

PRESIDENT’S COMMENTS // WATER IS LIFE



GREGORY E. SMOAK / GREG.SMOAK@UTAH.EDU

It has been another scorching summer in the American West. Salt Lake City hit one hundred degrees earlier this year than ever before, saw the highest temperature ever recorded in the city, and is on pace to shatter the record for 100-degree days in a summer (five is average, and there have been eighteen by early August). Still, Utah has gotten off comparatively easy. An unprecedented heat wave struck the Pacific Northwest, sending temperatures soaring to unimaginable highs in usually mild Portland and Seattle. While heat-related deaths have risen, water levels in reservoirs have plunged to historic lows. For several years now the West has been locked in a worsening “megadrought.” One result has been catastrophic and deadly wildfires that now occur so often that land managers no longer think in terms of a

summer “fire season,” but rather a “fire year.” The overwhelming consensus in the scientific community is that human induced climate change is at least partially responsible for the recent extremes seen in the West and around the globe.

This has me thinking about the intersection of public and environmental history and the role that public historians can play in helping communities understand the changes around them. Simply put, environmental history is the study of how human societies have engaged the natural world and the reciprocal consequences of that engagement. The approach requires us to take the natural processes of the planet into account as well as to consider the goals and values of human societies. The natural world sets limits and provides opportunities, but people interact with that world according to their own culturally and historically derived ideas of what constitutes a proper relationship to nature.



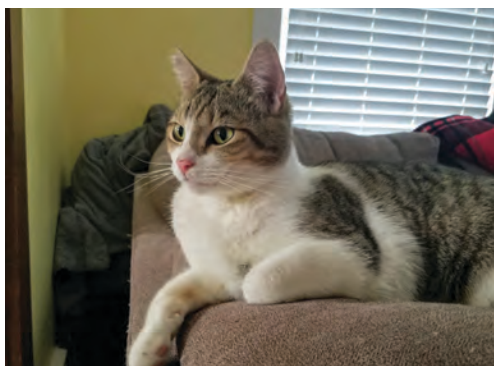
Death Hollow canyon in southern Utah. Courtesy of Greg Smoak.

For the past two years I have had the opportunity to be part of a Utah Humanities initiative called “Think Water Utah” (TWU), which asks the residents of our state to do

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THE “NEW NORMAL” AT NCPH

MEGHAN HILLMAN / MEGHILLM@IUPUI.EDU



Gus is NCPH Membership Coordinator Stasia Tanzer's public history pet.

The COVID-19 pandemic isn't over yet, by any definition. I write this after a weekend that loomed large with news articles warning about the Delta variant; the CDC has recently recommended that we all return to wearing masks indoors regardless of our vaccination status. Still, eighteen months in, we at NCPH are taking stock of the ways that the pandemic has changed our way of life, our way of work, and our approach to supporting public historians as we think about what's next.

First: we're back in the office—sort of. Last March, just one week before our scheduled annual meeting in Atlanta, NCPH staff hurriedly packed up everything in our office we thought we'd need for perhaps a month of remote work. Like everyone else, we couldn't imagine how long it would last. While we've been going into the office one at a time for a while, last month our fully-vaccinated staff returned to the office together for the first time to begin a new phase of hybrid work. The School of Liberal Arts at IUPUI in Indianapolis, our host institution, has approved two days a week of remote work, so most of the NCPH staff will be working from home two days a week and going into the office the other three. This is likely to be a permanent arrangement, provided policy at IUPUI doesn't change.

This won't impact members; there will be someone there to answer the phone and return your emails Monday through Friday. But for staff this is a best-of-both-worlds solution that will allow us to go back to a level of

face-to-face collaboration that makes our work easier and more enjoyable while not requiring us to sacrifice the flexibility we found at home this last



Lyra, NCPH Program Manager Meghan Hillman's cat.

year. For us, the ideal work situation lets us spend more time with our colleagues than we did during the pandemic, but also more time with our cats and kids than we did before it—so that's where we've landed. We encourage other professional and public history organizations to prioritize what's best for your staff, instead of pursuing a return to fully in-person work that might not be necessary or ideal. (Or safe. Indiana University is requiring vaccination for all faculty, staff, and students, which helps us feel more comfortable, but many public history workplaces lack that level of protection.)

