

PERSPECTIVES ON THE NATIONAL COUNCIL ON PUBLIC HISTORY ON ITS 40TH ANNIVERSARY



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Meghan Hillman
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INTRODUCTION

// STEPHANIE ROWE

At the start of 2020 and the National Council on Public History's (NCPH) fortieth-anniversary year, we had no idea what was to come. We were selecting a cake for our 40th Birthday Bash, to be hosted at the Atlanta History Center during our 2020 NCPH Annual Meeting; we were organizing an opening plenary panel with several of our organization's founders; and we were hoping to announce the success of our [2020 Vision Endowment campaign](#). Just a month later, it seemed our celebrations might be in jeopardy, and then on March 20, 2020, just eight days prior to the start of the conference, our Board of Directors made the difficult—but, no doubt, correct—[decision to cancel the in-person conference due to the COVID-19 pandemic](#).

With that decision came the cancelation of our party, opening plenary, and “Threads of Change” roundtable, and the temporary suspension of our fundraising campaign.¹ We watched the markets drop and many institutions grapple with the new realities of operating while closed.

Now, over a year later, we're still not on solid footing as a world or as a field, but NCPH remains. After a year's extension, we were able to announce during our Virtual NCPH 2021

1 See: “Present at the Creation: A Conversation with Pioneers of the Public History Movement—Part I,” *Public History News* 40, no. 3 (June 2020): 1, 6–7, 13, <https://ncph.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/2020-June-Newsletter-Final-Web.pdf>; “Present at the Creation Part II: Continued Reflections on Four Decades of Public History and NCPH,” *Public History News* 40, no. 4 (September 2020): 6–7, <https://ncph.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/2020-September-Newsletter-Final-Web.pdf>; Rebecca Conard et al, “Roundtable: Threads of Origin,” *The Public Historian* 43, no. 2 (May 2021): 9–40.

conference that we had exceeded our goal of growing the endowment to over one million dollars—a feat our founders only ever joked about—and our membership remains strong. Our work environments and professional gatherings look very different these days, but we are hopeful for an in-person conference in [Spring 2023](#) and have learned some good lessons from our forced shift to virtual programming that have made NCPH more accessible—something we hope to continue.



NCPH presidents at the 1988 NCPH Annual Meeting in Denver, Colorado.

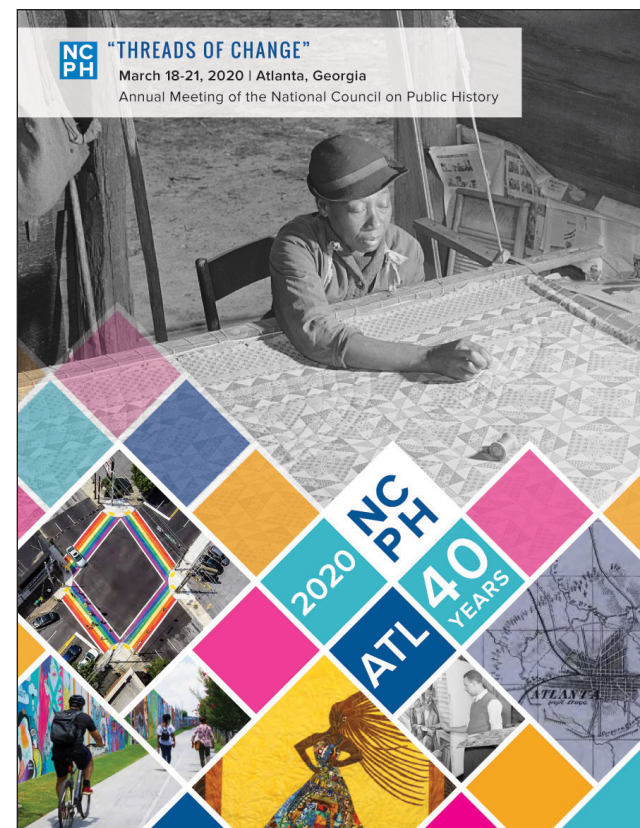
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In a time of such significant change, it is especially astonishing to look back on NCPH's forty years of "[putting history to work in the world](#);" while contemplating our modest but ambitious roots and looking forward to where work is still required.

In this substantial e-publication, you'll find ten individual essays exploring the ongoing work of the organization, key moments of change and reflection, and challenges for us to think about as we enter our next forty years.

Daniel Vivian explores thirty years of public history education in colleges and universities and NCPH's role in that growth. Kristen Baldwin Deathridge considers changing concepts of "the public" in our work, and Denise D. Meringolo takes us a step further, contemplating Ronald J. Grele's vision for democratic practice in public history and where

we may have succeeded and failed in upholding his vision. Modupe Labode examines NCPH's history of diversity, equity, access, and inclusion work, and Hope Shannon writes about issues of gender equity and sexual harassment in the public history field. Jason H. Gart and Jessica Knapp both consider the unique role of consultants in the field of public history and NCPH specifically. Centering more on NCPH's particular history, Anna Adamek reflects on the organization's role in internationalization and the creation of the International Federation for Public History, and Cathy Stanton digs into twenty-five years of NCPH's experiments in the digital realm. Patrice Green's essay challenges us to look forward while "embracing change, denying legitimacy to harmful narratives, and accepting the social justice and reparative elements of this work are critical elements for



On the eve of our 40th anniversary conference, scheduled to be held in Atlanta, Georgia, NCPH canceled the in-person gathering and was among the first history conferences to shift to a virtual environment due to the developing COVID-19 pandemic.

deciding what kind of organization we want to be."

Together, these essays provide context in understanding how NCPH came to be the organization that it is today and offer a map for where we might take ourselves in the next forty years. I want to thank all of our essay

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authors for giving us their time and reflections contained in the following pages, and to the 40th Anniversary Ad Hoc Committee members that conceptualized, shepherded, and edited this publication, including: NCPH Digital Media Editor Nicole Belolan; committee chair Marianne Babal; NCPH Program Manager Meghan Hillman; committee member Patrick Grossi, who helped with early planning; and the publication's copy editor, Madeleine Rosenberg.

Finally, 2021 marks my fifth (or sixth, depending on how you count) year as NCPH's executive director and my ninth with the organization. I could not be more grateful for this community. From our board to our committee volunteers, editors, social media managers, and the staff I have the honor of working with every day, this community is one of a kind. Thank you all for allowing me to be a part of it.

THE PUBLIC AND THE NATIONAL COUNCIL ON PUBLIC HISTORY

// KRISTEN BALDWIN DEATHRIDGE

In 2008, I joined the National Council on Public History (NCPH) and attended my first annual meeting.



NCPH leaders pictured during their transitions of power at the 2008 annual meeting in Louisville, Kentucky in the historic Brown Hotel. L-R: Robert Weible prepared to roll off as Immediate Past President, Bill Bryans prepared to pass along the Presidency to Marianne Babal.

It was in Louisville, Kentucky, at the historic Brown Hotel, of Kentucky Hot Brown sandwich-fame. The following year, when we met in Providence,

Rhode Island, was the last annual meeting that planners consciously set in a historic hotel. NCPH was growing and few historic buildings had the space to accommodate it, but this shift was also a sign of NCPH's changing relationship to

one of its publics—public historians themselves, evidenced here through more affordable and accessible accommodations. As the organization grew, these changes in the annual meetings have been a mirror for the profession's emphasis on expanding the conversation about which "publics" historians serve.

NCPH presidential addresses, published in *The Public Historian*, are particularly useful for observing changes and continuities in how public historians have conceptualized the *public* meaning of their work.¹ In

1 This piece isn't intended to be a rehash of definitions about the meaning of that riddled term, *public*, even as I recognize the utility of revisiting how historians operate for the *publics* of the profession and the community at large; plenty of time has been spent on this. Or has it? We keep looking back. Published in 1981, in only the third volume of *The Public Historian*, Ronald Grele's article "Whose Public? Whose History? What is the Goal of a Public Historian?" poses questions that we still wrestle with today. This piece is still frequently assigned reading

considering how NCPH has shaped my own relationship with the public, key themes emerge: public historians' relationships with each other, the publics they serve, and themselves.

Many historians work in isolation, and NCPH's meetings and publications offer vital forums where we converse. In 1992, Page Putnam Miller, a public historian active in a variety of professional organizations, reviewed a little over a decade of advocacy from NCPH, the Society for History in the Federal Government (SHFG), the American Association for State and Local History, and the American Historical Association. Even then, Miller noted that NCPH and SHFG were indispensable for their

in courses on public history and is the subject of another article in this anniversary publication. See Ronald J. Grele, "Whose Public? Whose History? What is the Goal of a Public Historian?" *The Public Historian* 3, no. 1 (Winter 1981): 40–48.

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members, who had previously been too isolated from one another.² Miller argued that the previous decade of work by these organizations had reached the goal of confirming public history's place in the profession, and they should turn to working towards "new opportunities for the exchange of ideas."³

Robert Weible's 2006 presidential address suggested "that the gap between professional historians and the public has grown during the past twenty-five years and that both the public and the profession have suffered as a result."⁴ Weible began with tenets most practicing public historians today would agree with—the gap between us and the public is too broad, and we need to

2 Page Putnam Miller, "Reflections on the Public History Movement," *The Public Historian* 14, no. 2 (Spring 1992): 68.

3 Miller, "Reflections," 70.

4 Robert Weible, "The Blind Man and His Dog: The Public and Its Historians," *The Public Historian* 28, no. 4 (Fall 2006): 8.

reshape institutions that keep us from serving people well. Through the process of creating a National Park Service unit in Lowell, Massachusetts, Weible described work towards "a synthesis, not a compromise," to share a more complete history of Lowell.⁵ Weible chastised those academics and bureaucrats too far removed from the publics they are supposed to be helping. He also argued that giving a public total authority (as opposed to shared authority, perhaps?) leaves it to the marketplace to determine the best version of history.⁶ I support the sometimes messy process of historians working with various publics that Weible urges, but I am not comfortable with the idea of historians leading the public in the

5 Weible, "The Blind Man," 12.

6 My read of Weible's discussion of marketplace here refers to the effects of capitalism; it should be clear that this part of the address was about specialists.

way that he describes. Weible doesn't explicitly ask the audience to consider and challenge where the power rests in the production of public history



Past NCPH presidents at the 30th anniversary reception during the Portland annual meeting in 2010.

projects. More recent participants in NCPH annual meetings and publications have done so.⁷

7 The rest of Weible's argument, which compares historians to guide dogs for an impaired public, is one that today we should rightly question—not least for its ableist language. I have learned from NCPH colleagues who have confirmed that my role is to listen and facilitate at least as much as it is to share expertise or address historical inaccuracies, if not more.

Mary Hancock, then editor of *The Public Historian*, noted in 2004, “Attention to how and why historians engage with the various ‘publics’... are concerns that launched public history as a ‘field,’” and this question has not been definitively answered.⁸ Hancock emphasized that reflection on and discussion of interactions with various publics continued to have a role in public historians’ writings. These questions about the public will always need to be asked; looking for definitive answers is not the point. Public historians should listen to what people need, give them the resources to tell their own stories, and include the public at all stages of inquiry and interpretation. Discussions of how, precisely, this happens continue to be useful because circumstances are varied and there is much to learn.

The following year, Hancock

8 Mary E. Hancock, “Keeping the Public in Public History,” *The Public Historian* 26, no. 4 (Fall 2004): 7.

reflected on Sharon Babaian’s presidential address and the need to be “increasingly skeptical about the unifying narratives that had once provided a social and moral compass... History, itself, has been subject to this critique, especially over the past couple decades, as historicist paradigms... have been scrutinized and, in some instances, overturned.”⁹ Babaian specifically talked about the narrative of inevitable progress of science and technology, and Hancock connected Babaian’s themes to public history work in the early 2000s. Historians grappled with charges that unified narratives of advancement and objective truth did not resonate with all of their publics. This sentiment was not new, but perhaps for the first time a majority took the skepticism Babaian described as accepted truth.

