else that might be worth examining is the Smithsonian's [Museum on Main Street](#) program, which attempts to deal with the big-little conundrum by providing a big story as an exhibit shell along with related educational materials, and participating local organizations fit a related small story and public programs into it.

CS: I like the way this approach seems to distill a lot of what public historians have learned over the years about combining contextualization with personal connection, while also challenging us to take a more active role in defining contexts and shaping public discussion. I agree that in trying to avoid "Let us tell you what your history means," public historians have sometimes fallen short of "Let us help find a way to link specific local and individual experiences with these much broader processes and debates," but there's an urgency about this particular set of questions that challenges us to push past our own hesitation to admit our own values and the politics of what we're trying to do. As someone who's engaged in training the next generation of practitioners, do you see any shift in willingness to do that?

RC: That's a good question, but not an easy one to answer. I enjoy the idealism and zeal of the next generation; many of them choose public history because they want to "make a difference," and that part is encouraging. Let's face it, though: as a lot, historians tend to have strong political beliefs but an inherent aversion to engage in "politics," which takes a good bit of tact. The aversion may not be quite as strong among the younger crop of public historians, which is another hopeful sign, but it's still there. Also, part of the challenge of admitting one's own values is learning to temper the zeal, and that just takes time and experience. Then, of course, there is the practical matter of turning one's degree into a job and a career. Still, I think many see themselves as emerging activist historians.

~ *Rebecca Conard* is Professor of History and Director of Public History at Middle Tennessee State University.

From the field

continued from page 11



Make the case that climate change is an "artifact" of past human actions. Understanding the human agency that has driven climate change is the bailiwick of history. Addressing climate change requires more than science; it requires paying serious attention to attitudes and values embedded in culture, which brings us back to history.
~ **Philip Scarpino**, Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI)



Public Historians should be identifying and articulating to one another and to other professional organizations the specific ways in which climate change impacts the ability to preserve and interpret the past for future generations. From there we can use our visibility to begin to provide historical perspective and context for past natural resource use and current economic policy.
~ **Leah Glaser**,
Central Connecticut State University



Photo:
Moat wall, Dry Tortugas, Florida
by [Rasheed Siddiqui](#)