“What is Public History?” Redux

Cathy Stanton
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Following the April 2007 NCPH conference in Santa Fe, a lively discussion developed on the H-Public listserv about the NCPH board’s proposed definition of the field. An annotated summary of some points from this discussion follows below. (The full archive of postings can be found via the H-Public website. Visit http://www.h-net.org/~public/, then click on “Discussion Logs” and choose May, June, and July 2007.)

The discussion began with a posting from Kathy Corbett and Dick Miller that challenged some features of the board’s proposed definition and offered a somewhat different vision of the field. The board’s draft definition is:

“Public history is a movement, methodology, and approach that promotes the collaborative study and practice of history; its practitioners embrace a mission to make their special insights accessible and useful to the public.”

Corbett and Miller questioned whether public history really is a movement, methodology, or even an approach. “Movement” seemed to them to be apt for the element of social activism that helped to launch public history in the 1970s, but they wondered if the term was still applicable for a field that has become entrenched in graduate programs and professional organizations. They argued that public history neither has nor needs a distinctive methodology, and that “approach” was too broad to be meaningful.

More importantly, they were troubled by the implication that public historians had a mission to bring a special set of insights to the lay public. They proposed an alternative definition that emphasized public history as a joint endeavor in which historians and their various publics collaborated in trying to make the past useful to the public. This change in emphasis, they noted, would acknowledge the agency and creativity of all participants in history-making projects, not just the self-identified public historians.

Listserv members were divided in their opinions about whether public history does constitute a distinct set of methods or approaches. Some, like Bureau of Land Management Regional Historian Carl Barna, argued that, “Public History is not a movement, nor a methodology, nor an approach. Doing History in service to the public is simply doing History, no more and no less, and doing it no differently than doing History in the academy... Historians who work in the public area need to be, first and foremost, Historians....” Paul Sandul, a graduate student at the University of California/Santa Barbara and California State University/Sacramento, agreed: “[P]ublic history is not a distinct methodology... Indeed, it seems as if we are framing some of this discussion on the notion public history is a separate discipline from academic history instead of just another concentration in much the same manner as, say, economic history, social history, or cultural history.”

> continued on page 14

New NCPH Web Site Coming this Fall

The entire NCPH web site has been redesigned to provide clearer access to resources and more useful information about public historians and the NCPH. Look for the new site in October!
“Labor History and Public History”

International Labor and Working-Class History (ILWCH) is soliciting articles for a special international thematic issue that will analyze initiatives in labor history that extend beyond the academic world to a broader public audience. The issue will engage questions that deal directly with the political and public aspects of the discipline of labor history. What is the relation of public labor history projects to academic research and debate? What is the impact of these projects? What are their political, historiographical, and theoretical implications? This issue will include articles and shorter descriptions of initiatives in public and labor history, such as reviews of films, plays, books, photo collections, and museum exhibits.

Possible topics for articles are educational and cultural projects organized by trade unions, governments, and immigrant and civil rights organizations, for example, and might include analyses of labor history websites, exhibits, tours and tourism, archives, oral history and education projects, etc., public celebrations of labor history, public history projects related to the history of slavery, and academic programs in public history.

For more information, please contact the editors of this thematic issue: Thomas Kluhock (kluh@wisc.edu) and Paula Fontes (pfontes@mandic.com). Submissions should be sent to ILWCH, New School for Social Research, 80 Fifth Avenue, #515, New York, NY 10011 or to ilwch@newschool.edu. ILWCH style guidelines are at: http://www.newschool.edu/ges/history/ilwch/frameset_submission.html Deadline for receiving contributions is February 28, 2008.

Sponsorship

The Friday night Endowment Fundraiser will take place at Farmington (http://www.historicfarmington.org/) the nineteenth-century plantation home of Abraham Lincoln’s dear friend Joshua Speed and his brother James, Attorney General during his administrations. Visiting in 1831, Lincoln returned to his home state of Kentucky as a privileged guest of a prominent slave-holding family, prior to his marriage to Kentuckian Mary Todd Lincoln. The site’s interpretation provides free airport shuttle, free wireless throughout, and close proximity to cultural venues, museums, shopping and the Ohio River. The Saturday evening of the conference will also coincide with the largest fireworks display in America, on the Louisville waterfront (a celebration of the upcoming Kentucky Derby, or NCPH’s 30th annual meeting—you be the judge).