9 Mary E. Hancock, “History in Public,” *The Public Historian* 27, no. 3 (Summer 2005): 9.

The winter 2006 volume of *The Public Historian* continues to provide new insights. As I write this in 2020, I am struck both by how far we have come and how much must be retread. Rebecca Conard, guest co-editor of that special edition and NCPH past president, argued that quality public history training should be more than public projects stacked on typical historical content. New practices and publications mean that many people who are training public historians have indeed built what Conard described as a “disciplinary base” where “public history can be examined as the reflective practice of history.”¹⁰ Reflective practice—the idea of thinking about what I’m doing and why, before, during, and after the process, in order to learn from and refine it—has become integral to my own work and is central to

10 Rebecca Conard, “Public History as Reflective Practice,” *The Public Historian* 28, no. 1 (Winter 2006): 11.

how I understand my ever-evolving relationship with the public.

Marianne Babal gave the presidential address on the occasion of NCPH's thirtieth anniversary and encouraged public historians to stop trying to define themselves by what they do or what they are not. Instead, she encouraged public historians to recognize that relationships, points of contact with various publics, make people public historians.¹¹

Babal argued that the next decade for NCPH should be focused on community, inclusivity, and diversity in order to help people succeed and thrive.¹²

11 In the address Babal notes, "Public history was often described as a 'movement' in those formative years. Perhaps at that time it was a movement, a force for social change as much as it was a groundswell of awakened identity by individuals joining together and pushing mightily to shift the paradigm of a profession." See Marianne Babal, "Sticky History: Connecting Historians with the Public," *The Public Historian* 32, no. 4 (Fall 2010): 78–79.

12 Babal, "Sticky History," 83.

NCPH has indeed focused on the things Babal urged. Several of the articles and published presidential addresses reviewed, including those discussed above, not only acknowledged but enthusiastically welcomed the influence of subsequent waves of public historians.¹³ Each wave brings a variety of perspectives on inclusivity and community and, as these folks join, NCPH continues to shape the ways that public historians interact with wider publics. Over the past twelve years that I've been a member, the organization's people have changed how I think and work. The NCPH community continues to shape and challenge me. Through the annual meeting, its publications, and actively engaged public historians, NCPH pushes me to practice self-reflective scholarship, consciously

13 Babal, Miller, to a lesser extent Conard, and others.

evaluate what went well and what needs improvement, and continue to ask myself "Who is the public?"

There are further steps to take; it isn't time to rest. I am writing this during the COVID-19 pandemic, a worldwide economic crisis, and uprisings for racial justice across the United States. I don't know what our organization, our jobs, our lives, or our world will look like during NCPH's fifth decade. But I do know that this community will continue to strive for better for ourselves and for our publics.

PUBLIC HISTORY HAS A PAST AND A PRACTICE: REVISITING RONALD GRELE'S CRITIQUE OF THE PUBLIC HISTORY MOVEMENT

// DENISE D. MERINGOLO

When I began my graduate work in the late 1990s, the National Council on Public History (NCPH) was not quite twenty years old, and the number of public history graduate programs—while growing—was relatively modest. Studying with James Oliver Horton in the George Washington University's Department of American Studies, I pursued public history as one of my four fields, and I benefited from my mentor's deep commitment to public engagement. But debates then-raging about the precise definition and intellectual value of public history defined my training. My department profited from the ascendance of public history. Horton was a visible public intellectual with a gift for attracting

funding to support public-facing projects and graduate students. Many of Horton's students went on to establish careers in the field of public history, a fact highlighted in the department's efforts to recruit more graduate students. Yet, during my tenure, the faculty was divided about the legitimacy of these pursuits. Some believed private funding directed toward projects that had been designed in collaboration with non-academic partners did not convey the same prestige as a fellowship or an award from a learned society. The work challenged deeply held ideas about the nature of scholarship and academic freedom.

These tensions and fissures were not unique to my graduate experience.

Rather, they closely mirrored the debates and discussions central to the late twentieth-century public history movement, brilliantly articulated by oral historian Ronald J. Grele in the winter 1981 issue of *The Public Historian*. Grele identified both the promise and the problem with public history in his essay "Whose Public? Whose History? What is the Goal of a Public Historian?" Grele argued that the founders of the public history movement had failed to analyze both the historical roots and the unique practices that had given rise to the field. He called on them to develop practices grounded in "a democratic declaration of faith in members of the public at large to become their own historians and to

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advance knowledge of themselves” and to facilitate processes in which “a broad public participates in the construction of its own history.”¹ By echoing Carl Becker’s 1931 address to the American Historical Association, “Everyman His Own Historian,” Grele rooted public history firmly in the history of the discipline itself. Like Becker, Grele feared that the impulse to professionalize might render history irrelevant in the eyes of the public. He understood historical curiosity and historical thinking as essential for the creation of a productive civic life and a meaningful collective identity. Most importantly, he influenced a generation of public historians to practice shared authority, collaborate with a diverse group of stakeholders and audiences, and facilitate the co-creation of knowledge.

1 Ronald J. Grele, “Whose Public? Whose History? What is the Goal of a Public Historian?” *The Public Historian* 3, no. 1 (Winter 1981): 48.

Grele first presented his vision for—and astute critique of—the public history movement at an annual meeting of the Organization of American Historians and revised it for publication in *The Public Historian*. Grele feared that the potential of public history to actively engage “the members of the public at large” in an ongoing dialogue about the meaning of the past would be impossible to fulfill because of two interlocking problems with the movement.² First, those working in the field had not clearly defined “what it is we do, why we do it, and why it is an alternative to other forms of historical effort.”³ This reluctance to define public history as a distinct intellectual and practical pursuit, he believed, would serve merely to reinforce the traditional pillars of disciplinary professionalism and dampen public historians’ ability

2 Grele, “Whose Public?” 48.

3 Grele, “Whose Public?” 41.

to advance new forms of intellectual inquiry and knowledge production. Second, the debates shaping the public history movement had “taken place in a historical vacuum.”⁴ Without a careful analysis of the past events, philosophies, epistemologies, and practices that had shaped relationships between historical workers and their various publics, Grele thought the movement would lack a strong foundation on which to build.

By the start of the twenty-first century, public historians had embraced Grele’s call to define the distinctiveness of their field, one that was simultaneously rooted in and separate from the discipline of history. Rebecca Conard edited a special issue of *The Public Historian* in the winter of 2006 in which she and a variety of other thought

4 Grele, “Whose Public?” 41.

leaders from the public history movement responded to Grele's call to articulate the field's methods, values, and originality.⁵ Together with Conard, contributors Katharine T. Corbett, Howard S. (Dick) Miller, Noel Stowe, and Shelley Bookspan identified a process of research and interpretation that challenges some of the core aspects of disciplinary expertise. Academic historians had long valued individual archival research and the monograph, but the volume's authors named collaboration, interdisciplinarity, and non-expert perspectives as valid and valuable aspects of intellectual inquiry. They adopted terminology coined by oral historian Donald Schön to describe the cornerstones of public history practice: *reflective practice, shared inquiry, shared authority, and reflection-in-action*.

5 Rebecca Conard, "Public History as Reflective Practice: An Introduction," *The Public Historian* 2, no. 1 (Winter 2006): 9–13.

In the forty years since Grele published his critique, public historians have also sought to craft new histories of the field. This work has tended to center the role of non-academics in shaping public history's core values and practices over time, and it takes seriously the distance between the discipline of history and the profession of public history. Central to this effort, public historians have acknowledged the ways in which the field and its institutions are not neutral. Indeed, the acts of preservation, collection, and commemoration that form the roots of public history have worked together to reproduce and normalize the twin ideological projects of white supremacy and colonialism. Contemporary public historians have begun the difficult work of transforming museums, monuments, national parks, historic sites, and, indeed, universities. This work has

been part and parcel of a larger effort to create a more diverse and inclusive historical landscape. The pages of *The Public Historian* have increasingly foregrounded work that seeks to dismantle ubiquitous white supremacist and "great man" narratives. The February 2019 issue of *The Public Historian*, for example, documented the importance of critical heritage practices in reframing the relationship between Native



The cover of the February 2019 issue of *The Public Historian* features an image from the collection of Charles Van Schaick of Black River Falls, Wisconsin. Standing are John Hazen Hill (XeTeNiShaRaKah), left, Alec (Alex) Lonetree (NaENeeKeeKah), and Mary Clara Blackhawk (WaHoPiNiWinKaw), daughter of Lucy Emerson Brown; sitting are Lucy Emerson Brown (HeNuKaw), left, and Lucy Long-Wolf Winneshiek (ShunkChunkAWinKah), ca. 1900. As with other photographs from this collection, this image demonstrates how turn-of-the-century Ho-Chunk families employed photography for their own ends, and were able to use family photographs to convey survivance and resilience. See Amy Lonetree's article, "A Heritage of Resilience: Ho-Chunk Family Photographs in the Visual Archive," for more. (Photo courtesy of the Wisconsin Historical Society, WHS-61591).

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peoples and cultural organizations. In “A Heritage of Resilience: Ho-Chunk Family Photographs in the Visual Archive,” Professor Amy Lonetree, who self-identifies as an enrolled citizen of the Ho-Chunk nation, reconsiders the images captured by the photographer Edward Curtis for his twenty-volume study of Indigenous people in North America.⁶ Historians have long criticized the images, captured between 1895 and 1930, as being faked by the photographer in order to appeal to a white audience. Lonetree argues, however, that if we de-center Curtis, we can recognize an active effort by the Ho-Chunk people to assert a powerful visual narrative of the strength and durability of their collective identity.

Further, important conversations

⁶ Amy Lonetree, “A Heritage of Resilience: Ho-Chunk Family Photographs in the Visual Archive,” *The Public Historian* 41, no. 1 (February 2019): 34–50.

about the intersections between social justice activism and public history are taking place on the blog *History@Work*. For example, members of Historians for a Better Future, an activist organization that brings historical context to the task of addressing contemporary problems, wrote about their efforts to intercede in ongoing and often violent debates about the meaning and future of Confederate Monuments. Their post, “[Q: Sir, Would You Like a History of this Monument? A: F**k You!](#),” makes clear that interpreting history in public spaces is an overtly political act.⁷ Similarly, a series of posts on “[Rethinking Diversity](#),” led by Angela Thorpe, Director of the North Carolina African American Heritage Commission, confronts

⁷ Historians for a Better Future, “Q: ‘Sir, Would You Like a History of This Monument?’ A: ‘F**k You!’” *History@Work* (blog), National Council on Public History, March 21, 2018, <https://ncph.org/history-at-work/q-sir-would-you-like-a-history-of-this-monument/>

unexamined forms of violence and inequity in collections, exhibitions, and preserved landscapes.⁸ As these examples suggest, public historians are actively engaged in crucial conversations about the ways in which unacknowledged and profoundly institutionalized racism has hindered the field’s further development.

Finally, public historians are aware that acknowledgement alone is insufficient. [On History@Work](#), [GVGK Tang](#), who works for an arts and humanities nonprofit, has argued that white leaders must commit themselves not simply to diversity and inclusion, but more powerfully to reconciliation, reparations, and redress.⁹ NCPH has sought ways to

⁸ Angela Thorpe, “Rethinking Diversity: Modupe Labode and Juanita Moore,” *History@Work* (blog), National Council on Public History, November 20, 2014, <https://ncph.org/history-at-work/rethinking-diversity-labode-and-moore/>.

⁹ GVGK Tang, “We Need to Talk about Public

open up these crucial conversations, engaging scholars and practitioners from a variety of institutions and backgrounds in dialogue outside of platforms intended only for members or locked behind a paywall. In this vein, [Aleia Brown, the Assistant Director of the African American Digital Humanities Initiative at the Maryland Institute for Technology in the Humanities, led a Twitter-chat](#) which defined an Ethic of Care, making a case for its importance in the work of decolonizing public history practices.¹⁰

Despite the evident progress the field has made in identifying the uniqueness of public history,

History's Columbusing Problem," *History@Work* (blog), National Council on Public History, June 25, 2020, <https://ncph.org/history-at-work/we-need-to-talk-about-public-historys-columbusing-problem/>.

10 Aleia Brown, "#EthicofCare" Twitter Chat, sponsored by the National Council on Public History, July 8, 2020. Available on Thread Reader, <https://threadreaderapp.com/thread/1281000986358755328.html>.

NC PH NATIONAL COUNCIL ON PUBLIC HISTORY

WEDNESDAY, JULY 8 AT 7PM EST

AN EVENING WITH ALEIA BROWN

A Twitter presentation and discussion exploring a public history practice that centers an ethic of care for Black life in this moment, with @ModupeLabode and @gygktang as discussants.

