

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY NEWSLETTER

THE FUTURE OF HISTORY

FROM THE CHAIR

Dear students, alumni, and friends,

The new year brings both rewards and challenges — and I'm hopeful the rewards will outweigh the rest. Like many public universities, PSU faces significant budget pressures, and the coming year will require difficult choices. Through it all, our department remains committed to excellent teaching, meaningful research, and the community we've built together.

I'm glad to share some good news: Jennifer Kerns and Rodney Koeneke have returned to the department in their previously held positions following last year's layoffs and subsequent arbitration. They are valued colleagues and gifted teachers, and we're pleased to have them back — look for their courses in the Spring schedule.

This newsletter also carries sadder news. We lost two emeritus faculty members in the last year: Charles Le Guin, who taught French history here for over three decades, and Caroline Litzenberger, scholar of the English Reformation and beloved teacher. Their tributes appear below.

We have exciting public programs coming up this winter and spring. I hope to see many of you there.

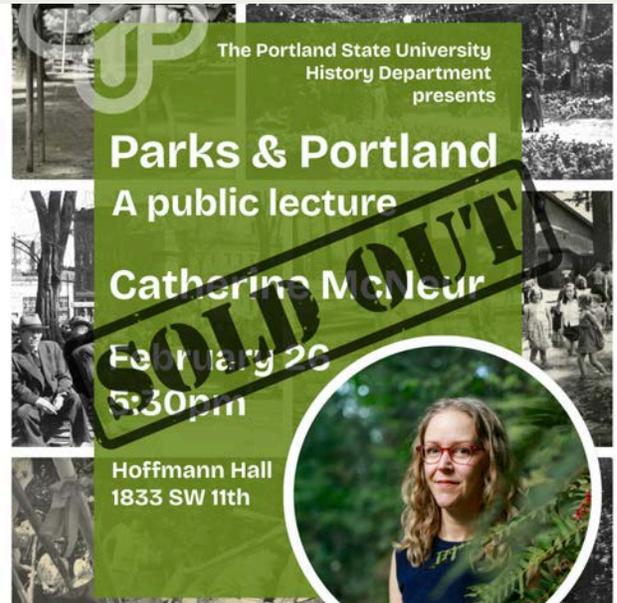
Alumni and friends: I love hearing what you're up to. Keep in touch — barberk@pdx.edu



Katy Barber
Chair, History Department



MARK YOUR CALENDARS & KEEP AN EYE OUT FOR FURTHER DETAILS!



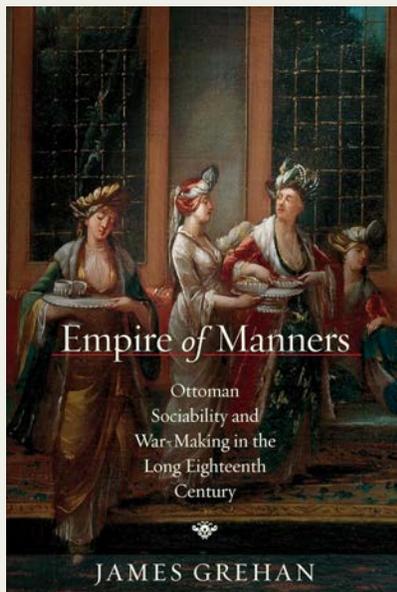
February 18, 7:30 p.m.: Representative Jamie Raskin of Maryland delivers the 21st Annual Solomon Memorial Lecture: “Church and State, Politics and Faith: Why We Need the Constitutional Wisdom of Thomas Jefferson and the Ethical Wisdom of Rabbi Hillel Today”, at Portland State University. Learn more at <https://www.pdx.edu/judaic-studies>

February 26, 5:30 p.m.: History Prof. Catherine McNeur’s Feb. 26 lecture is sold out, but you can sign up to hear about future talks — and possibly walking tours! In the meantime, check out her Instagram videos for fascinating stories and insights about Portland’s parks and public spaces.

March 5, 5:00 p.m.: Laura Robson Lecture (Yale University). Professor Robson specializes in Middle Eastern and international history, with a focus on forced migration and statelessness. Her books include *Human Capital: A History of Putting Refugees to Work* (2023) and *The Politics of Mass Violence in the Middle East* (2020). She is co-founder of StatelessHistories.org, a digital humanities project on statelessness, and a recent fellow at the Wilson Center’s Refugees and Forced Displacement Initiative.