In response to comments from past attendees about what public historians want to get out of our conference, we are building into the 2008 meeting more opportunities for networking and informal conversation. Coffee breaks will be longer, and tabletop tents will invite participants to gather with others to discuss compelling issues. The meeting will also offer an innovative new feature: two Working Group sessions. The meeting will also offer an innovative new feature: two Working Group sessions. This first iteration of the Working Group sessions, one group will assess the present and potential role of public history in civic life; a second session will focus on historic buildings in downtown Louisville as the basis for discussion about the politics of historic preservation.

The 2008 program will also repeat some of the successful elements of the 2007 meeting in Santa Fe, including an opening plenary that will turn our collective attention to the conference themes of union, civic history, race, and the capstone plenary on Sunday morning that will help all of us digest the meeting’s insights. And of course the program committee is eager to receive your proposals for panels, sessions and roundtables.

Nominating

The Nominating Committee will identify, determine the eligibility of, and recommend to the Board of Directors persons to be considered for elected offices of NCPH, including one candidate for NCPH Vice President to run uncontested for term 2008-2010 as Vice president, and President thereafter 2010-2012. The committee will also produce a slate of six candidates to fill three vacancies on the Board of Directors (terms 2008-11) and a slate of four candidates for two vacancies on the Nominating Committee (terms 2008-11). In carrying out its duties the committee will keep in mind the goals and objectives of the recently adopted Long Range Plan. (If you are interested in serving on an NCPH board or committee, please let us know at ncph@iupui.edu.)
Committee Reports

Membership

The Membership Committee will be busy this coming year continuing work on the NCPH Branding project, providing a report on key messages and audience strategies, and will also work in conjunction with the executive office to prepare a survey of membership demographics and preference of NCPH services and programs. At the annual meeting, the committee will organize and facilitate the New Member/New Professional Breakfast. The committee will also be charged with collaborating with the executive office to create a new membership marketing plan by focusing on new groups, such as alumni of public history programs.

Finance

In addition to its regular duties of reviewing financial reports and helping to prepare the annual budget, the Finance Committee will be developing a statement of principles and policies for current and future investment of endowment funds for approval by the board of directors. The committee will also conduct fiscal oversight of Endowment invested funds and the investments themselves while consulting in necessary with the Endowment Committee on issues related to fundraising, investment, and return on investment of endowment funds. Finally, the committee will coordinate with the Long Range Planning Committee in developing budgetary aspects for implementation of the Long Range Plan—2012.

Long Range Planning

In 2006, the Long Range Planning Committee drafted a new five-year plan for NCPH and submitted it to the board for approval. It was approved at the April 2007 Board Meeting. In the course of this process the committee and NCPH staff discussed the need to make the plan the foundation of all of our activities. With this in mind, the committee will focus its efforts on seeing that the plan becomes an effective tool for the organization. It will work with the executive office to identify elements which can be used in NCPH planning efforts. It will work to ensure that members, the board, and the general membership have access to the plan and are aware of its contents. Finally, the committee will consult directly with committee chairs as needed to ensure that their work reflects the goals and objectives of the Long Range Plan.

Committee Reports

In Santa Fe, the Endowment Committee sat down with leadership of NCPH to sketch out new goals and direction for the committee. With the successful completion of our NEH Challenge Grant, the organization both needs to move forward with the new endowment and to keep the momentum and culture of giving continuing. With that in mind, the Endowment Committee, executive office, and other interested parties charged this group with: assisting the office with endowment responsibilities, recommending fundraising strategies for the Long Range Plan, creating guidelines for using endowment funds, continuing to organize the fundraising event at the annual meeting, and establishing a planned giving program, among other responsibilities.