Follow @CollardStudies and @NCPHInclusion, use #EthicofCare #BlackLife

Advertisement for the July 2020 Twitter Chat led by Aleia Brown, with fellow NCPH Diversity and Inclusion Task Force members Modupe Labode and GVGK Tang as discussants. The conversation ultimately leads to transforming the field to center an ethic of care for Black life, particularly during the convergence of the COVID-19 pandemic and continued anti-Black violence.

claiming its past, and confronting its role in perpetuating injustice, Grele's criticism of the public history movement remains relevant. While the [American Historical Association](#) and the [Organization of American Historians](#) have both advanced new and broader definitions of scholarship in order to adequately recognize community engagement as a viable form of intellectual inquiry,

on the ground many academic departments remain unsure, at best, about how to recognize and reward collaborative work and shared inquiry.¹¹ Further, most traditional

11 "Tenure, Promotion, and the Publicly Engaged Academic Historian (updated 2017)," American Historical Association, accessed July 9, 2021, <https://www.historians.org/jobs-and-professional-development/statements-standards-and-guidelines-of-the-discipline/tenure-promotion-and-the-publicly-engaged-academic-historian>; "Historical Associations Issue Recommendations about Rewarding Public History Work for Promotion and Tenure," *OAH Insights* (blog), Organization of American Historians,

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scholars still use the term *alt-ac* to describe employment outside of the university, as if a traditionally trained scholar could not actively choose a career in the public sector as a first choice. Most troubling, public history and public humanities have become co-opted in the workings of the neoliberal university in which administrators tend to value publicly engaged scholarship mostly for its ability to attract prestige and funding, rather than for its impact on collaborating organizations and communities.

As a public historian, I always find myself struggling to uphold Grele's vision for a truly democratic practice. I must sometimes defend the scholarly value of collaborative processes that do not necessarily

April 8, 2010, <https://www.oah.org/insights/archive/historical-associations-issue-recommendations-about-rewarding-public-history-work-for-promotion-and-tenure/>.

result in a monograph or an article. I have attempted to adequately advance two sets of best practice—one defined by the discipline of history and one increasingly well-defined by the profession of public history. This requires an investment of time, energy, and emotion that can sometimes feel overwhelming. Nonetheless, I am committed to a belief that our collective identities are made richer, more meaningful, and more productive by engaging in collaborative inquiry about the past that is deeply rooted in the needs and interests of a broad public. As I think about the future of the profession, I am hopeful that the field will be flexible and self-reflective, and that the leaders of the movement will welcome the transformations that the next generation will implement. Ultimately, we should not think of Grele's questions as requiring a definitive answer. Rather, we should

recognize them as mantras that guide our ever-evolving sense of identity and practice: "Whose public? Whose history?"

FROM THE MARGINS TO THE MAINSTREAM: PUBLIC HISTORY AND PUBLIC HISTORY EDUCATION SINCE THE 1970S

// DANIEL VIVIAN

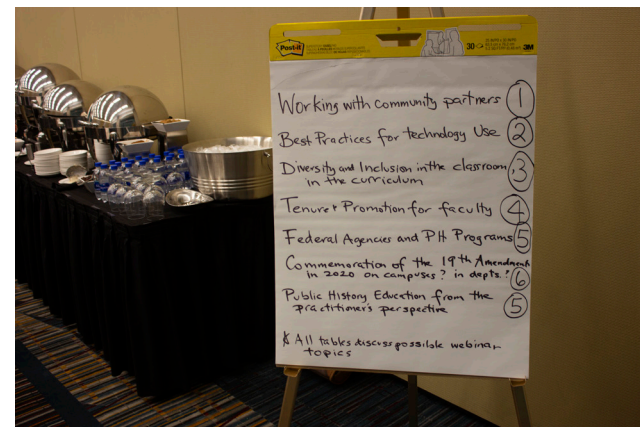
I discovered public history through an internship in the early 1990s. As a history major who loved research and enjoyed working with the public, I found the idea of getting paid to do history without being in a classroom exciting. Learning about the field proved challenging. None of the professors at my undergraduate institution knew much about public history, and the internet had not yet become the readily accessible source of information it is today. Fortunately, I found David Trask and Robert Pomeroy's 1983 anthology, *The Craft of Public History: An Annotated Select Bibliography*, which helped me better understand what public historians do. The book also guided me toward several master's programs that seemed suited to my interests.¹ I

¹ David F. Trask and Robert W. Pomeroy, *The Craft of Public History: An Annotated Select Bibliography*

sent letters requesting information, received informational materials in return, and soon began preparing applications. I began the master's program in applied history at the University of South Carolina in August 1995 and graduated in December 1997. Today I am a professor at the University of Kentucky, where I teach public history and historic preservation.

The ways public history has changed over time are simply astounding. The number of public history programs has grown dramatically, and types of training that were once unusual—undergraduate courses in public history, for example—have become widespread. Moreover, the field has expanded, become more varied, and grown in influence. Early in my

(Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983).



A list of conversation topics from the 2019 Public History Educators' Forum in Hartford, Connecticut. Photo courtesy Jess Lamar Reece Holler.

career, it was common to think of public history mainly as a group of specializations that performed historical work in nonacademic settings. Today, the ideological and methodological foundations of public history are better developed, and practitioners' commitments to engaging public audiences are stronger. Further, the field has earned respect from the public and academic historians. Once dismissed

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by some scholars as “history lite,” public history has become an influential part of the historical profession, recognized as serving important needs and vital for sharing the findings of historical scholarship with general audiences.

Progress has not come easily. Since the National Council of Public History (NCPH) has long sought to serve the needs of diverse constituencies, determining whose interests should take priority has sometimes proven challenging. Moreover, the growth of the field has sparked anxieties as well as optimism. In the early 2000s, a wave of new public history programs led many observers to express concerns about the potential for overproduction of public historians and a looming job crisis. The 2008 financial crash sent those fears into overdrive. Many public history educators and practitioners worried that long-term declines in

public funding, coupled with a weak economy and large numbers of new graduates of master’s programs in public history, had created a recipe for disaster.² Well into the early 2010s, an impending sense of doom pervaded discussions about the public history job market and the future of the field. Now, the COVID-19 pandemic may be creating an even more severe set of challenges that will likely shape the experiences of public historians for years to come.

If there is any consolation to be found in how public historians weathered the Great Recession, it lies in the fact that fears of an employment crisis proved overblown. To be sure, many new graduates struggled to find stable employment, and cutbacks at many institutions left experienced

2 Robert Weyeneth, “A Perfect Storm?” *History@Work* (blog), National Council of Public History, December 6, 2013, <https://ncph.org/history-at-work/tag/a-perfect-storm-series/>. The essay also appeared under the same title in *Public History News* 33, no. 4 (September 2013): 1, 4–8.



Screenshot of NCPH's Guide to Public History Programs.

professionals unemployed. Still, nothing approaching the worst-case scenarios occurred. The reasons have less to do with the strength and resilience of the public history job market than fundamental changes in college- and university-level history education and the diversification of public history employment.

One of the most important developments of the past four decades has been the growth of

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public history in history education at the graduate and undergraduate levels. In the 1980s and 1990s, few institutions in the United States offered public history courses to undergraduates. Now, such courses are common. Moreover, more than a dozen institutions offer a bachelor's degree in public history, and close to sixty offer an undergraduate certificate or concentration in the field.³ Meanwhile, master's and doctoral students have greater opportunities to study public history and gain applied experience than ever before. Many master's and doctoral programs accept public history as a major or minor field, and other programs encourage students to gain some public history experience, no matter their career goals.

3 Statistics derived from "Guide to Public History Programs," National Council on Public History, accessed July 15, 2021, <https://ncph.org/program-guide/>.



Cover of NCPH's *The Public History Navigator: How to Choose and Thrive in a Graduate Public History Program*.

These developments show that public history has moved beyond its beginnings as a niche specialization to become a widely accepted mode of historical practice. Although students seeking careers in the field continue to benefit from the training provided by well-developed public history programs, a general sense that some exposure to public history is useful for historians-in-training has become fairly common.⁴

4 On successful public history programs, see

According to this view, learning how museum exhibitions are created, how traditional forms of historical scholarship differ from presentations intended for public audiences, and how to lead discussions about controversial historical subjects, for example, help students develop a broader view of historical practice, and a better understanding of history's role in civic life and in the academy.

A second key development is the continued expansion of what constitutes public history. During my years at the University of South Carolina, it was common

especially John Hunner and Daniel Vivian, "Best Practices in Public History: Establishing and Developing a Public History Program," National Council on Public History, February 2016, <https://ncph.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Best-Practices-for-Establishing-and-Developing-a-Public-History-Program.pdf>; Robert Weyeneth and Daniel Vivian, "Charting the Course: Challenges in Public History Education, Guidance for Developing Strong Public History Programs," *The Public Historian* 38, no. 3 (August 2016): 25–49.

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to think of public history as “work performed by trained historians in nonacademic settings.” The specific modes of activity quickly became familiar: museums, archives, historic preservation, and historical consulting. In recent years, these categories have remained part of the public history landscape, but advertisements for positions such as engagement coordinator and programming specialist have become common. Digital history has become a thriving field of its own. These developments reflect an ongoing expansion and diversification of the field involving new areas of activity, new categories of employment, and evolving relationships within and without the historical profession.

In short, public history has come a long way, and the growth of public history programs and public history education are an important part of that story. So is the growth and

development of NCPH, which has moved beyond its modest beginnings to become a larger, more nimble enterprise with a broader scope of activity and greater ambitions. What the future holds is far from certain, but there is no question that public history is better established, better respected, and a more important part of the historical profession than it was not long ago. Perhaps most notably, comments dismissing public history as unserious or lacking rigor have become rare. That alone is significant progress—and a sign historians are thinking more realistically about their profession, the public, and the institutions they serve.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION, AND THE NATIONAL COUNCIL ON PUBLIC HISTORY

// MODUPE LABODE

After I had been a National Council on Public History (NCPH) member for about a year, I attended my first annual meeting in 2003. At that time, NCPH meetings resembled traditional academic history meetings: people dressed in a slightly formal manner reading papers before an audience. But a walking tour of Houston's Third Ward made me realize that this meeting was different. As we walked through Emancipation Park, the guide introduced provocative questions: How did Black people make this area of Houston a refuge and home? Where can we see the impact of city, state, and federal policies that starved the Third Ward of resources? How does history provide resources to communities fighting gentrification? I was excited by these questions, and this activist

perspective continues to drive my commitment to public history and NCPH. At that meeting and a few subsequent ones, it was obvious that the majority of participants were white and many were women. When presenters discussed their projects, they often expressed the hope for a more racially and ethnically diverse public history field. In this essay, I offer a broad overview of how NCPH has approached diversity based on my own observations and a reading of NCPH's publications. My focus is on race and ethnicity, but I recognize that an intersectional approach that includes other identities will lead to more insights. I leave that task, however, to future researchers who, using archives, oral histories, and other sources, will be able to create a more nuanced understanding of

NCPH's approach to creating a more diverse membership.

Not long after NCPH's founding, members attempted to address the lack of racial and ethnic diversity in the organization. An annual meeting in the 1980s promised sessions on "Minority Issues in Public History" and "Public History—What's the Use?"—Three Black Historians Respond."¹ In the late 1990s, NCPH created an ad hoc committee on "minority recruitment," and the committee suggested familiar approaches, such as increased cooperation with

1 These sessions were planned for the NCPH annual meeting held in conjunction with the Organization of American Historians. It is not clear if these sessions were delivered. "Public History Conference in Los Angeles," *NCPH Newsletter* (now *Public History News*) 3, no. 4 / 4, no. 1 (Summer–Fall 1983): 3, <https://ncph.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/NCPH-Vol-3-No-4-and-Vol-4-no-1.pdf>.