April 16, 5:00 p.m.: Jamie Kreiner (UCLA) is the Robert and Dorothy Wellman Chair in Medieval History at UCLA. She specializes in early medieval history and the forces that shape ethical systems. Her widely acclaimed book *The Wandering Mind: What Medieval Monks Tell Us About Distraction* (2023) examines how early Christian monks struggled with concentration, drawing parallels to our modern challenges with focus. Her work has been featured in *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times*, and the *Wall Street Journal*.

FACULTY SPOTLIGHT: JAMES GREHAN



The Department of History is delighted to congratulate Professor James Grehan on his appointment to the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences Turkish Studies Professorship. This named professorship recognizes his distinguished contributions to Ottoman and Middle Eastern history over the course of his career.

Professor Grehan's latest book, *Empire of Manners: Ottoman Sociability and War-Making in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Stanford University Press, 2025), exemplifies the scholarship that earned him this honor. The book offers a sweeping examination of manners and social life across the Ottoman Empire, from the Balkans to North Africa, arguing provocatively that violence and war-making — not just civility and etiquette — played a

central role in shaping social conduct. Yale historian Alan Mikhail calls it "a model of social history." This is Grehan's third book, following his award-winning *Twilight of the Saints* (2014).

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT: TRENNA WILSON

MA student Trenna Wilson (BA, 2023) has made her mark on the History Department through both scholarly achievement and community leadership. A recent recipient of the Joel Palmer Graduate Research Fellowship, Wilson is currently working on her thesis, "‘The Grass Would be Greener if it were Ours:’ Comparing 150 years of land conflicts in Eastern Oregon and Kenya’s ‘White Highlands’" Wilson has strengthened the departmental community by organizing



events for incoming graduate students and revitalizing the History Club. Drawing on her experience directing [PSU's Food Pantry](#), she brings valuable perspectives to departmental service, including her recent participation in the search for a new CLAS dean. The department recognized these efforts and more when it awarded Wilson this year's Outstanding Service to the Department Award. Wilson's dual recognition reflects her commitment to excellence in scholarship and community engagement as she prepares for her final year at PSU.

IN MEMORIAM

The History Department mourns the loss of two beloved colleagues this past year.

Professor Emeritus Charles A. Le Guin (1927–2025) passed away peacefully at his home in Portland on January 4, 2025. Charles joined what was then Portland State College in 1959 and devoted more than three decades to teaching French history here, retiring in 1993. He arrived during what he remembered as a thrilling era of "striving collegiality," teaching packed sections of students returning to education under the GI Bill. Though he served as department chair and on the Faculty Senate, his true love was the classroom, especially undergraduate teaching. His popular "Biography as History" seminar reflected his conviction that individual lives illuminate larger historical forces, a conviction he pursued in editing his grandmother's diaries as *A Home-Concealed Woman* (University of Georgia Press, 1990). After retirement, he collaborated with colleagues Candice Goucher and Linda Walton on *In the Balance: Themes in Global History* (McGraw-Hill, 1998). Charles' heart belonged to his family, his garden, and the Oregon Coast, though he never lost the habits of a historian, maintaining a daily journal begun in 1953 until the end of his life.

Professor Emerita Caroline Litzenberger (1942–2025) died on October 27, 2025, after a long illness. Caroline came to history after an earlier career in computer programming—at the Port of Portland, she developed a cargo inventory system using hand-held devices and trained longshoremen to use it. She earned her MA from PSU in 1989, studying early-modern England, then completed her PhD at Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1993, specializing in the English Reformation. After teaching at West Virginia University, she returned to PSU in 2002, where she earned tenure and received the John Eliot Allen Outstanding Teaching Award that same year.

A Fellow of the Royal Historical Society of Great Britain, Caroline published four books: *Tewkesbury Churchwardens' Accounts, 1563–1624* (1994), *The English Reformation and the Laity: Gloucestershire, 1540–1580* (Cambridge, 1997), *Belief and Practice in Reformation England* (co-edited with Susan Wabuda, Ashgate Publishing, 1998), and *The People and the Book: Negotiating Religious Change in Reformation England and Beyond* (Cascade Books, 2022). Alongside her scholarship, she was ordained an Episcopal priest in 2004, bringing the same intellectual rigor and care for students to her ministry that characterized her teaching. An Anglophile to her core, Caroline found peace at the ocean and purpose in the classroom.