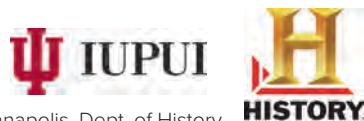
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NOTICE OF THE FALL BOARD MEETING

On October 16, the NCPH Board of Directors will be convening virtually in lieu of the typical in-person Fall Board Meeting. The board welcomes comments, questions, and suggestions from NCPH members throughout the year, and

especially for the fall agenda. Please contact the executive director (rowes@iupui.edu) or the board at large (board@ncph.org). Individual board members are listed at <http://bit.ly/ncphcommittees>.

WELCOME, ELISE AND NOAH!



Elise Schrader is serving as the NCPH Graduate Assistant for the 2021-2022 academic year. She graduated from Ball State University in December of 2019 with a BS in History, and she is currently in her second year at IUPUI in the public history graduate program. Prior to working at NCPH, Elise has been involved with multiple oral history projects, interned with the Indiana State Museum's collections department, served as a research intern for the William G. Pomeroy Foundation, and worked with Ball State's history department as an undergraduate teaching fellow.



Noah Nobbe is a first-year grad student at IUPUI currently interning with NCPH. Noah grew up outside Westport, Indiana, and recently graduated from Ball State University, where he majored in Public History and minored in Digital Media and Coaching. Noah is a big fan of Italian food, movies, and the Cincinnati Bengals, and he is looking forward to helping NCPH run at its best and learning from a great organization.

Welcome New Members!

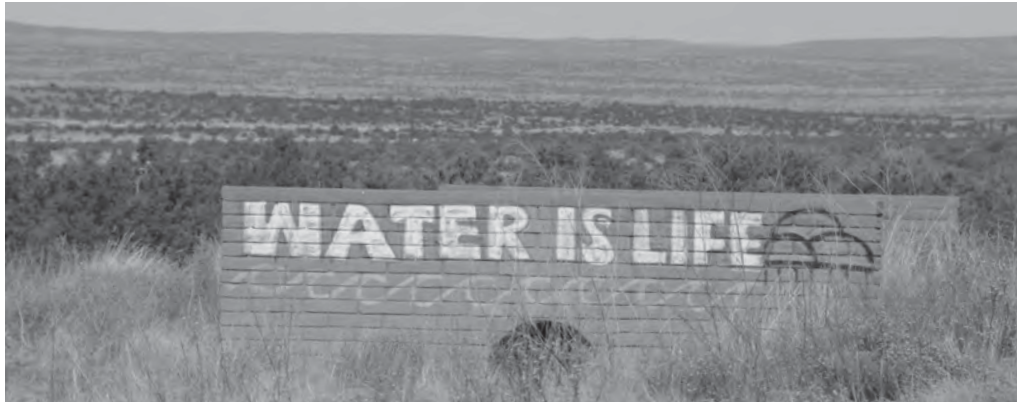
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just that—pause and think about where we get our water, how we use it, and the lessons that history might provide for finding a more sustainable future. The core of TWU has been the statewide tour of two Smithsonian exhibitions, *Water Ways* and *H2O Today*. Add to that companion exhibits and programming at the seven local venues presenting the touring exhibits, as well as partner exhibitions at the Natural History Museum of Utah and Utah Museum of Fine Art, and you have what Megan Van Frank of Utah Humanities lovingly refers to as the “water circus.” (For more on the partnerships check out Megan Weiss’s recent *History@Work* post.)

As the state consulting scholar for TWU, my role has been to provide the local context for the national and global stories told in the exhibits. Utah has its own unique water history that flows first from the natural world. It is a very arid state, the second driest in the nation, yet the presence of water in particular places has allowed human populations to thrive for millennia in narrow swaths of what might otherwise be an inhospitable landscape. Native peoples utilized mobility and an intimate understanding of local resources to survive. On the other hand, the first Euro-American colonists, members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, sought to transplant an agrarian way of life they knew from the well-watered East. This meant diverting water from natural channels to where people farmed and lived. In the 20th century, rapid urban growth intensified pressure on water resources and the belief grew stronger that nature could be reengineered to meet ever-greater demands.

In telling Utah’s water story we emphasized several themes that speak to issues that extend beyond the state’s borders—the impact of climate change, the pressures exerted by a rapidly growing population, and issues of environmental justice.