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organizations of African American historians and historic preservationists.² Surveys of public historians recognized that NCPH's membership was predominately white but sometimes left out the statistics in their reports. A survey of graduates of public history programs adopted a nearly apologetic tone, stating, "Not surprisingly, the racial and ethnic background of respondents reflected the general outlines of the historical profession."³

NCPH has never claimed to be the arbiter of what constitutes public history, and the organization has demonstrated an awareness of public history traditions that emerged from the specific experience of racial and ethnic communities in the United States. For example, in a presentation delivered to the National Association for Chicano Studies, historian Antonio José Ríos-Bustamante outlined the development of a politically conscious Mexican American public history tradition, nourished by community organizations, theatre troupes, and activist scholars, such as *Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social* (Women Active in Letters and Social Change).⁴ *The*

2 Janette Hoston Harris, "Minority Recruitment Committee, ad hoc," *Public History News* 16, no. 4 (Summer 1996): 8, <https://ncph.org/wp-content/uploads/PHN-Vol-16-No-4.pdf>.

3 "NCPH Survey Background," *Public History News* 19, no. 1 (Fall 1998): 2, <https://ncph.org/wp-content/uploads/PHN-Vol-19-No-1.pdf>.

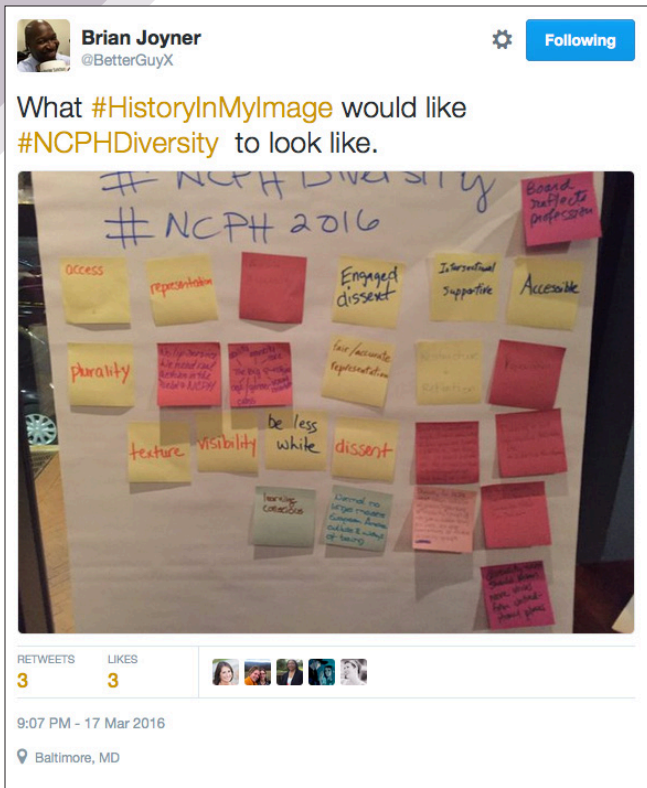
4 Antonio José Ríos-Bustamante, *El Orgullo De Ser: Mexican American/Latino Applied History Programs, Exhibitions and Museums*, The MASRC Working Paper

Public Historian published numerous articles dedicated to African American, Asian American, Latinx, and Native American public history practice. The interviews in its "Pioneers of Public History" series include revealing interviews with public historians including Him Mark Lai, an engineer by training who was among the first in the United States to teach Chinese American history, and Dorothy Burnett Porter Wesley, the librarian and archivist who built Howard University's Moorland-Spingarn Research Center and challenged racial bias in the profession's classification systems.⁵ Although NCPH advocates for diversity were clearly aware of these public history traditions, at this time they found it difficult to forge a bridge between traditions grounded in community practice and NCPH. For example, Ríos-Bustamante's overview on the experience of Native

Series, No. 17, 1990): 2, <https://repository.arizona.edu/handle/10150/218873>.

5 Judy Yung and Him Mark Lai, "Reclaiming Chinese American History," *The Public Historian* 25, no. 1 (Winter 2003): 51–69; Avril Johnson Madison and Dorothy Porter Wesley, "Dorothy Burnett Porter Wesley: Enterprising Steward of Black Culture," *The Public Historian* 17, no. 1 (Winter 1995): 15–40. See also: Dave Warren, "New Worlds, Old Orders: Native Americans and the Columbus Quincentenary," *The Public Historian* 14, no. 4 (Autumn 1992): 71–90; Jocelyn Robinson-Hubbuch, "African-American Museums and the National Conversation on American Pluralism and Identity," *The Public Historian* 19, no.1 (Winter 1997): 29–31; John E. Fleming and Margaret T. Burroughs, "Dr. Margaret T. Burroughs: Artist, Teacher, Administrator, Writer, Political Activist, and Museum Founder," *The Public Historian* 21, no. 1 (Winter 1999): 31–55; *The Public Historian: Special Issue on Latino Public History* 23, 4 (Fall 2001); Elizabeth Clark Lewis, "Report from the Field: Public History at Howard," *The Public Historian* 25, no. 2 (2003).

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An early meeting of the NCPH Diversity Task Force in Baltimore, Maryland in 2016 explored what diversity should mean for NCPH and the public history field.

in all phases of creating and leading NCPH. At its founding in 1980, about one-third of the people who identified themselves as public historians were women.⁷

6 "Latino and Native American Museum Professionals to be Surveyed," *Public History News* 12, no. 1 (Fall 1991): 6–7; Antonio José Ríos-Bustamante, *Latinos and Native Americans in the Museum: The National Survey and Directory of Historical and Art Museum Professional Personnel* (Tucson: Mexican American Studies and Research Center, 1996).

7 *Newsletter of the National Council on Public History* (now *Public History News*) 1, no. 1 (Summer 1980): 1; Barbara J. Howe, "Reflections on an Idea: NCPH's First Decade," *The Public Historian* 11, no. 3 (Summer 1989): 74.

American and Latinx museum and public history professionals received little substantive discussion in the organization's newsletter or journal.⁶

It is useful to note that women, most of whom were white, were involved

At a time when 13 percent of the people holding full-time faculty positions in history departments were women, it is easy to see how public history appeared welcoming to women.⁸ However, the experiences of women public historians at work sites and in classrooms deserves investigation. How and where did they discuss pay, harassment, issues of professional respect and advancement, and the intersection of gender with race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, ability, and nationality? An exchange in *The Public Historian* provides a glimpse into the hostility that feminist interpretations of history faced.⁹ Page Putnam Miller, then director of the National Coordinating Committee for the Promotion of History, argued in an article about women's history and the National Historic Landmark standards that biases in interpreting "national significance" effectively marginalized women's history in historic preservation; the article

8 Robert Townsend, "The Status of Women and Minorities in the History Profession," *Perspectives* 40, 4 (April 2002). <https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/april-2002/the-status-of-women-and-minorities-in-the-history-profession>

9 For example, an admonition that the conference committee jointly organized by NCPH and the Organization of American Historians discouraged "gender-segregated panels" (that is, all-male panels or "manels") can be interpreted as an effort to confront everyday sexism. *Public History News* 3-4, nos. 4-1 (1991), 4. Decades later, mainstream media picked up on this issue when a conference about "applied history" featured only white, male speakers. Maya Salam, "Stanford History Event Was 'Too White and Too Male,' Organizer Admits," *New York Times*, March 17, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/17/us/stanford-conference-white-males.html>

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also documents efforts to challenge these biases.¹⁰ In a letter to the editor, a National Park Service historian condescendingly explained that what Miller interpreted as bias was really just the functions of bureaucracy and reminded her that preparing a National Historic Landmark nomination was supposed to be difficult and time-consuming.¹¹

When public historian Calinda Lee and I organized working groups at the 2009 and 2010 annual meetings to address how NCPH could become more inclusive, I was not aware of the previous efforts to address diversity. Nor did I know about some organizational changes—such as shifts in how the board defined its work and that of the executive director—which has increased the organization’s capacity to engage with difficult, long-term issues. Our working groups benefited from the participation of both longtime members, who could speak to their experiences in the public history field, and students, who brought their experiences in public history programs. They shared frameworks created through different generations of activism and work in the field.¹²

10 Page Putnam Miller, “Women’s History Landmark Project: Policy and Research,” *The Public Historian* 15, no. 4 (Autumn 1993): 82–88.

11 “Letters to the Editor,” *The Public Historian* 16, no. 2 (Spring 1994): 6–9.

12 Modupe Labode, “Diversity, Here to There,” *Public History News* 29, no. 4 (September 2009): 7, <https://ncph.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/2009-September-Newsletter-Compressed.pdf>; Marty Blatt, “Embracing Diversity,”

The discussions were wide-ranging, difficult, and exciting. Importantly, in our discussions gender was intertwined with race, as two-thirds of public historians are women and the majority of public historians are white.¹³

Starting around 2010, the documented discussion about diversity within NCPH has become more nuanced, rigorous, and interdisciplinary. A sampling of sessions at annual meetings, articles in *Public History News*, and posts to the *History@Work* blog reveal a range of frameworks, critiques, and experiments. The efforts to create a more diverse field are not separated from analysis of the informal curricula of public history graduate programs; arguments for using community-created frameworks for defining the scope of public history; using Black feminist theory for concepts such as intersectionality, developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw; and critiquing the whiteness of public history.¹⁴ NCPH, along with the American

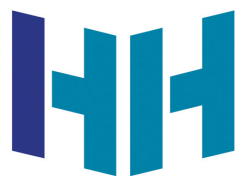
Public History News 30, no. 3 (2010): 5, <https://ncph.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/2010-June-Newsletter-Compressed.pdf>

13 “A Picture of Public History,” *Public History News* 29, no. 4 (September 2009):

14, <https://ncph.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/2009-September-Newsletter-Compressed.pdf>.

14 The following citations are not comprehensive, but provide an example of the richness of recent discussion: Aleia Brown, “Ethnic of Care Twitter Chat,” Thread Reader, July 8, 2020. <https://threadreaderapp.com/thread/1281000986358755328.html>; Shakti Castro, “Alternative Public History: What We Mean When We Say the Field,” *Public History News* 38, no. 1 (December 2017): 1, 9, <https://ncph.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/2017-December-Newsletter-Final.pdf>;

Association for State and Local History, cosponsors the *Inclusive Historian's Handbook*, which is supporting public historians' efforts to create a diverse, equitable public history practice.¹⁵



THE INCLUSIVE HISTORIAN'S HANDBOOK

Logo for the *Inclusive Historian's Handbook* co-edited by Modupe Labode, William S. Walker, and Robert Weible and co-sponsored by NCPH and the American Association for State and Local History.

Shakti Castro, Patrice Green, and GVGK Tang, "Insider/Outsider: Racial Bias and Positionality in Interpretation," *Public History News* 38, no. 3 (June 2018):12, <https://ncph.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/2018-June-Newsletter-Final-Web.pdf>; Lara Kellend and Abigail Gautreau, "Calling on Public Historians: Challenging White Public History Working Group," *History@Work* (blog), National Council on Public History, May 7, 2020, <https://ncph.org/history-at-work/callinchallenging-white-public-history/>; Brian Joyner, "Whither Diversity," *History@Work* (blog), National Council on Public History, April 22, 2016, <https://ncph.org/history-at-work/whither-diversity/>; Yolanda Chávez Leyva, "NCPH 2013 Project Award: The Power of Place Within Us," *Public History Commons* (blog), December 10, 2020, <https://publichistorycommons.org/ncph-2013-project-award/>; Mary Rizzo, "NCPH So White?" *History@Work* (blog), National Council on Public History, March 11, 2016, <https://ncph.org/history-at-work/ncph-so-white/>; GVGK Tang, "Gather, Connect, Amplify: The Importance of Grassroots Community Building and Dismantling White Middle-Class Public History," *Public History News* 40, no. 3 (June 2020): 8, <https://ncph.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/2020-June-Newsletter-Final-Web.pdf>; GVGK Tang, "We Need to Talk about Public History's Columbusing Problem," *History@Work* (blog), National Council on Public History, June 25, 2020, <https://ncph.org/history-at-work/we-need-to-talk-about-public-historys-columbusing-problem/>; Angela Thorpe "Rethinking Diversity: Who Does History Belong To?" *History@Work* (blog), National Council on Public History, January 8, 2015, <https://ncph.org/history-at-work/rethinking-diversity-conclusion/>; Daniel Vivian, "The Elephant in the Room: Toward a More Diverse History Profession," *History@Work* (blog), National Council on Public History, October 6, 2020, <https://ncph.org/history-at-work/toward-a-more-diverse-profession/>.