We are grateful for all they gave to our department and to their students.

READ AWARD-WINNING THESES FROM OUR STUDENTS

Did you know that many student papers, including MA and Honors theses, are freely available on PSU's Millar Library website? Explore the [History Collection](#) to see the range of research our students produce.

This year's Outstanding MA Thesis Award went to two exceptional projects spanning centuries and continents:

Callie Pappas, "[Beyond Skins: The Far-flung Impacts of Sea Otter Fur Capitalism](#)"
(Advisor: Joe Bohling)

Pappas traces how the 18th- and 19th-century sea otter fur trade shaped geopolitics, Indigenous cultures, commerce with China, and Pacific Northwest ecology— from St. Petersburg to Alaska, Boston to Astoria, and Hawaii to Canton.

Alice Holland, "['Stricken by the Worst Type of Sickness': The Communal Reaction and Response to Impaired Individuals in the Middle Ages](#)" (Advisor: John Ott)

Drawing on four twelfth-century miracle collections, Holland examines how medieval communities created systems of care for disabled members, finding that responses to mental and physical impairments differed in ways that reveal both the possibilities and limits of communal support.

30 YEARS OF *PACIFIC HISTORICAL REVIEW*

Congratulations to *Pacific Historical Review*, as the journal launches its 30th year at Portland State. Published quarterly, PHR showcases innovative scholarship on the American West and the Pacific, including work on race and ethnicity, empire, environment, gender and sexuality, and more. In the past year, PHR has won prizes from the Western History Association, the Pacific Coast Branch-American Historical Association, the Western Association of Women Historians, the Coordinating Council of Women Historians, the Berkshire Conference of Women Historians, the Society for Historians of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era, and the Society for the History of Technology. Read about PHR [here](#).

SUPPORT THE FUTURE OF HISTORY

SUPPORT OUR STUDENTS

In a year of budget challenges across the university, donor support for History students matters more than ever. Your gifts fund the scholarships that help students complete their degrees and the awards that recognize outstanding work in the classroom and archives. They also make possible the public programs—lectures, workshops, and community partnerships—that connect our department to you, Portland and beyond.

Numbers tell part of the story, but our students tell it better:

"It is an incredible honor to have my work recognized in this way. I poured countless hours into researching, writing, and refining this project, and this acknowledgment only affirms the value of the stories I sought to tell."

— Rayli Dornan, Outstanding Undergraduate Seminar Paper

"I wrote this seminar paper at a time when I was struggling in both the grad program and my personal life. To look back on that period and know that I was still somehow doing great work helps me recast that time in a different light."

— Charlie Huxley, Outstanding Graduate Seminar Paper

"It feels good to be recognized for the achievement, and it's equally important to know that there are such organizations that are supporting the study of history at this time in our nation."

— Adam Reed, Graduate GPA Achievement Award

To learn more about supporting the History Department and our students, please visit the PSU Foundation Giving Page: [//bit.ly/psuf_history](https://bit.ly/psuf_history) or email us at: hist@pdx.edu.



[Support the department!](#)

PSU DAY OF GIVING

SUPPORTING THE PAST. SUSTAINING THE FUTURE. 📖 ✨

April 16-17, 2026 the PSU's Spring Day of Giving will commence! 🌸 This 36-hour campaign supports the History Department's fundraising priorities and strengthens our general fund, sustaining our programs, students, and shared mission. ❤️ 🇺🇸

KEEP IN TOUCH WITH US

The History Department at PSU is open
Monday - Friday, 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.
with holiday and academic break exceptions.

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Events List



Join FOH



The Friends of History is a community-based organization affiliated with the Portland State University Department of History that is committed to supporting the teaching and study of history within the larger Portland area. Thanks to the generous support of our members, we are able to provide lectures, discussion groups, and other programming that speaks to a variety of scholarly interests, as well as scholarships and grants to further important research in history by Portland State University students and faculty members.