The first two factors are intertwined and together pose great challenges for finding a sustainable path forward. According to the 2020 census, Utah’s population grew by 18.4% in the last decade. That’s faster than any other state and over two and half times the national average! The expansion has been concentrated along the narrow metropolitan corridor of the Wasatch Front, home to the vast majority of Utahns, and around the burgeoning amenity communities in the southwest corner of the state. At the same time, Utah is also one of the fastest warming places in North America. Over the past century much of



Shongopavi on the Hopi Reservation in Arizona. Courtesy Greg Smoak.

the state experienced temperature increases between two and three degrees Fahrenheit. While that rise might seem small, it makes a big difference in a place like Utah that gets most of its precipitation as winter snowfall. As elsewhere in the West, the state’s water infrastructure was designed to capture spring snowmelt. Warming temperatures mean that snowpacks are thinner, melt earlier, and more of the region’s scant precipitation falls as rain and cannot be captured as effectively. Still, state leaders largely focus on controversial and expensive new developments to increase water diversions as a solution to this problem of supply and demand, rather than emphasizing conservation. In this way Utah’s experience mirrors those of our arid, fast-growing neighbors Idaho, Nevada, and Colorado.

The team behind TWU was also keenly aware that not all peoples have shared equally in nature’s wealth. Water is life, and Utah’s Native peoples made their lives where that most precious of resources created oases. Early white settlers coveted these same places and co-opted the most well-watered lands as their own. Native peoples were forcibly

removed to more arid, marginal lands, and then during the 20th century were subject to economic and political pressure to divert even more water to sustain agricultural and urban development. What so many Utahns view as a straightforward triumph of faith, ingenuity, and will—the struggle to make the “desert bloom as a rose”—came at the expense of Utah’s Indigenous water ways. This was an important story for us to tell.

Ultimately, “Think Water Utah” and projects like it are about provoking thoughtful discussion. One of the most important things that we can do as public historians is to provide historical context for communities as they ponder their futures. Environmental history is an increasingly important tool in our kit as climate change impacts communities everywhere. We must take the natural world and our impact on it seriously, but we must also keep in mind how our attitudes and actions impact diverse communities.

-Gregory E. Smoak is the President of NCPH and is director of the American West Center and Associate Professor of History at University of Utah.

Public History Book Club

This summer the NCPH Professional Development Committee launched the inaugural Public History Book Club. Keep an eye on <https://ncph.org/conference/other-programs/2021-virtual-gatherings/public-history-book-club/> for future reads and discussion dates.

Other Fall 2021 Programs

Out of Time: REM, Gen X, and Public History
September 12, 7 pm Eastern

Grumpy Hour: Consultants' Support Group
October 27, 7:30 pm Eastern

2022 NCPH AWARDS



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DUE NOVEMBER 1



Book Award

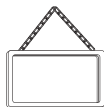
Best public history book of
2020 or 2021



Robert Kelley Memorial Award

Distinguished achievement in
making history relevant outside of
academia

DUE DECEMBER 1



Outstanding Public History Project Award

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Excellence in Consulting Awards

Outstanding work by consultants and contractors



New Professional Travel Awards

2 travel grants to attend #NCPH2022

Student Project Award

Travel grant to attend #NCPH2022 recognizing
student contributions to the field



Student Travel Awards

5 travel grants for graduate students to attend
#NCPH2022



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SEMI-ANNUAL REPORT

STEPHANIE ROWE / ROWES@IUPUI.EDU



I am pleased to be editing this issue of *Public History News* from my campus offices once again! NCPH staff are working hybrid schedules and easing into our “new normal,” but we’re

happy to be brainstorming in person once again, as well as feeling the IUPUI campus return to life. You can read more about our office plans in my colleague Meghan Hillman’s piece which starts on page 1 of this issue.

The past year plus has been rocky to say the least, but we’re pleased to report that NCPH is weathering the storm. Membership numbers hover around 1,600—slightly down from our high point after the 2019 Annual Meeting in Harford, Connecticut, but far above where we feared we might be after two virtual conferences and a difficult 18 months for public history institutions and universities across the board.