¹⁵ *The Inclusive Historians Handbook* originated with Will Walker and is coedited by Modupe Labode, Robert Weible, and Walker. It launched in August 2019. See <https://inclusivehistorian.com/>

The NCPH staff and board have provided substantial organizational support for inclusion and diversity efforts.¹⁶ The board authorized the formation of the Diversity and Inclusion Task Force in 2015, which in turn is overseeing the creation of a standing board committee on inclusion. This task force also led some of NCPH's first steps toward recognizing and confronting the prevalence of sexual discrimination and harassment in NCPH and the public history field.¹⁷

As NCPH enters its fifth decade, it is clear that the work of creating a more equitable and diverse NCPH—and, ideally, public history field—has resulted in significant efforts. Because working toward equity is complicated and ongoing, it is important to recognize that particularly complex work remains to be done. Public history programs, along with museums and public history sites, have attempted throughout several decades to recruit and support more diverse cohorts of students, interns, and fellows. Although these efforts are essential, they are likely not sufficient in themselves to increase

¹⁶ For example, see the virtual programs made possible by a 2020 grant from the NCPH: "2020 Virtual Programs," National Council on Public History, accessed August 16, 2021. <https://ncph.org/conference/other-programs/virtual-programs/>.

¹⁷ Modupe Labode, Marla Miller, Stephanie Rowe, and Mary Rizzo, "Confronting Sexual Harassment and Gender Discrimination in Public History?" *Public History News* 38, no. 3 (June 2018): 2, 5, <https://ncph.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/2018-June-Newsletter-Final-Web.pdf>.

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the diversity of the field. The working conditions of public history sites—from classrooms to collections spaces—with respect to inclusion have largely remained unexamined. The courageous testimonies of Black art curators who have experienced and denounced racist harassment and opposition to their efforts to advance equitable interpretations of art history should prompt public historians to examine the harmful practices that their own programs and institutions may perpetuate. Extending inclusion and diversity practices to the experiences of class, disability, sexuality, and other identities are only the beginning. Finally, as NCPH, like other professional organizations, explores our own history, we should be humble as we uncover our own limits and missed opportunities, as well as innovations.

I am hopeful about the ongoing efforts to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion within NCPH, although I anticipate that it will be difficult and complex. But my experience on countless conference calls, classrooms, annual meeting sessions, and community rooms has led me to believe that a more diverse, more equitable NCPH will only enlarge the spirit of experimentation and respect for co-creators that is at the foundation of public history.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN PUBLIC HISTORY PRACTICE

// HOPE SHANNON

The morning I sat down to begin drafting this essay happened to be the same morning the *New York Times* published an investigative piece in which journalists Robin Pogrebin and Zachary Small revealed an alleged long series of abuses perpetrated by Joshua Helmer, who was then the director of the Erie Art Museum. Helmer, they reported, resigned from the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 2018 following “allegations about a pattern of misconduct” and “harassment complaints,” but soon found employment with the Erie Art Museum. How, Pogrebin and Small wanted to know, had Helmer managed to secure “an even bigger job [in Erie, Pennsylvania]... making him one of the youngest museum chiefs in America after his misconduct

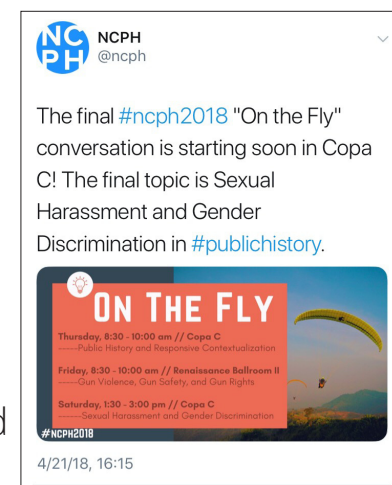
in Philadelphia?”¹ The faces and names were new to me, but the story was a familiar one. An institution failed to protect its employees from someone who “repeatedly buil[t] up and [broke] them down,” and, while Helmer was able to find a new (and better) position in Erie, the victims he left behind in Philadelphia had to grapple with the decision about whether or not to go public with their experiences. The museum failed at every turn, and the burden of justice fell on the people who were most

¹ Helmer has since left his position at the Erie Art Museum. Whether he resigned or was fired remains unclear. See Robin Pogrebin and Zachary Small, “He Left a Museum After Women Complained; His Next Job Was Bigger,” *New York Times*, January 10, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/10/arts/design/joshua-helmer-philadelphia-museum-art-erie-art-museum.html> and Robin Pogrebin and Zachary Small, “Museum Director Forced Out Amid Harassment Complaints,” *New York Times*, January 13, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/13/arts/design/joshua-helmer-erie-museum.html>.

vulnerable to abuse in the first place.

Stories about gender discrimination and sexual harassment aren't new, and they cut across boundaries separating industries and disciplines.

The public history field is no exception, though it seems we've only recently begun to confront, at least publicly, issues related to sexual harassment and gender discrimination in our profession. National Council on Public History (NCPH) leadership began taking a more intentional approach to



NCPH 2018 conference advertisement for “On the Fly” session.

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supporting victims of gender discrimination and sexual harassment four years ago when NCPH's Diversity and Inclusion Task Force (DITF) sponsored an "On the Fly" session focused on this topic at the 2018 NCPH annual meeting. The session generated considerable energy and, soon after, DITF members "prepared a report for the NCPH staff and board" laying out recommendations "for how NCPH can ensure... members and attendees feel respected and safe while participating in NCPH events... provide... members with resources to advocate for and protect themselves in their professional lives; and... hasten a wider cultural change that improves the working conditions cisgender women, transgender women and men, and non-binary people experience as public historians."² A

² Meghan Hillman, "NCPH's own 'Repair Work' at #ncph2019 and beyond," *History@Work* (blog),

few months later, in a *History@Work* blog post, DITF member Mary Rizzo shared some of the many examples collected by the task force to demonstrate how "sexual harassment and gender discrimination disempowers and marginalizes women and men of all races, gender identities, and sexual orientations." "Ending sexual harassment and gender discrimination," Rizzo stated, "is an equally critical part of our efforts to diversify our field."³

With that, efforts to eliminate gender discrimination and sexual harassment in public history work assumed an official place within the broader effort by NCPH leadership to support all public historians regardless of

National Council on Public History, August 29, 2018, <https://ncph.org/history-at-work/ncphs-own-repair-work-at-ncph2019-and-beyond/>.

³ See Mary Rizzo, "Sexual harassment and gender discrimination in public history," *History@Work*, August 14, 2018, <https://ncph.org/history-at-work/sexual-harassment-and-gender-discrimination-in-public-history/>.

race, gender, or sexuality. In late August 2018, NCPH staff member Meghan Hillman shared how NCPH staff and board members planned to implement recommendations offered by DITF members in the task force's post-conference report. Changes included allowing annual meeting attendees to indicate proper pronoun use during the meeting registration process and identify their pronouns on their conference badges as well as providing all-gender restrooms at the annual meeting. The board also adopted "a new NCPH Events Code of Conduct that includes an email-reporting venue and a value statement," adding conduct at NCPH-sponsored events to NCPH's existing, as of 2007, "Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct." In addition, the 2019 annual meeting program featured the workshop "From #MeToo to Prevention: Bystander Intervention Training

for Public History and Museum Professionals,” led by Michelle Carroll and Chel Rose Miller, who “provide[d] information about sexual violence, how to support survivors, and how to intervene as a bystander to prevent sexual violence.”⁴

In a profession where so many of us rely on whisper networks for allies and information, I felt encouraged to hear public historians discuss sexual harassment and gender discrimination in plain sight and with NCPH’s full support. But at the same time, NCPH’s new policies and procedures highlighted how little we actually know about the extent and nature of sexual harassment

4 See: National Council on Public History, *Repair Work*, Program of the 2019 Annual Meeting of the National Council on Public History, March 27–30, 2019, <https://ncph.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/2019-Annual-Meeting-Preliminary-Program-Web.pdf>. The code of conduct prohibits, among other things, “intimidation or unwanted attention based on gender, sexual identity, gender identity, gender experience, race, physical appearance, religion, or other group identity.”



An advertisement to join Chel Miller and Michelle Carroll during the 2021 virtual annual conference for their workshop, “Beyond #MeToo: How Public History Leaders Can Prevent and Respond to Sexual Harassment.” Image courtesy Chel Miller.

and gender discrimination in public history practice. We know that these issues are pervasive and systemic, but we lack the data needed to inform constructive action. In addition, while NCPH’s new policies and codes of conduct are good and necessary, any recourse and protection they offer does not extend beyond NCPH’s boundaries to the

broader field.⁵

A few weeks after the 2019 annual meeting, NCPH President Marla Miller published a letter in which

5 For more on public history’s “#MeToo moment” at NCPH’s 2019 annual meeting in Hartford, Connecticut, see Chel Rose Miller, “From #MeToo to systemic cultural change: a public historian’s call to action,” *History@Work* (blog), National Council on Public History, November 8, 2019 <https://ncph.org/history-at-work/from-metoo-to-systemic-cultural-change-2/>.

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she addressed some of these challenges. “We know that patriarchal power operates in problematic ways across our organization and our fields of practice,” she wrote. “We have a responsibility to look at the power structures that NCPH as an organization both benefits from and helps to uphold through our board structure, awards programs, networking events, and other programs, and we deeply are committed to those urgent conversations,” Miller elaborated.⁶ A few months later, the NCPH Board of Directors established a new subcommittee on gender discrimination and sexual harassment and asked its members to “enact more of the recommendations outlined in the [2018 DITF] report . . . includ[ing]: a survey collecting data on sexual harassment and gender discrimination in public history”;

6 Miller letter.

developing related readings and trainings for students and faculty members; and “collaborat[ing] with other professional organizations to coordinate efforts for greater efficacy and impact.”⁷

I’m on that subcommittee and am optimistic about its efforts to make NCPH a more equitable and supportive space for its members. Since its founding in 2019, subcommittee members have participated in the review and revision of NCPH’s Events Code of Conduct and Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct and launched, in partnership with the American Association for State and Local History, a survey to gather information about the extent and nature of gender discrimination

7 Kristen Baldwin Deathridge, Modupe Labode, Sharon Leon, Marla Miller, Stephanie Rowe, and Gregory Smoak, “From #MeToo to Prevention,” *Public History News* 39, no. 3 (June 2019), <https://ncph.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/2019-June-Newsletter-Final-for-web.pdf>

and sexual harassment in our field.⁸ Subcommittee members are also researching potential “revocation policies and disciplinary measures” that NCPH might implement, how to best aggregate and share educational materials and resources with NCPH members⁹, and how NCPH might best support victims of gender discrimination or sexual harassment. The exact path forward is still unclear. The subcommittee’s research, as well as the results of the survey, will inform action taken by NCPH in the future, and new questions are certain

8 For a comprehensive overview of the subcommittee’s activities as of March 2020, see Mary Rizzo and Kristen Baldwin Deathridge, “The Continuing Work of the Board-Led Subcommittee on Gender Discrimination and Sexual Harassment,” *History@Work* (blog), National Council on Public History, March 12, 2020, <https://ncph.org/history-at-work/sexual-harassment-committee-report/>.

9 In August 2021, the NCPH Gender Discrimination and Sexual Harassment Sub-Committee published a list of resources for public history practitioners, consultants, educators, and students. <https://ncph.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/GDSH-Resources-for-Public-History-Practitioners-Consultants-Educators-and-Students.pdf>.

to arise as we continue our work.¹⁰

The challenges in this work have been plentiful. Chief among them is the perennial question: How much can we influence the field as a whole when it comes to gender discrimination and sexual harassment? How can NCPH leaders, staff, and members orchestrate broader cultural and legal change outside of NCPH's organizational boundaries? How can the conversations percolating within NCPH affect our work environments in meaningful and lasting ways? I don't have answers, but I do know that attempts to eliminate gender

¹⁰ See Kristyn Scorsone, "A Call for Resources on Sexual Harassment and Gender Discrimination in Public History," *History@Work* (blog), National Council on Public History, March 12, 2021, <https://ncph.org/history-at-work/a-call-for-resources-on-sexual-harassment-and-gender-discrimination-in-public-history/> and Gregory Samantha Rosenthal, "How Should We Respond When a Public Historian Engages In, or Has Experienced, Sexual Harassment?," *History@Work* (blog), National Council on Public History, January 14, 2021, <https://ncph.org/history-at-work/how-should-we-respond/>

discrimination and sexual harassment in public history belong to a wider conversation about the conditions under which public historians work. Our experiences at work tend to occupy a marginalized space in our professional discourse because the act of discussing them is usually provoked and led by the field's most vulnerable practitioners. But imagine a world where conversations about justice and equity aren't optional add-ons, where the number of conference sessions dealing with how and where we work comes close to or exceeds the number committed to public history case studies and methodologies. We need to place efforts to fight harassment and discrimination and improve working conditions for all public historians front and center, not at the edges of our meetings, publications, and trainings. To make lasting progress toward equity, we need to reconsider why we meet and use our time

together to make our field a more equitable place for all.