Harry Klinefelter, Chair, hklinefelter@pdx.org

Education and Professional Practice Coordinating

The committee is preparing a proposal for a model workshop or workshops that the NCPH would sponsor for members. This is an early stage of development. In the next two months a draft proposal will circulate among the committee members before going to the board or executive committee for an initial review this fall. One concept under consideration will follow the example of the Great Lakes Public History Workshop, a series of workshops that the NCPH sponsored with the National Park Service and the Public History Program at Loyola University Chicago. This model provided a common ground for public history academics and practitioners to share research and explore the practices and presentation of history at historic sites.

Don Stevens, Chair, Don_Stevens@nps.gov

Consultants

The Consultants’ Committee has been charged with developing submission guidelines for the new NCPH Consultants’ Award, which will recognize outstanding work by public history consultants or contractors. The Board of Directors has approved $500 for this award, and the Consultants’ Committee is seeking funding for an additional $500 annually. Interested donors can contact John Dichtl or Emily Greenwald.

Thirteen people attended the consultants’ breakfast at the annual NCPH conference in Santa Fe. They discussed ways in which NCPH and the committee could better serve consultants. Ideas that emerged from the breakfast included using the NCPH website to raise the profile of consultants’ work and conducting outreach with PhD students to educate them about consulting as a career option.

Breakfast attendees also recommended developing a workshop on the business of historical consulting that would address matters such as finding work, preparing proposals and budgets, the ethics of “history for hire,” and the traits of a good consultant. I would like to organize such a workshop for the 2008 NCPH conference in Louisville, with an eye toward developing a panel that could be presented at other professional conferences or alternative venues.

Emily Greumwald, Chair, egreumwalt@bassauic.com

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Emily Greumwald, Chair, egreumwalt@bassauic.com
NCPH entered 2007 heralding success in meeting the NEH challenge grant for our endowment. Fulfilling this longstanding goal was a significant accomplishment, and I want personally to thank everyone who helped make this possible. The primary purpose of the endowment, of course, is to generate earned income that can be used to augment NCPH services to its members, and public history generally. This process, I am pleased to report, has begun.

At its meeting during the Santa Fe conference, the board approved allocating earnings from the endowment to fund a number of activities. Some involve recognizing the accomplishments of our members—a new Consultants Award, a prize increase for the Book Award, and the establishment of a new Student Travel Grant. The conference itself was the culmination of an effort to expand existing programs and provide new services to the public history community. This is just a sampling of what is in the plan, and I invite you to review Plan 2012 in its entirety on the NCPH web site. When you do, I am confident that you will agree that it provides a roadmap to a very bright future.

Meeting the NEH challenge grant was really just a beginning, not an ending, in making the endowment a tool for a stronger, more vibrant NCPH. Obviously, bringing the goals of Plan 2012 into reality will once again require additional resources, at least some of which will come from the endowment’s earned income. This means, to be absolutely clear, that I have to continue growing the endowment. Meeting the NEH challenge grant was really just a beginning, not an ending, in making the endowment a tool for a stronger, more vibrant NCPH.

You may have noticed all my columns invariably mention that NCPH is only as strong as its member’s commitment to the organization. This includes helping to build the organization’s future through the endowment. In the not-too-distant future, you will be receiving a letter asking you to contribute to the endowment. When you receive that letter, request that I add you to our membership database.

If you are a faithful reader of Public History Now, you already know about these projects; I mention them here collectively to underscore what having an endowment means. Of course, all of these new undertakings relate back to earlier long range plans which outlined each as an important goal for the organization. So, meeting the challenge grant affords an opportunity to celebrate both reaching a financial goal and bringing to fruition long stated aspirations to make NCPH an even more vital voice for public history.