The past year has also been one of Memorandums of Agreement and contract renewals. We’ll continue to publish *The Public Historian* in concert with the University of

California Santa Barbara (*TPH* co-owners), as well as the Mid-Atlantic Regional Center for the Humanities at Rutgers University, Camden, and the University of California. We’ve also renewed our agreement with IUPUI, our host university, through 2022. The coming years will bring substantial additional costs to NCPH as we assume more of our staff salary and benefit costs from the university—something not unanticipated (and a major pillar of our 2020 *Vision Endowment* campaign that successfully wrapped this spring), but now at a much-accelerated pace thanks to COVID-19. Secretary and Treasurer Sharon Leon will update the membership in more detail as longer terms are laid out in that partnership, but we know the fundraising and development of more earned revenue streams will not slow down as we work to keep pace with our growth and retain high quality, full-time staff.

One of these new income streams, and a great source of potential for our members and community, is the operationalizing of our master cooperative agreement with the National Park Service. At the time of writing this, several projects are already underway, including an update of the World War II Home Front Theme Study, a series

of roundtables in preparation for the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution in 2026, and a Historic Resource Study for the Valles Caldera National Preserve. New projects just launching are a series of criterion essays for the World War II Heritage Cities Program and an Administrative History for the Southwestern National Monuments Group (open calls for letters of interest from historians for both of these closed in August), and we’re preparing to begin work on a Disability History Handbook and a 50th Anniversary scholars’ roundtable at the Lincoln Home National Historic Site. This work has been incredibly fulfilling for our staff—allowing us to practice public history in ways our current positions don’t always make room for—while providing opportunities for paid work to our members and strengthening our relationship with the National Park Service.

We’re not sure what the next few months will look like for our field or our organization, and we’re so grateful for your ongoing support.

-Stephanie Rowe is NCPH’s Executive Director

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THE “NEW NORMAL” AT NCPH // CONT'D. FROM PAGE 1

Other changes at NCPH will impact our members more directly. Prior to COVID-19, we were of two minds about virtual programming. We wanted to explore doing webinars and virtual events, recognizing that they would be valuable to our community and reach people for whom in-person events are a barrier. However, we knew that learning the virtual landscape would be a substantial investment of time and resources for staff and volunteers already at capacity. In the meantime other organizations were already producing great webinars, and we didn't want to reinvent the wheel. So instead we prioritized work laid out in our 2017-2022 Long Range Plan (like developing a comprehensive accessibility plan for the conference, growing our endowment to fund new awards, and collaborating with the National Park Service to bring consulting opportunities to our members) while ideas for virtual programs sat on the back burner.

For better or for worse, the pandemic forced us to get cozy with virtual in a hurry. And while we were learning, public historians were learning with us: attending Zoom meetings, putting together virtual programs, exhibits, and tours of their own, teaching online classes, and going to virtual conferences on new platforms. We developed the tools to put

together virtual events as, simultaneously, our community developed the language to tell us what you want and need from them. Going forward, you probably won't see a lot of formal training webinars from NCPH—we continue to think that other organizations cover those bases well—but you can expect to keep seeing informal virtual conversations, networking opportunities, vent sessions, and working groups, plus a virtual component to our annual conference with unique content that complements the in-person offerings.

Compounding personal loss, the pandemic took a lot from the field. The already-tenuous job market for public historians crumbled; there were weekly reports of furloughs and layoffs, and submissions to NCPH's jobs page slowed to a trickle. Some who kept their jobs were asked to sacrifice their personal health and safety to perform “essential services” by employers who prioritized the budget over their staff's well-being. BIPOC public historians did all this while shouldering the additional burden of racial injustice, a systemic problem rotting our field and our institutions from the inside-out as surely as it is every other. The pandemic highlighted and worsened just about every inequality, every failing, and every stressor we had.



Jacob and Leo, NCPH Executive Director Stephanie Rowe's kid- and cat-storian.

But in addition to all the pandemic took, it also reframed our whole attitude to work. Here's what it gave me, professionally: the ability to say, *this isn't working; let's try something new*. Permission to try things that even two years ago seemed out of reach when the usual way of doing things became impossible, and then to evaluate those new things fairly, with fresh eyes unencumbered by ego, attachment, or precedent. Finally, it provoked some soul-searching for me about what about my job makes me feel good, and about what professional organizations are even *for*, which have me eager to move into our next cycle of long-range planning.

-Meghan Hillman is NCPH's Program Manager.

