PACIFIC NORTHWEST HISTORY CONFERENCE

Graduate students Heather Burmeister, Lisa Donnelly, and Emily Stuckman traveled to Spokane, Washington, during the first week of November to attend and present their work at the 63rd annual Pacific Northwest History Conference. This year’s theme was “Game Changers & History Makers: Women in Pacific Northwest History.” Each student presented well-received papers related to their public history theses, prompting one senior historian from Western Oregon University to declare, “PSU grad students rock!”

Heather Burmeister’s paper, “Tuning In, Dropping Out: Documenting Lesbian Land Communities in the Pacific Northwest,” examined the emergence of separatist lesbian land communities in southern Oregon in the 1970s. Burmeister is currently collecting oral histories from founders and longtime residents of the communities, many of which continue to exist. Her efforts will be archived at the University of Oregon as part of their Southern Oregon County Lesbian Archival Project collection. The Oregon Heritage Commission recently selected Burmeister as an Oregon Heritage Fellow.

Kwan Hsu was the focus of Lisa Donnelly’s paper, “Social Problem More Difficult than Physics Problem: The Papers of Dr. Kwan Hsu.” Dr. Hsu came to the United States from China on a student visa, and remained after the Chinese communist revolution. Hsu eventually worked as a Physics professor at Portland State University. Donnelly is accessioning Hsu’s papers at the PSU archives and will base her thesis on Hsu’s experiences.

Emily Stuckman has been working with the Oregon Jewish Museum for the last year to carefully transcribe the handwritten minute books of the Portland Section of the National Council of Jewish Women. Emily’s paper, “More than a Sign of the Times: Progressive-Era Educational Efforts of the Portland Section, National Council of Jewish Women,” reported her findings as the council moved from self-improvement efforts to service to the community, both Jewish and non-Jewish.

On their return to Portland, Burmeister, Donnelly, and Stuckman presented their papers again to History department faculty and students. All three are on the public history track.

LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

This is a particularly exciting time in the History Department. Last year we welcomed two new faculty members: Jennifer Tappin in history of Africa (PhD Columbia University) and Laura Robson in history of the modern Middle East (PhD Yale University). This year three of our faculty members have published major new monographs, two of which are highlighted in this issue. Ken Ruoff has published a study of the Japanese Empire at its zenith in 1940, and Victoria Belco has published a book on the final stages of WWII and its aftermath in Italy. Look to an upcoming issue for a description of Friedrich Schuler’s new book on German espionage in the Americas under that Weimar Republic, which laid the foundations for Nazi spy networks. Between these publications we cover all three major Axis powers!

(continued on page 4...)
Some time ago, cable-TV humorist Stephen Colbert described America as “divided between those who think with their head and those who know with their heart.” Certainly, the excessively personal approaches to reason and empirical reality increasingly defining American society offer major challenges to the pursuit of higher knowledge and intensify the need to address broader issues and purposes beyond the narrowest confines of academic expertise.

My way of responding to these challenges is to envision myself as a humanistic general educator who uses the study of history to help students achieve fundamental tools for success in any endeavor or course of self-development. I agree with the extensive body of literature that describes the liberal arts as sharpening intellectual faculties, engendering curiosity about the world, expanding the ability to think critically and creatively, developing the facility to learn and grow intellectually, and stimulating the capacity to liberate the mind from the bondage of habit and custom. These goals can provide the useful requisites for a knowledge-driven economy or simply contribute to the joys of personal enlightenment. I believe that one of the fundamental features of a democratic society is the chance for those with the will and ability to develop the mind and enhance powers of reasoned inquiry to serve both individual and social interests.

Studying human history in all its diversity provides one fruitful approach to achieving these goals.

How did Italians – ordinary people – “get on with life” during and after Allied bombing campaigns, the passage of the battlefront, and the massacres of hundreds of civilians by German troops in retreat left central Italy a landscape of death and ruin? This book examines the wide range of problems citizens faced in rebuilding their lives and communities from the fall of Fascism and the collapse of the Italian state in 1943 to the beginnings of the new Republic in 1948. This is a different kind of war story from that usually told. Rather than battles, the decisions of generals, and national, political concerns, this puts resilient men, women, and children, and their daily lives under terrible conditions at the center of history.

Victoria Belco is an Associate Professor in the History Department.

U.S. 20th Century and Cultural Historian David Horowitz distributed this statement to his students on the first day of Fall term. Professor Horowitz’s article, “The Sicuro File: A Personal Perspective on the Struggle over Portland State University’s Most Controversial President,” will appear in the spring 2011 Oregon Historical Quarterly. His personal and professional memoir, “Getting There: An American Cultural Odyssey,” is currently under consideration for publication.
Ken Ruoff has published a new book, Imperial Japan at Its Zenith: The Wartime Celebrations of the Empire’s 2600th Anniversary. A decade in the making, this new book follows Ruoff’s first book The People’s Emperor (2001), the Japanese version of which was awarded Japan’s equivalent of the Pulitzer Prize. With the Japanese version of Imperial Japan at Its Zenith forthcoming in December, Portland State University has scheduled a book talk (and book signing) by Dr. Ruoff on 25 February 2011 (see upcoming events) in order to have copies of both the English and Japanese versions on hand. He will also be giving book talks throughout North America and in Japan, South Korea, and China. Waseda University in Tokyo and PSU’s Alumni Office are making a major effort to alert PSU alumni in Japan about Professor Ruoff’s talk at Waseda in the evening of January 21.

"Kenneth J. Ruoff is the most distinguished historian of his generation writing about the modern Japanese monarchy. His latest book, looking at the extraordinary celebrations of the 2,600th anniversary of the Japanese royal dynasty and the Japanese empire, is his most powerful and original yet. It is a tour de force of research, scholarship, and exposition, and anyone, anywhere, who is interested in the complex and controversial history of modern Japan or, indeed, the history of the modern world should read it."—Professor Sir David Cannadine, Princeton University and Institute of Historical Research, University of London.
We are also building our program in the related fields of public history and the history of the Pacific Northwest. As part of those plans, with this issue we launch an appeal for donations to the Gordon B. Dodds Endowed Fellowship. This endowment was created in 2003 in memory of our departed colleague with the intention of funding a graduate fellowship in Gordon’s field, the history of the Pacific Northwest. Gordon was a founder of the Friends of History. Many of our members knew him well and remember him fondly as leader, scholar and trusted friend. In the words of the late Craig Wollner (who is also greatly missed), “Gordon’s loyalty and generosity to students, young faculty, PSU, and the community were legendary.”

Our goal is to raise $200,000, which will allow us to fund this graduate fellowship position and continue Gordon’s legacy at Portland State. We hope you will consider supporting the study of Pacific Northwest History by making a gift to the Gordon B. Dodds Endowed Fellowship this year. Please contact Brian Federico, Senior CLAS Development Officer, at 503-725-5039 for more information about making your gift today.

If you would like to learn more information about this and other FOH events and announcements, feel free to contact me at 503-725-3982 or visit the Friends of History website at www.pdx.edu/foh.

Warm Regards,
Tom Luckett
Chair, History Department