In Santa Fe, NCPH adopted a new long range plan. Building on the momentum provided by earlier efforts, Plan 2012 seeks to reinforce the Council’s place as the premier professional organization for public historians. Like its predecessors, it also calls for an expansion of programs to serve our members and the public history profession as a whole. For example, the plan sets as a goal offering ongoing professional development opportunities for members and others, both at the annual meeting and, ultimately, throughout the year else where. It also declares that we will expand existing programs and provide new services to the public history community. This is just a sampling of what is in the plan, and I invite you to review Plan 2012 in its entirety on the NCPH web site. When you do, I am confident that you will agree that it provides a roadmap to a very bright future.

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The Finance Committee including Marianne Babal, Danne Britton, Alan Newell, and Elizabeth Monroe. With continued growth in membership, developing opportunities for the organization, and an active and sound investment and expenditure vision, the NCPH should expect to have a variety of positive changes in the coming years. Special thanks for the success of this past year go to John Dichtl and Sarah Younker-Koopel and to the members of the 2006-2007 Finance Committee including Marianne Babal, Danne Britton, Alan Newell, and Elizabeth Monroe.

For 2009 we will meet in Providence, RI, where board member Steve Lubar will serve as chair of the Local Arrangements Committee. For 2008 we met in Santa Fe, New Mexico, a venue in organization memberships, the successful completion of the NEH Challenge Grant, and sponsorship of the NCPH including a three-year commitment from The History Channel.

FROM THE DIRECTOR’S DESK  >  continued from page 7

Welcome New Members!

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Fiscal Year 2008 Funding Levels

Come into Focus

**TEACHING AMERICAN HISTORY GRANTS**

On July 19, 2007, the House of Representatives passed the Labor, Health, and Human Services and Education fiscal year (FY) 2008 budget bill (H.R. 3045), by a vote of 276-140. The bill includes $119.79 million for the Teaching American History grants program at the U.S. Department of Education, the same amount provided in FY2007. This amount is $20,000 less than approved by the Senate Appropriations Committee (S.3124). However, the House amount is $69.79 million more than the President’s request.

**NATIONAL ARCHIVES & RECORDS ADMINISTRATION**

On July 12, 2007, the Senate Appropriations Committee approved its FY2008 Financial Services and General Government appropriations bill. The bill includes $131.9 million for operating expenses of the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA). This funding level is $1.1 million above the President’s request; $11.1 million less than the House recently approved in its bill (H.R. 2829), and $34.6 million above FY2007 budget.

The Electronic Records Archive program will receive $58 million, the same as the amount provided in the House bill and the President’s request. This is an increase of $12 million over FY2007.

The Senate bill provides $25.1 million for the Archivist’s repair and restoration account, which is $9 million more than the House-passed bill. The Senate’s allocation is $16 million more than provided in FY2007 and $16.5 million above the President’s FY2008 request for this account. $13.5 million of the increase would be earmarked for construction projects at the Johnson, Kennedy, Nixon, and Franklin Roosevelt presidential libraries. $9.6 million would go to ongoing repairs and restoration, and $2 million would be allocated to the Anchorage, Alaska Regional Archives and Records Center.

On June 28, 2007, the House of Representatives approved its version of the Financial Services and General Government appropriations bill (H.R. 2829). The Committee Report (H.Rept. 110-207) accompanying it directs that the $2.1 million in additional funding be designated to restore evening and weekend hours for public research at the Archives that were eliminated last October. The Senate Appropriations Committee’s report language is silent on restoring research room hours and mentions only “maintaining current service levels.” The House report also mandates the hiring of additional archivists to help process public requests for access to historic documents. (The archivist workforce has been cut back over recent years.) Funding also is included for additional space to house archival documents.

The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) is the nation’s leading provider of historical records and archival materials of historic significance. The Archives, the Library of Congress, the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC), the National Park Service, and the Library of Congress’ Prints and Maps Division make up the National Archives System. The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) was established in 1934 by the Federal Archives Act.

NARA FILMS FOR SALE ON AMAZON.COM

On July 30, the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) announced that it had reached an agreement with CustomFlix Labs, a subsidiary of Amazon, Inc., to make thousands of historic films from the Archives’ holdings available for purchase on Amazon.com. CustomFlix DVD on Demand service will initially make the NARA collection of Universal Newsreels, dating from 1920 to 1967, available on DVD. A limited number of titles are already available on Amazon.com.