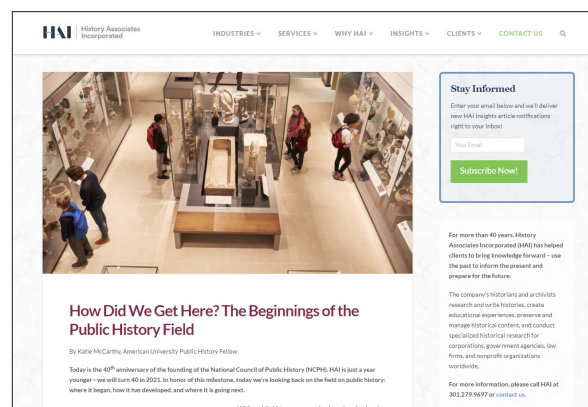
REFLECTIONS ON THE “ORIGINS, NATURE, AND PROSPECTS” OF HISTORICAL CONSULTING

// JASON H. GART

More than twenty years ago, as a graduate student in the Public History Program at Arizona State University, I had the opportunity to prepare a biographical entry about Robert L. Kelley for the *American National Biography*.¹ Kelley, one of the founders of the public history (or applied history) movement, which emerged in the wake of the job crisis of the late 1970s, urged an awakening within the historical profession. As the director of the Public Historical Studies Program at the University of California, Santa Barbara, he argued that the core problem was not a shortage of academic jobs but rather that historians had not adequately convinced the American public—there was little practice of international public history as of yet—that the practice of history had inherent value.²

Kelley's benchmark essay, “Public History: Its Origins, Nature, and Prospects,” which was published in *The Public Historian* in late 1978, became a model for revamping

graduate curricula across the United States. Kelley articulated the practical value of the historical method (its origins), outlined several potential professional tracks (its nature), and opined on future opportunities (its prospects).³ He defined public history as “the employment of historians and the historical method outside of academia: in government, private corporations, the media, historical societies and museums, even in private practice.”⁴



Screenshot of a March 2020 blog post from HAI on the 40th anniversary of NCPH. Full post can be found at <https://www.historyassociates.com/how-did-we-get-here-the-beginnings-of-the-public-history-field/>.

Fast forward to 2021, and I now work at one of the private practices that Kelley had foreseen. As a professional historian at History Associates Incorporated (HAI) in Rockville, Maryland, I manage the day-to-day operations of

1 Jason H. Gart, “Kelley, Robert Lloyd,” in *American National Biography*, ed. John A. Garraty and Mark C. Carnes (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

2 Kelley noted that he had wanted to “imbue [students] with the idea of a public rather than an academic career, and sending them out, one by one, to demonstrate their value by their work.” See Robert Kelley, “Public History: Its Origins, Nature, and Prospects,” *The Public Historian* 1, no. 1 (Fall 1978): 19–20.

3 Kelley, “Public History,” 16–21.

4 Kelley, “Public History,” 16.

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the litigation research group, which provides historical research, data, and analysis to corporate and government clients and their counsel. Since its founding in 1981, HAI's staff of forty professionals have completed more than 1,300 historical research investigations. Our litigation clients include top national and regional law firms, inside counsel at numerous *Fortune* 100 and 500 companies, federal agencies, and multiple state attorneys general.⁵

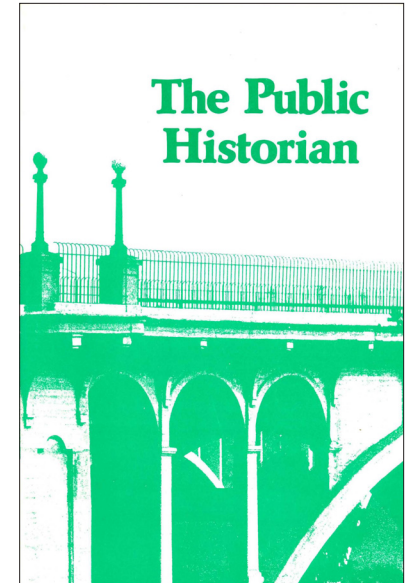
HAI and its peers—which include firms such as Historical Research Associates and Morgan, Angel & Associates—are successful, both in terms of their breadth and depth of services and their sheer longevity, but one wonders if public historians have met the challenge that Kelley laid down. According to my rough calculations, supplemented by the “Where Historians Work” database of the American Historical Association (AHA), 500 to 600 historians work in private practice.⁶ A keyword search of JSTOR for consulting-themed articles published in *The Public*

5 For the formative history of HAI, see Philip L. Cantelon, “The Business of Professional History,” *The Public Historian* 21, no. 3 (Summer 1999): 15–19, and Brian W. Martin, “The Business of History: Customers, Professionals, and Money,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Public History*, ed. James Gardner and Paula Hamilton (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 121.

6 The AHA counts 589 history doctorates (out of a total of 8,523) working in the private sector. See the “Broad Sectors of Employment for History PhDs, 2004–13” section of “Where Historians Work: An Interactive Database of History PhD Career Outcomes,” *American Historical Association*, [accessed February 27, 2020], <https://www.historians.org/wherehistorianswork>.

Historian between 1978 and 2016 found only 30 hits in a codex of approximately 300 articles. Articles on historical consulting occasionally appear in the AHA's *Perspectives on History*, typically as vignettes on career alternatives, and the National Council on Public History's (NCPH) *History@Work* blog serves as a venue for those who work as consultants. Compared to those in academia, historical consultants and other private practitioners remain on the periphery of the craft, to the detriment of the broader profession.

One issue that continues to vex the public history profession is its pedagogy. Kelley believed that historians practicing in an applied field faced distinctive professional challenges. Almost fifteen years ago, another pioneer of the public history field, Noel J. Stowe, urged a new generation of public history faculty to reconceptualize public history curricula. Stowe advocated traditional historiography and research methods courses but also training in reflective practice techniques, as articulated by Donald Schön in *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*



Cover of the first issue of *The Public Historian* from 1978, which featured Robert Kelley's essay, "Public History: Its Origins, Nature, and Prospects."

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(1983).⁷ Stowe rightly observed that future historians-as-practitioners needed to “navigate the swampy lowlands of practice.”⁸ This is the place, according to Stowe, where evidence is fragmentary or incomplete; where traditional archival sources might be nonexistent; where scope, schedule, and budget matter; and where the presentation of findings are contested in real time by opposing experts, stakeholders, or other constituent groups. My discreet inquiries to others in the field—and a decade of interviewing job candidates—indicate that only a few public history programs have heeded Stowe’s advice.

Another challenge facing the profession is increasing specialization. Many historians are reluctant to define themselves as generalists. The professional historical consultant, however, must be comfortable attacking any subject in history. This can be frustrating but is more often rewarding, as historians expand their knowledge on an array of disparate topics over the course of their career.⁹ Many challenges remain as we reflect on the fortieth anniversary of the NCPH and the prospects for

the future, but we owe Kelley a considerable debt of gratitude.

Author’s note: Mimi Eisen provided research assistance during the preparation of this article. The views and opinions expressed in this article do not represent HAI, its employees, or its owners.

7 Noel J. Stowe, “Public History Curriculum: Illustrating Reflective Practice,” *The Public Historian* 28, no. 1 (Winter 2006): 39–41, 45–65. See also Donald A. Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

8 Stowe, “Public History Curriculum,” 51.

9 During my first five years at HAI, I completed project-related research and writing assignments on accountancy, cardiology, industrial mobilization, molecular biology, national bank regulations, and unmanned aerial vehicles.

GROWING INTO PUBLIC HISTORY CONSULTING

// JESSICA KNAPP

In 2020, I was asked by the National Council on Public History (NCPH) to provide a critical reflection on its history and future within the context of consulting in public history. This is a big topic, of course, and I have narrowed it by focusing on my development as an independent consulting public historian. My career as a consulting historian began with my training at the University of Windsor and then Western University. I did not know it at the time, but that first contract for a book project in 2012 doing primary source research, including oral history interviews, would set the foundation for my consulting career. In 2013, I formally learned what public history entails, and in early 2014 I attended my first annual meeting of the National Council on Public History in Monterey Bay, California. NCPH has been a

public history home for me. I have been so inspired by the consultants and experts I have met at the annual meeting over the years; but as valuable as my formal education and my time at NCPH have been, I have learned just as much from non-profit, corporate, and entrepreneurial communities.

NCPH has been my go-to professional body for most of my career because I connect with the members there in a way that challenges and supports me in my practice. Ever since attending my first meeting in 2014, I have been drawn to the workshops, sessions, and events specifically for consultants. The “Speed Networking” event has been particularly engaging, as I have been able to meet consultants who specialize in research, litigation, oral history, archival management, exhibition

design, and multimedia development. Once, I even met a consultant who also had her public investigator license. I remember thinking that that was exactly how I could picture myself in the future: public history consultant by day, private investigator by night! Learning how to network at this and similar events was an essential skill that has helped me develop my business. My time at NCPH and, later, at Canada’s History, a national non-profit organization, allowed me to build essential relationships with educators, historians, and public historians throughout North America.

In 2017 and 2018, I attended consulting workshops at NCPH meetings in Indianapolis and Las Vegas, respectively. Led by public historians from both large and small consulting companies, I was able

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to envision the type of company I wanted to have. We completed exercises through which I familiarized myself with the common elements for large and small companies. We also discussed the various ways companies can attract clients, business structures and legal considerations, what would go into a contract, and what to charge per hour. Even through this learning, it was hard to make decisions related to my specific circumstances and my values.

Public history consulting, perhaps more so than other public history career paths, is as much about public history as it is about business. For best practices in this arena, I needed to go outside the public history world. When I moved to Montreal, Canada, in 2018 and committed to consulting as my full-time profession, I struggled with marketing my skill set. I am what

some would call a jill-of-all-trades, and it is this generalist approach that made it difficult to connect with potential clients, the majority of whom are not familiar with public history or connected to the public historian community. So, to learn how to market my skills to potential clients, I sought a business coach. There are all types of business coaches, but I lucked out when I found a nonprofit in Montreal called YES Employment + Entrepreneurship that offered business coaching for a small annual fee. I met with my business coach regularly, and she helped me understand the legal obligations as a business owner in my specific province. She also guided me on how to present my



Participants at the 2019 annual meeting workshop "Starting and Growing a Historical Research Business. Image courtesy Elizabeth Gelvin.

public history consulting company in a way that would draw in folks to ask questions about their specific projects. I continue to meet with the coach regularly to discuss contracts, setting fair expectations for my clients and myself, and potential changes in my business model.

Project management is another tool I acquired. As public historians, we

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use project management processes everyday but might not be aware of it. As the projects I was taking on were getting more complex and involving different types of people, I looked for better ways to organize this work. NCPH offered a “Project Management for History Professionals” workshop at the 2015 annual meeting, but the workshop was not available to me when I needed that guidance. So, I audited a project management course online to expand my understanding of the tools and processes that could be applied to different projects. Auditing the course was free and gave me access to the videos, exercises, and readings but not to the course assessments or a certificate of completion. Certificates are useful to prove skillsets, but auditing a course is a great way to validate what I had learned in other environments. Through this course I discovered that my early training as a historian had subtly

introduced me to elements of project management, and my previous work in public history had given me space to practice and grow this knowledge. With my understanding of project management validated, I became confident infusing this skill into my services. Since then, I have been predominantly hired as a project manager for client projects. I did attend the “Principles of Audience Research and Evaluation in Public History” workshop in 2017 in Indianapolis, and what I learned there has supported me as I implement feedback loops both in my business and my clients’ projects.