MAKE YOUR MARK ON NCPH 2022

Make sure you've got a valid passport, because we're excited to bring the NCPH annual meeting back to Canada for the first time in a decade! Join us in Montreal, Quebec next March, and online later in the spring of 2022, as we envision the best of both worlds: an in-person conference that will bring us back together (with COVID-19 guidelines in place) and a virtual conference that remains accessible and affordable to accommodate those who can't travel. We invite you to reserve exhibit space, advertise in the conference *Program*, or sponsor an event—most marketing opportunities for 2022 include in-person and virtual benefits. Reach potential customers, collaborators, or students; promote the latest scholarship, forthcoming titles, and journals from your press; and share the vital work of your organization. For more information, visit <https://ncph.org/conference/2022-annual-meeting/support-ncph-2022/>.

IT'S NOT TOO LATE TO GET WITH THE PROGRAM

The Program Committee is in the process of evaluating session, workshop, and working group proposals for #NCPH2022, but other opportunities to get on the program are either available now or will open soon. Our Call for

Posters, Call for Working Group Discussants, and other open calls between now and next March will help you find the right venue to share your work and connect with your fellow public historians. The hub for all conference CFPs, where you'll find information about what we're looking for or a link to the relevant submission form, is <https://ncph.org/conference/2022-annual-meeting/calls-for-proposals/>.

CALL FOR POSTERS

The poster session is a format for presenters eager to share their work through one-on-one discussion, and is particularly appropriate where visual or material evidence represents a central component of the project. Poster proposals are due **October 4**. In addition to the in-person poster session in Montreal, we'll be inviting poster presenters to share their posters on our virtual conference platform later in the spring.

CALL FOR WORKING GROUP DISCUSSANTS

Each working group will be led by facilitators, whose topic has already been proposed and selected by the Program Committee. They'll be looking for 8-12 individuals to join them in preconference online discussion, to exchange brief case statements, and to meet in person



St-Viateur Bagel. Photo credit: Alison Slattery – Two Food Photographers – Tourisme Montreal.

during the conference. Because so much of the work of these groups is accomplished before and after the meeting, you may still be able to participate even if you can't travel to Montreal. The Call for Working Group Discussants will open as soon as the working group selections are finalized (expected by mid-September) and will be open through early November.

MORE OPPORTUNITIES TO COME

Between the in-person conference and virtual follow-up conference, we're likely to have new opportunities for presenting your work come up in the next few months. Keep an eye on the conference website and our Twitter (twitter.com/ncph) for the latest calls for participation!

PUBLIC HISTORY NEWS

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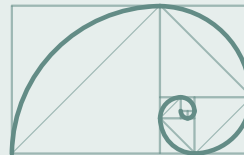
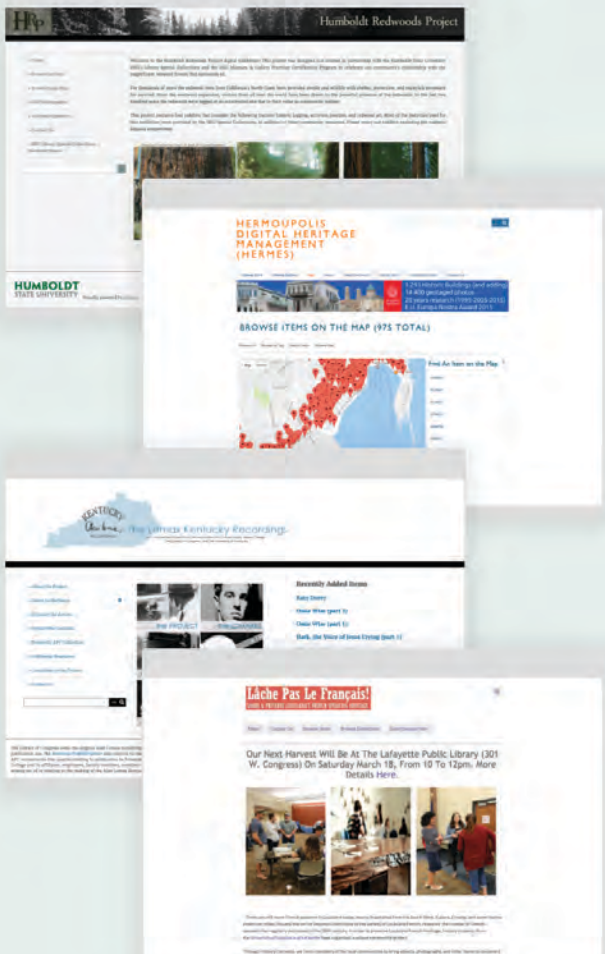
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