In an article in the Washington Post, NARA spokeswoman Susan Cooper emphasized that the deal between the Archives and CustomFlix was non-exclusive. Last year the Smithsonian Institution was sharply criticized for entering into a semieclusive deal with the Showtime Networks, Inc. that limited access to the Smithsonian’s holdings for filmmakers. No details were released concerning the financial arrangements made between the Archives and CustomFlix.

“Our initiative with CustomFlix Labs will reap major benefits for the public and for the National Archives,” said Allen Weinstein, Archivist of the United States. “While the public can come to our College Park, MD research room to view films and even copy them at no charge, this new program will make our holdings much more accessible to millions of people who cannot travel to the Washington, DC, area. CustomFlix Labs’ DVD on Demand will provide the National Archives with digital reference and preservation copies of the films that are sold on Amazon.com. This is an important contribution to our preservation program.”

The Education Act of 1965 established a federal grant-in-aid program to assist state and local governments in providing educational opportunities to the nation’s youth. The program included funds for state and local educational agencies and for colleges and universities to provide educational programs for youth. This program, plus others associated with it, is known as Title I of the Education Act of 1965.

The program currently is funded by the U.S. Department of Education. The grant program is administered by the U.S. Department of Education through the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education. The grant program is funded by the U.S. Department of Education. The grant program is administered by the U.S. Department of Education through the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education.

The U.S. Department of Education announced in June that its latest round of Teaching American History Grants includes a $1.5 million award to a consortium of Pennsylvania school districts partnering with NCPH and other educational and cultural organizations.

The project, entitled “Link to Liberty: The Pennsylvania Connection to American History,” is led by the Central Susquehanna Intermediate Unit (located in Lewisburg) in partnership with school districts from Pittsburgh, Lancaster, Reading, and elsewhere. Other partners include the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, Millersville University, NPR/PBS affiliate WITF, Inc., and NCPH.

NCPH will be taking responsibility for planning, administering, and managing field trips for Pennsylvania teachers to historic sites in Pennsylvania and surrounding states during the summers of 2008 through 2010. NCPH member Charles Hardy III of West Chester University will lead the field trips.

The grant will also support yearly professional development graduate courses at Millersville University, distance learning courses featuring American history content to promote literacy strategies and practices, and expansion of the award-winning PHMC/WITF web site ExplorePAhistory.com. Former NCPH President and Director of Public History at The State Museum of Pennsylvania Robert Weible will serve as the project’s Content Director.
American Association of Museums is accepting nominees for their Excellence in Peer Review Service Award. Nominees must have received high evaluation ratings for their peer review activities. More information can be found at <http://www.aam-us.org/getinvolved/pr/award_details.cfm>. Deadline is December 31, 2007.


Penn Humanities Forum of the University of Pennsylvania is accepting applications for the Mellon Postdoctoral Fellowship for the 2008-09 academic year. The Forum has set “Change” as the topic for this year’s applications, and proposals on this topic are invited from different humanistic disciplines. <http://www.ph.upenn.edu>. Deadline for submissions is October 15, 2007.

The DAR (Daughters of the American Revolution) Museum has spring 2008 internships available for undergraduate and graduate students interested in gaining experience in American History, education, collections management, and public relations. Interns will work at least 20 hours per week for a 10-12 week period. The application is due December 15, 2007. <http://www.dar.org/museum/edprograms.cfm#interns>


The University of Virginia Military Oral History Conference, February 21-23, 2008, in Victoria, British Columbia, is seeking proposals. Papers should address any facet of military history that relies heavily upon oral history. Senior undergraduate and graduate students are encouraged to submit. For further information or to send proposals, email Shawn Caffery, shawnca@gvic.ca. Deadline is November 15, 2007.


For weekly updated information on jobs, fellowships, internships, awards, conferences, and calls, please visit www.ncpb.org.