This collection of experiences has shaped who I am as a public historian and represents what it means to work as a public history consultant. The skills and tools you will use within your work will not all be found in one place or in a single experience. As entrepreneurial public historians,

we must take a holistic view of our experiences and extrapolate our knowledge from there. There is no one way to do it, no recipe to follow. As public historians at all stages turn to consulting as a career, NCPH must continue to offer workshops and sessions related to the skills and experiences of public history consultants—from using our public history training to marketing and business development. Further, the inclusion of training for universal skills used by public historians, such as budgeting and project management, should find their way into professional development offerings.

Public history consultants have a variety of skills, and to stay competitive we will continue to learn and grow; but we do not do it alone. Public history consultants find and support each other through the NCPH community.

BUILDING A FORUM FOR INTERNATIONAL DIALOGUE: FROM THE NCPH TASK FORCE ON THE INTERNATIONALISATION OF PUBLIC HISTORY TO THE INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION FOR PUBLIC HISTORY

// ANNA ADAMEK, WITH CONTRIBUTION FROM PAULA HAMILTON AND PAUL ASHTON

I had just been elected to the National Council on Public History (NCPH) Board of Directors and was feeling intimidated by this responsibility when NCPH met for its 2009 annual meeting in Providence, Rhode Island. Marianne Babal, then NCPH president, suggested that I take on guiding the newly formed Task Force on the Internationalisation of Public History. The NCPH board had recently voted to establish the task force to achieve greater visibility for NCPH globally and identify ways in which NCPH, as the leading professional organization in the public history field, could better serve historians outside the United States. At the time, a number of Canadian public historians had already chosen NCPH as their professional home. David Neufeld of Parks Canada joined the NCPH Board in 1999, and Sharon Babaian from the Canada Science and Technology Museums Corporation served as NCPH president from 2004 to 2005. *The Public Historian* saw a steady increase in the number of submissions from abroad, and Europeans

were exploring American public history work but were not ready to join what they perceived as an organization focused predominantly on domestic issues. The NCPH board felt that a Polish-Canadian might be just the right person to chair the Task Force on the Internationalisation of Public History and make NCPH more inviting to international members. Grateful for Babal's confidence in me, I accepted the new challenge.

This was not the first time that NCPH had attempted to spearhead international public history action. In the 1980s, American public historians Jann Warren-Findley and Jim Gardner worked with colleagues in Australia to establish closer collaboration between public historians in the two countries. A public history program in Australia was set up in 1989 by Anne Curthoys, who was then dean of the faculty of humanities at University of Technology Sydney (UTS). In the lead-up to establishing the program, UTS had flown Peppino Ortoleva, a renowned Italian

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historian, to Australia to advise on a communication-focused public history course, which ultimately ran for sixteen years. Australian historians have typically employed an international outlook due to the country's small population and their roots in the British History Workshop movement¹, but UTS faculty Paula Hamilton and Paul Ashton began looking more seriously to connect with international public historians once the course was well-established. In 1992, Australian public historians founded the journal *Public History Review*, first published in partnership with the New South Wales Professional Historians Association and then independently. UTS Press still produces the journal, edited by Ashton.

In 1998, Ashton attended his first NCPH conference and met Warren-Findley and Gardner, who strongly supported Australian practitioners' participation. Warren-Findley had lived in England and received a Fulbright grant to study heritage in New Zealand, and Gardner was already involved in creating international collaborations between museums. This encounter began a generally close collaboration between American and Australian public historians, with Warren-Findley, Gardner, and

¹ The British History Workshop was launched in the 1970s by British historians, including Bill Schwarz and Raphael Samuel, who emphasized the collaborative and inclusive nature of historical research. The group gained popularity in Europe in the 1970s and 1980s and published the *History Workshop* journal.

Lonnie Bunch visiting Australia on several trips. In 1999 the Australian Centre for Public History was established to house major projects, seminars, and facilitate student transitions from courses to employment. Ashton and Hamilton attended NCPH conferences annually during the 2000s. From 2003 to 2006 Ashton served as a member of the NCPH board.

Hamilton had been in discussions with some members about a broader reach for NCPH, especially since English historians, such as Hilda Kean, were looking to set up public history programs there. At the 2004 NCPH annual meeting in British Columbia, Canada, the NCPH board set up a subcommittee to explore internationalisation options. Gardner and Warren-Findley strongly supported the subcommittee, as did Canadian public historians who were keen to increase their participation. Other supporters included Rebecca Conard, Marty Blatt, Mark Tebeau, Martha Norkunas, and Connie Schultz. However, since many American public historians were busy with their own work, museums and universities led the push for a broader public history movement outside the United States. In the early 2000s the internationalisation subcommittee met a few times, but its members found it difficult and expensive to travel. Certainly, it was hard for the Australians to take a major role from such a distance,

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and at a time when their own program was still finding its place.

Yet by 2009, it was evident that public history methodologies reached beyond North America and Australia. There was interest in Europe, Asia, and South America. NCPH was well-positioned to provide a platform to reopen the discussions. NCPH established a Task Force on the Internationalisation of Public History, which included historians Michelle Hamilton, Holger Hoock, Jon Olsen, Manon Parry, and Jonathan Whalley, all of whom had extensive international contacts. For the 2010 NCPH annual meeting in Portland, Oregon, the task force proposed a working group on the internationalisation of public history. The response to this proposed working group was overwhelming, with historians from Italy, Germany, Romania, France, Czech Republic, Cambodia, Bangladesh, and China putting forward proposals. Serge Noiret, who later became the president of the International Federation for Public History (IFPH), Jean-Pierre Morin, future vice president of IFPH, and Andreas Etges, who led the creation of the International Public History journal, attended the Portland meeting. Past NCPH presidents Phil Scarpino, Mike Devine, and Gardner offered the working group invaluable mentorship.



IFPH leadership (L-R) Andreas Etges, Arnita Jones, Anna Adamek, Serge Noiret, and Jean-Pierre Morin during the 2014 IFPH conference in Amsterdam, Netherlands.

It was clear that the growing global public history movement needed a forum, and participants in the 2010 working group committed to creating the space for a dialogue among practitioners from different countries. This was by no means an easy conversation. Even the term public history posed a problem, as it did not translate well into other languages. The participants also made it clear that, though they saw NCPH as their professional home, the international interest group needed to expand beyond North American leadership. One suggestion made by Lisa Singleton, who was at the

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time at the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's World Heritage Centre, was to form a new organization as an internal commission of the International Committee of Historical Sciences (ICHS), an organization based in Paris, France. In 2010, Arnita Jones, former executive director of the American Historical Association, who was familiar with ICHS's structure, drafted the bylaws of the new international group with support from then NCPH Executive Director John Dichtl. At the 2011 NCPH annual meeting in Pensacola, Florida, attended by a strong representation of European historians including Thomas Cauvin, the current president of IFPH, the Working Group on the Internationalisation of Public History voted to dissolve and to form a new organization, the IFPH. I agreed to act as IFPH chair but believed that it was important to elect a leader with closer ties to Europe. In 2012, Serge Noiret—a public historian from the European University Institute in Florence, Italy, and a personality larger-than-life—became the first elected president of IFPH.

support of NCPH and its members. Today IFPH counts among its members practitioners from every continent (except Antarctica); holds a biannual conference and workshops around the world; publishes *International Public History*, to which historians can submit articles in their own language; and runs a multilingual blog. All this would not have been possible without the persistent push from NCPH to promote the dialogue between public historians globally. As the public history movement flourishes across the world, its roots are firmly in NCPH.



Logo for the International Federation for Public History.

Even though the IFPH was formally an internal commission of ICHS, its ties to NCPH remained strong. IFPH organized sessions at NCPH annual meetings and benefited from logistical and financial

FERAL KITTENS AND GROWING NETWORKS: TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF DIGITAL NCPH

// CATHY STANTON

Digital technologies often still feel like whatever is at the cutting edge. But in reflecting on the National Council on Public History's (NCPH) first forty years, it's worth noting that we've been involved in the digital realm for twenty-five of those years—more than half of our existence. In fact, the development of our digital communications, websites, and projects has both paralleled and helped to facilitate changes in the organization and the field over the past quarter-century, creating new platforms for long-running conversations about what it means to “put history to work in the world.”

NCPH was a fairly early adopter of digital communications technology, certainly among historical organizations. We took on the management of the then two-year-old PUBLHIST LISTSERV in 1995, changing the name to H-Public when the list joined the H-Net network in 1998. Our [nearly two-decade association with H-Net](#) showed both the promise of the new digital spaces and the costs of creating and maintaining them.

The advent of widely accessible online platforms opened up almost magical possibilities for self-organizing, self-

generating content created by a multiplicity of voices in widespread locations. When I became an H-Public subscriber in 1998, I was intrigued by the potential of this new communication channel to connect far-flung (and usually underfunded) public historians across time and space. Some within NCPH were trying to foster more international public history networks; others were working to bring more graduate students and new professionals into the organization. LISTSERVS seemed like a useful step in these directions, and other emerging digital tools prompted more ambitious visions: Virtual conferences! Crowd-built archives! Fully open-source peer-reviewed publishing! As NCPH began to grow with full-time staff and new energy in the first decade of the new century, its digital projects were part and parcel of these more expansive plans.

I was recruited to serve as H-Public's editor in 2005 (shortly joined by Debbie Ann Doyle) and gained a behind-the-scenes view of what it took to provide the seemingly free spaces of digital publication and

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communication. In addition to the costs of H-Net's staffing and infrastructure, housed at Michigan State University, each list needed its own advisory board and editorial procedures, which involved both staff and volunteers on the NCPH side. Without fully realizing it at first, we were underway for a decade of digital building, experimenting, consolidating, and bridging.

Former NCPH Executive Director John Dichtl was a driving force in these projects, appointing an ad hoc (later formalized) Digital Media Group in 2008 and creating a staff-like role for a volunteer Digital Media Editor in 2011. For the most part, we took to heart the advice given by an attendee at a 2013 NCPH conference session about digital media: "Web projects are like feral kittens—they're easy to adopt, but then you're stuck with them for years and years." We tried to adopt, iterate, and build judiciously, in ways that would directly serve the needs of our growing organization with its limited staff and financial resources while responding to a new terrain in which everyone was becoming their own publisher, peer reviewer, and media host.

Our [first experiment with a conference blog](#) in 2008 made use of an out-of-the-box commercial platform and prompted [some thoughtful post-conference reflections](#)

on the challenges and possibilities for this new facet of our annual meeting. In 2010 we launched a year-round

blog, [Off the Wall](#), as an exploration in semi-structured peer review, casting a wide net over all types of digital and analog modes of historical display. Two years later we expanded this to a multi-sectioned blog named [History@Work](#) (credit to Benjamin Filene for the name).