CALLS FOR PAPERS, ARTICLES, PROPOSALS, AND PRESENTATIONS


Western History Association 47th Annual Conference, October 3-6, 2007, Oklahoma City, OK. “Crossroads of the West: Meetings and Exchanges, Old and New.” <http://www.umal.edu/wa/wha/index.htm>


Australian Historical Association Biennial Conference, July 7-10, 2008, Melbourne, Australia. Papers are invited on Australian as well as non-Australian topics that explore the various resonances suggested by the theme of history and locality–to connect the lineages of place and time. Deadline is December 31, 2007. <http://www.theauh.org/indexmhp>

CONFERENCE AND LECTURE SERIES


JOBS AND POSITIONS AVAILABLE

ABC-CLIO has a position open for Editor of American History & Life who will edit and index historical abstracts and bibliographic citations; select and evaluate material to be covered in publications; and enter bibliographic entries. B.A. in U.S. or Canadian history required; graduate work in history desired. To submit application and resume online visit <http://www.abc-lico.com/publishing/employment/jobdetail.aspx?jobid=248>.

Charlotte Museum of History is seeking a Director of Education to supervise and coordinate the education and interpretive programs at the Museum and Hezekiah Alexander House. A B.A. in U.S. History, Public History, or Education; special event coordination; excellent writing skills; and a minimum of five years museum experience required. MA and classroom teaching experience is preferred. Send resume, cover letter, salary requirements, and references to: Kris Carmichael, Charlotte Museum of History, 3500 Shamrock Drive, Charlotte, NC, 28215; kcarmichael@charlottemuseum.org.

The Berkshire Museum in Pittsfield, MA, is looking for an Education Program Manager to be in charge of implementing education programs for K-12 students and teachers. A B.A. and three years of education experience, preferably in a museum setting, are required. Send resume, cover letter, and references to Deputy Director, Berkshire Museum, 39 South Street, Pittsfield, MA 01201. For more information email Maria Mingalone, mmingalone@berkshermuseum.org.

Museum London and Ellen House in London, Ontario, is seeking a Curator of Regional History to conduct research and initiate exhibitions related to the history of London, and also coordinate all aspects of regional history and artifacts exhibitions including all stages of planning, budget and grant preparation, and proofreading and editing publications. Master’s degree in history and five years museum experience required. Email bmeehan@museumlondon.ca with questions or visit <http://www.museumlondon.ca>.

Appalachian State University is inviting applications for a tenure-track position for a professor of Public History, beginning in August 2008. Applicant must be able to teach World Civilizations courses as well as Public History courses. Ph.D. in history, teaching experience, and evidence of scholarly potential expected. Send application, c.v., and three letters of recommendation to Professor Michael L. Krens, Chair, Department of History, Appalachian State University, Boone, NC 28608. Review of applications will begin on November 26, 2007, and continue until the position is filled.

Florida Historical Society is seeking an Executive Director. Applicant must have managerial and fundraising skills. Ph.D is preferred. Submit four copies of application letter, c.v., employment history and three letters of recommendation to Search Committee, The Florida Historical Society, 435 Brevard Avenue, Cocoa, FL 32922. Consideration of applications begins October 1, 2007, and the position will be filled prior to July 1, 2008. <http://www.florida-historical-soc.org>
In terms of what role public historians can and should play in relation to popular history-making such as reenactment, genealogy, community celebrations, and so on, some subscribers spoke about helping to push the boundaries of how people were approaching their own history. Mary Rizo felt it was “absolutely essential that public historians try to push people in their understanding of their communities and their history,” including thinking about issues of power and causation, while Denise Meringolo said, “as a public historian, I’ve begun to think of myself as something akin to a community organizer... While I have training and interests and curiosities that have led me to become a historian, I become a public historian when I began actively to look for ways to be of service, to listen and learn about the precise needs of a given community, and to gently challenge a community to push its own sense of boundaries and exclusiveness.” As H-Public’s editor, I weighed in with the notion that another key role public historians seem to play in public projects is to continually broaden narrowly-defined agendas, with an eye toward keeping space open for possible other perspectives, including those that might arise in the future.

Although the discussion never returned to the concrete task of offering alternative drafts that the NCPH board might consider, Jay Price approached this when he proposed that, “Perhaps at its heart, public history is more of a ‘spirit’ that sees historical scholarship as part of a larger sense that includes both professionals of both academic and non-academic stripes as well as those segments of the public at large.” If I had to sum up the vision of public history that emerged from this online conversation, it might be that the participants saw themselves as “historians in the middle”—operating between various constituencies and disciplinary fields, grounded in the methods of the historical discipline, highly attentive to the social processes and political implications of their work, and resistant to too much closure when it comes to defining what they do.

Cathy Stanton is currently the editor of the H-Public list, as well as teaching cultural anthropology at Tufts University in Boston and history and cultural studies online at Vermont College of Union Institutes. Her book The Lowell Experiment: Public History in a Postindustrial City (University of Massachusetts Press, 2000) won the 2007 NCPH Book Award.

“...I feel that the practitioners of these diverse sorts of history-making for varied publics benefit from talking with each other and reflecting on each other’s practices.”

Although the discussion began with the aim of rethinking the NCPH board’s draft definition of public history, one idea that repeatedly emerged from the H-Public discussion was the importance of keeping that definition open as possible. Ray Smock, a lifelong public historian and current director of the Robert C. Byrd Center for Legislative Studies, wrote, “You would think that someone who has been a public historian for 40 years would have solved some of these definitional questions, but I haven’t, although I keep trying.” Others saw the definitional dilemma as part and parcel of the enterprise of doing public history.

Debbie Ann Doyle, public history coordinator at the American Historical Association, wrote, “Perhaps we should think of public history like gender—a category of identity, complicated, negotiated, and socially constructed in tension with and in opposition to other categories... [Public historical work] requires public historians to engage in a conversation about the nature, meaning, and use of history of interest to all historians.”

Benjamin Filene concurred: “In a field like ours, the act of definition should be about opening doors, not building walls... Part of the vitality of public history is that any definition we come up with will continue to be fluid.”

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The Best in Public History
NCPH’s Awards Program

CONSULTANT’S AWARD
This $500 award recognizes outstanding work and contributions by consultants or contractors.
New Award!

STUDENT TRAVEL AWARD
Five matching travel grants of up to $300 each for graduate students attending the 2008 Annual Meeting.
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G. WESLEY JOHNSON AWARD
A $750 award for the best article in The Public Historian for the 2007 calendar year. Prize increase!

ROBERT KELLY MEMORIAL AWARD
This $500 award honors distinguished achievements by individuals, institutions, or nonprofit or corporate entities for making history relevant to individual lives of ordinary people outside of academia.

NCPh BOOK AWARD
A $1,000 award for the best book about or “growing out of” public history published within the previous two calendar years (2006 and 2007). Prize increase!

NEW PROFESSIONAL AWARDS
Two $500 travel grants to encourage new professionals, practicing public history for no more than three years, to attend the 2008 Annual Meeting.

STUDENT PROJECT AWARD
The $500 travel grant to attend the 2008 Annual Meeting recognizes the contributions of student work to the field of public history.

Your Help with a Survey?
The Center for the Study of Public History at the George Washington University has undertaken a project to further the discussion among public historians about the knowledge, skills, and experiences that are most important for those entering the profession. This information in turn will inform ongoing discussions about the development of public history programs. We would appreciate your participation in a brief survey about (1) your involvement in public history and (2) the ideas you have about the education of the next generation of public historians. The survey can be accessed through the link below and takes approximately 10-20 minutes: https://survey.gwu.edu/index.cfm?SURVEY_ID=5938

If you would like a copy of the survey report, please e-mail: csph@gwu.edu. Direct questions to Kathleen Anderson Steeves, Associate Professor, Secondary History Education and Associate Director, Center for the Study of Public History and Public Culture The George Washington University, 2134 G Street, NW, Washington, D.C. 20052; 202-994-2773; or ksteeves@gwu.edu

CALL FOR ANNUAL MEETING SITE PROPOSALS
The National Council on Public History seeks site proposals for its annual meetings, beginning in the year 2010. Proposals should include the following information:

- A statement of why the site is appropriate for the NCPH annual meeting.
- Information regarding support from local individuals, institutions, and agencies that could work together to plan a successful conference. Letters of intent would strengthen the proposal.
- Potential arrangements for meeting facilities, hotels, and transportation, with approximate costs.
- Proposed dates for the meeting, generally between 15 March and 1 May.
- Any other details that might strengthen the proposal.