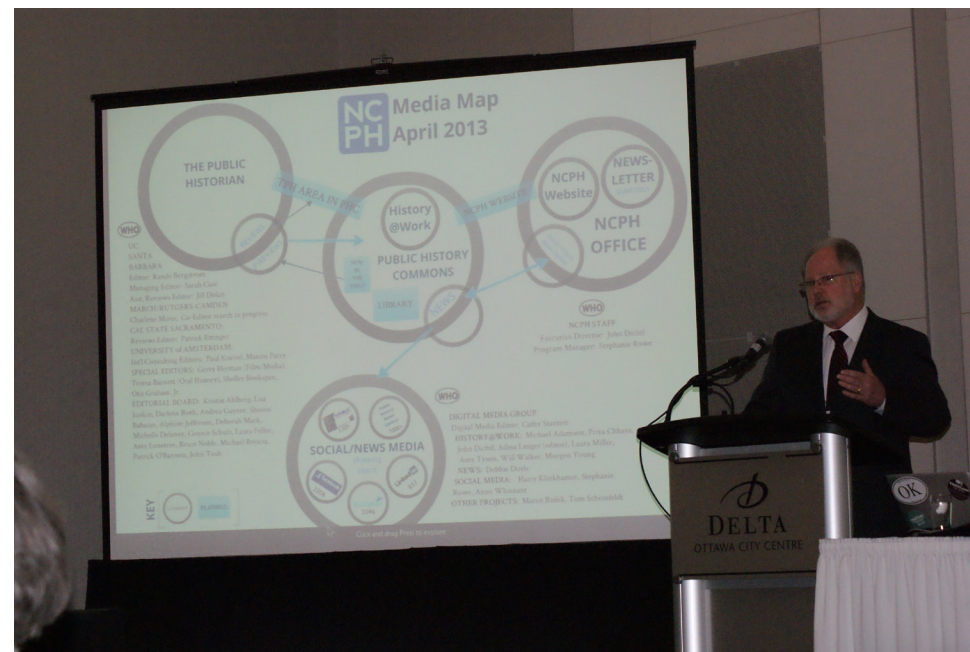
History@Work was initially housed on a site we called the Public History Commons, built for us by partners at the Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media at George Mason University. We intended the site to be a digital "third space" that NCPH would maintain and that could serve a number of purposes. It would be a digital platform for various constituencies within NCPH that wanted a space to address specific concerns. To that end, we assembled a team of section-specific volunteer editors who recruited and shepherded blog posts through the editorial process. We also wanted the site to serve as



Screenshot of the 2008 conference blog header.

a communications channel for NCPH's own news and information; create a bridge between our growing digital ecosystem and NCPH's print publications, particularly *The Public Historian* journal; and revive the discussion functions of H-Public, which—like many LISTSERVS—was becoming more of an online bulletin board than the one-stop gathering place it had been in earlier years. The publichistorycommons.org domain was also a space where we could continue to experiment with new digital initiatives. Some of these (for example, the annual “unconference” now called Digital Public History Lab) have sustained themselves while others failed to fledge—an argument for the utility of flexible, low-cost projects that could serve the evolving needs of a rapidly growing organization with limited resources.

In 2015, we took a hard look at NCPH's various online publications, platforms, and resources and decided it was time to bring them all together. The NCPH website was by then badly outdated, and it made sense to rebuild it from the ground up. In the process, we integrated *History@Work*, our conference-related materials, digital directories and publications, and other resources into one unified WordPress-based site that different users could access in a multiplicity of ways, better coordinated with print and hybrid print/digital initiatives such as the



Then-president Robert Weyeneth addresses conference attendees during a special open forum called “The Future of Publishing and Communications, from *TPH* to Social Media” in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada in 2013.

quarterly [newsletter](#) and [journal](#) as well as with evolving organizational structures and projects like [long-range planning](#) and partnership initiatives.

The site's functionality continues to hold up well, the result of a thoughtful planning and construction process. At the same time, like any finished product, the site's fairly smooth surfaces belie some bumps and even conflicts that occurred along the way. Perhaps most notably, there were challenges in configuring the relationship between *The Public Historian* and NCPH's new digital publications. These reflected longstanding institutional

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investments in the journal and the organization, which were being [revisited and renegotiated](#) just as our digital platforms were emerging. These negotiations led to a three-way partnership with NCPH, the journal's home at the University of California at Santa Barbara, and a newly created co-editor position based at Rutgers University–Camden, a collaboration that has already produced a number of strong print/digital hybrid collaborations.

At the more wide-open end of the online communications spectrum, our presence in the social mediascape has been both robust (especially on Twitter, thanks to enthusiastic early #twitterstorians such as Suzanne Fischer and Anne Mitchell Whisnant) and occasionally problematic. Demands for more transparency, immediacy, or editorial access have occasionally run into behind-the-scenes issues of capacity or confidentiality. Like other professional organizations operating in social media spaces, NCPH has tried to be nimble, responsive, and ethical—not always an easy balance.

That balance, of course, is a familiar one to public historians. Perhaps more than anything else, NCPH's ventures in the digital realm have been characterized by fundamental public history questions about who

controls the messages, how our media platforms shape what we can and do say, and what it means to have an inclusive conversation. While we haven't been practicing digital public history per se, in the sense of building projects for and with various publics outside of the historical profession, we've drawn on the same skill sets and mindsets as have all practitioners in the field, and we have aimed, in turn, to create spaces for deeper engagement and reflection on what it means to do this work in the world.¹

1 Works consulted for this essay that are not linked within the text include: William Bryans, Albert Camarillo, Swati Chattopadhyay, Jon Christensen, Sharon Leon and Cathy Stanton, "Imagining the Digital Future of The Public Historian," Roundtable, *The Public Historian* 35, 1 (February 2013): 8–27; Adina Langer, "Peer review in a world of professional practice," *History@Work*, February 22, 2013, <https://ncph.org/history-at-work/peer-review-in-professional-practice/>; Cathy Stanton, "Elephant in the conference room: The Public Historian," April 22, 2012; <https://ncph.org/history-at-work/elephant-in-the-conference-room-the-public-historia/>; Cathy Stanton, Christine Crosby, and Stephanie Rowe, "Makeover in progress: New NCPH website coming soon," September 4, 2015, <https://ncph.org/history-at-work/makeover-in-progress/>; Cathy Stanton, "Projects in the print-digital pipeline," April 1, 2014, <https://ncph.org/history-at-work/projects-in-the-print-digital-pipeline/>; Cathy Stanton, "Where is the world is the Public History Commons?," February 9, 2016, <https://ncph.org/history-at-work/where-in-the-world-is-the-public-history-commons/>; Cathy Stanton, "Where is the public history conversation headed?," September 7, 2017, <https://ncph.org/history-at-work/where-is-the-public-history-conversation-headed/>; Cathy Stanton, "Reflecting on the first NCPH 'extraordinary service' award" May 18, 2018, <https://ncph.org/history-at-work/ncph-extraordinary-service-award/>; and Robert Weyeneth, "The next 28 months of The Public Historian," September 6, 2012, <https://ncph.org/history-at-work/the-next-28-months-of-the-public-historian-an-update-from-ncphs-president/>.

TOWARDS BUILDING THE CAPACITY FOR CHANGE

// PATRICE GREEN

The National Council on Public History's (NCPH) fortieth anniversary theme was "Threads of Change," and we have seen lots of change in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Those with the privilege to ignore the struggles of others are finally opening their eyes to a long-reigning negative reality for millions of marginalized people. Racism, housing crises, childcare and education issues, and the structures of patriarchy and white supremacy that enable and perpetuate inequities worldwide are not new challenges. In fact, they are at the very nexus of how American society operates in order to privilege one vision of humanity over another. These structures of privilege continuously permeate the field of public history at every angle, and to ignore entrenched, inaccurate historical narratives further upholds

that trend. So, what is the public historian's role in preventing a return to normalcy for some and tragedy for others? To keep our field relevant and sustainable for the next forty years, public historians can elect to build the capacity to imagine ourselves, our field, our institutions, and our practices differently.

The Public Historian's Role

Public historians use their work to respond to the world around them. In my three years as a member of NCPH, I have had the pleasure of seeing students and new professionals reimagine the field for the better by challenging our practices and expecting more from the profession than what is presented.

I was fortunate to be part of a working group of scholars during the

2018 annual meeting in Las Vegas. NCPH provided a networking session of people working on issues that directly and indirectly embrace the foundational work on intersectionality developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw, a professor at UCLA Law School and Columbia Law School. With facilitators Grace Tang and Shakti Castro, I was able to explore interpretation bias and positionality within the field of public history, noting that what we choose to preserve and when is never happenstance—preservation, interpretation, and reinterpretation are a series of intentional choices made to prioritize a story. Historians use documented evidence and historical context to piece those stories together, and those trained in public history find ways to use that evidence, or lack thereof, to

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reinterpret and reimagine physical and intellectual spaces, along with the entrenched narratives that limit them.

More often than not, public historians choose to prioritize one story or era at the expense of marginalized people and their descendants. Students and young professionals, in addition to those before us, have challenged that by being willing to acknowledge and reinterpret difficult history on the job. For example, public historians have reinterpreted content at historic house museums such as the Hampton-Preston Mansion in Columbia, South Carolina, to be more inclusive of enslaved people who worked there against their will. Part of that process was literally pulling those interpretive panels and ephemera out of the basement and incorporating them into other parts of the building. Public historians have been working against the bad reputation of revisionist



Participants from the author's 2018 working group, "Insider/Outsider: Racial Bias and Positionality in Interpretation," from L-R Patrice Green, Marion McGee, Shakti Castro, Margaret Huettl, Blanca Garcia-Barron, GVGK Tang, Lauren O'Brien, Omar Eaton-Martinez, Gloria D. Hall, and Carol Park.

history for years, and others have incorporated new ideas regarding what counts as public history. In recent years, scholars such as Lacey Wilson, formerly of the Charlotte Hawkins Brown Historic site and the Owens Thomas House and Slave Quarters, along with Olivia Williams, formerly of McLeod Plantation

and Historic Site and currently with the National Park Service's Reconstruction Era National Historic Park, have worked to deromanticize southern memory while prioritizing the lives and stories of Black people through interpretation. These practitioners' method of disrupting

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that memory and compelling patrons to confront past horrors is a good example of how public historians cannot allow themselves to opt out of important conversations that affected people in the past and continue to do so in the present. Creating a link, tangibly and intellectually, to the Atlantic slave trade, the Black Lives Matter movement, or the growing call for police abolition is essential to holding ourselves and our institutions accountable for the narratives we perpetuate.

Creating a Link

Through collection policies, preservation projects, our exhibitions, and even our mission statements and standard operating procedures, public historians have created a myriad of ways to absolve themselves of any responsibility in the false name of neutrality. As a result, practitioners also decide what is and is not worthy of time, labor, and attention,

as illustrated by any number of monuments discussions at the University of Georgia, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the University of Virginia, and numerous other institutions. Museums and historic sites are not neutral, and building the capacity for change includes adjusting what we imagine our field to be by redirecting funding



Dr. Bobby Donaldson, Director of the Center for Civil Rights History and Research at the University of South Carolina, and Program Manager Jennifer Melton give a tour of the Justice for All Exhibit to Joan Trumpauer Mulholland, Freedom Rider and civil rights activist.

and energy to historically under-resourced communities, projects, and fields or methods of scholarship.

A dedicated effort to provide stewardship over materials and spaces allows today's public historians to think more deeply about the ideas those materials and spaces represent, along with how those ideas impacted this nation. Upon hearing the claim that there was no Civil Rights Movement in Columbia, South Carolina, Bobby Donaldson, head of the Center for Civil Rights History and Research at the University of South Carolina, set out to illustrate the movement in Columbia and throughout the state. After looking through thousands of documents, photographs, oral histories, and news clippings, Donaldson and his team identified major areas to highlight and worked to include as many elements of South Carolina's Civil Rights Movement history as possible.

Using enough material to cover all three galleries in the Hollings Special Collections Library, the research and exhibits team employed primary sources buried across a multitude of collections to create a new standard for archival exhibitions at the University of South Carolina. Setting this new precedent allowed the team to push the boundaries of the stories they could tell and negate unspoken institutional limits on what they could accomplish with the available materials.

Embracing Change

Public history work is a response to the world around us. Embracing change, denying legitimacy to harmful narratives, and accepting the social justice and reparative elements of this work are critical elements for

deciding what kind of organization we want to be. Our work compels us to ask ourselves some incredibly hard questions:

“Why are we still prioritizing this narrative?”

“What generational knowledge have we stifled?”

“What if we didn’t take [insert donor]’s money?”

“What are we doing to evade accountability?”

“What exactly do we count as knowledge? As memory?”

“What is worth our time, energy, and effort?”

Every day, public historians provide a humbling link from the present to the past through stewardship, whether or not the physical objects, places,

spaces, or people are still with us. Looking forward, our mission to put history to work in the world requires action, empathy, sincerity, and a dedicated effort to never take the past, its people, and their experiences for granted.

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Anna Adamek is the Director of the Curatorial Division at Ingenium – Canada’s Museums of Science and Innovation, and an instructor in Public History at the Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada. Anna was a founding member of the International Federation for Public History, and also served as its interim Chair. She sat on the Board of Directors of the National Council on Public History, and the Canadian Science and Technology Historical Association.



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Stephanie Rowe was appointed NCPH Executive Director in 2016 after serving as NCPH's Program Manager and then Associate Director. She came to the organization after five years with Museumwise, now the Museum Association of New York, where she served as Program Coordinator and Regional Archivist. Originally from New York State, Stephanie earned her BA in Social Studies (2006) from Ithaca College and MA in History Museum Studies (2008) from the Cooperstown Graduate Program.

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