Since the NCPH Board of Directors considers proposals at its spring and fall meetings, a representative or representatives of the host institution(s) should plan to be present and discuss the site proposal.

For more information, contact the NCPH Executive Offices at 317.274.2716 or by email: ncph@iupui.edu
Lee Wittmann
Independent Consultant/Researcher, San Mateo, CA

I would like to thank Historical Research Associates, Inc. for sponsoring the NCPH New Professional Award that enabled me to attend and present at the 2007 Annual Meeting in Santa Fe.

As an Aboriginal professional (from Kitimat, BC, Canada) within the Museum/Public History field I feel that I have been enriched through an assortment of experiences over the past few years. My academic background in Anthropology, First Nations Studies, and Cultural Resource Management has led me to archival research, interviewing and transcribing oral testimony, researching material culture in public and private museum collections, and providing analysis of museum and reparation policies for the Haisla Treaty Team through the ongoing British Columbia Treaty Process. Additionally, I lived and worked amongst the Mentawai peoples of Siberut Island, West Sumatra, Indonesia, conducting Participatory Rural Appraisal (historical inventory) through an indigenous Non-Government Organization, Yayasan Citra Mandiri. In June 2005 I served as a consultant to the Gupsgolox Totem Yayasan Citra Mandiri.

My stint with CSTM resulted in further contract work, which included travel to the province of New Brunswick to interview M’kmag and Maliseet community members with regards to traditional and contemporary forms of forest management, harvesting techniques, the use of timber and non-timber products, ecotourism initiatives, and the relationship between Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal people in Eastern Canada. As a new NCPH member, I am thrilled to be involved in a national organization of public historians, community and oral historians, educators, consultants, historical preservationist and academic researchers alike. After perusing the meeting guide for Santa Fe, I was further impressed with the array of workshops, exhibits, sessions, special events, tours and other options for the conference.

Upon arrival at the La Fonda Hotel, I received a warm welcome and it became apparent to me that this was a well-organized and well-planned meeting in “the city different.” Hours later my colleagues and I presented in a well-attended session, which led to rewarding, free-flowing conversation before we moved on to attend other sessions. The meeting’s theme, “Many Histories, Many Publics – Common Ground?” provided windows of opportunity for a wide variety of exchanges over the next few days. Overall, I felt that the Opening Plenary set the tone for the meeting and carried momentum into the numerous scheduled events. The meeting also provided an opportunity to share our personal histories, experiences, identities and concepts in a spectacular setting.

I left Santa Fe inspired by Estevan Rael-Galvez’s and Christopher Wilson’s keynote speeches, open-minded professionals and academics, and stimulating conversations. I also want to learn more about NCPH and to develop new contacts and relationships.

As a direct result of attending the NCPH conference I have established rapport with other professional organizations, been invited to speak at various U.S. universities and attend ground-breaking symposiums, and received historical research contract offers from local county archives to conducting private interpretive tours of Northwest Coast culture and collections at the Stanford Museum.

Thank you to NCPH and everyone involved in making the annual meeting such a rewarding experience.

Lee Wittmann currently resides in San Mateo, CA, and works as an independent consultant and researcher. He is in charge of communications for an indigenous hip hop band, El Vah. The band’s members use music to challenge stereotypes and to discuss their Mayan/Aztecs/Native American histories and identities. This may result in a proposal for the 2008 annual meeting in Louisville, Kentucky.

Thank you!

The support of the following institutions and organizations, each committed to membership at the Patron and Sponsor levels, makes the work of the National Council on Public History possible.

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