What could unite such disparate topics: German Protestant missionaries establishing model settlements in Ottoman Palestine in the late nineteenth century; Eastern European Jews negotiating with German military officials in devastated Poland during the First World War; one Latvian interwar dictator who got many of his ideas while living as an exile in Nebraska; Nazi race examiners in search of mythical “lost Germanic blood” in occupied Europe; and the Gestapo’s manhunts in the Rhineland at the end of World War II?

Besides the obvious fact that they are fascinating, the common denominator is that these topics are being researched by UT modern European history graduate students who have won major international and national fellowships. Professor Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius is very proud of his students, who since 2008 have won nine major fellowships, including two Fulbrights (Tracey Hayes Norrell to Poland, Jordan Kuck to Latvia), three DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service) fellowships (Jacob Hamric, Tracey Hayes Norrell, and Michael McConnell), two US Holocaust Memorial Museum fellowships (Michael McConnell and Bradley Nichols), a Berlin Program fellowship (Bradley Nichols), and a University of Tennessee Humanities Center fellowship (Bradley Nichols). In addition, Geoff Krempa, working on interwar ultranationalist plots, attended the Junior Scholars Training Seminar of the Woodrow Wilson International Center and won a US Army Military History Institute grant. Josh Sander, investigating Nazi plans for the Netherlands, won places in two summer seminars, hosted by the Center for Jewish History in New York and the Holocaust Education Foundation Summer Institute at DePaul University.

From the department head

The faculty of the Department of History is grateful for Tom Burman’s leadership as department head over the past six years. Taking over that role just when the world economy—and UT—faced a paralyzing recession, he led the department through some major challenges, the proverbial curse of “interesting times.” We have emerged stronger than ever, with a vibrant faculty recognized nationally for its track record in winning competitive fellowships. In this issue, you can see a sample of the fascinating and award-winning research we have recently published.

We are fine teachers, too, mentoring some outstanding graduate students, staying abreast of the latest thinking about effective undergraduate education, and helping a new generation of Tennessee students remember all that came before them. As the department’s new head, I am particularly thankful for all that Tom Burman did to make us one of the strongest humanities departments at the university, and I look forward to building on this legacy. Thanks for spending some time reading this newsletter and catching up on what we are doing. You will see why I am optimistic about the future of our Department of History.

Ernest Freeberg
Tore Olsson is a historian of the twentieth-century United States, and he is delighted to join the department. He is particularly interested in the impact of the United States on the larger world surrounding it, and he explores that impact through the lens of food and agriculture. Food has always been a key vehicle of globalization: Christopher Columbus crossed the Atlantic Ocean in search of Indian spices. Olsson looks at the exchange of plants and animals as a window to how the United States exercised power on the global stage during the last 100 years.

Olsson’s current book project looks at the global campaigns known as the Green Revolution—the US-led, post-WWII attempt to teach so-called “scientific agriculture” to poor farmers in the Third World. The book will examine the circuitous path of plant scientists and agricultural experts from under-developed regions in the United States into Mexico, a country long understood as the birthplace of the Green Revolution. In Mexico, the application of US agricultural science followed and led, in the short term, to a year abroad as part of a reciprocal exchange between his university and Nankai University in Tianjin and, in the long run, to an obsession that continues today.

He went on to earn a master’s degree in Chinese language and ended up at the University of Muenster, Germany. There he studied under the undervalued second-century BCE political philosopher Jia Yi under Professor Reinhard Emmerich, with support from the Heinrich Hertz-Stiftung, a fellowship for non-Germans studying in Germany.

After earning a PhD, Sanft held a two-year post-doctoral position at Kyoto University supported by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science. He then returned to teach for several years at the University of Muenster, where he completed the Habilitation review in 2011 (a process in German universities that requires the submission of a second dissertation and rigorous review of a candidate’s scholarship and teaching).

He returned to the United States and spent a semester at the Institute for Advanced Study (Princeton), followed by a semester teaching and doing research at the University of Minnesota. Last year he taught at the University of Wisconsin—Madison. In his debut lecture at UT (fall 2011) he taught History of China: China to 1000 and Studies in Asian History: The Death Penalty in a Cross-Cultural Context.

Sanft is interested in how political and government processes worked in China during the time when the Chinese empire was first taking shape. He makes use of transmitted historical and philosophical texts, as well as legal and bureaucratic texts that archaeologists in China have recovered in recent decades. Charles’ first book, Communication and Cooperation in Early Imperial China: Publishing the Qin Dynasty, was published in January 2014.

When he’s not working, you may find him riding through Knoxville on a bicycle or turning the compost heap in his backyard.

The University of Tennessee Humanities Center Fellowships for 2013–2014 include three historians: Thomas E. Burman (see “Faculty fellowships,” page 4), Jacob Latham, and Christopher Magra.

Jacob Latham is completing a manuscript, The Pompeian creamers and the Urban Image of Rome: Ritual, Performance, and Urban Space from the Late Republic to Late Antiquity, which examines the procession that preceded the immensely popular chariot races in the Circus Maximus—one of Rome’s three great pompae—together with the triumphal and the funeral procession. This spectacle attracted enormous crowds, offering an unparalleled opportunity for public merriment, political patronage, and religious devotion as it conducted the gods from the temple of Jupiter to the circus where the wild contests entertained one and all.

Chris Magra’s second book is Poseidon’s Curse: Naval Impressment and the Atlantic Origins of the American Revolution, in which he argues that the British navy’s policy of press gangs and ships into service around the Atlantic to support commerce threatened merchants’ property and profits. Labourers also resented the navy’s uncompetitive wages and limited employment options. Both groups viewed British actions as a danger to economic freedom, and merchants and workers around the Atlantic signaled their resentment toward British impressment. The British government encouraged the slave and sugar trades by regulating impressment in these enterprises. Elsewhere, American signals went unanswered, which is the reason impressment is listed as a grievance in the Declaration of Independence.

Happy man
Steve Ash on writing, teaching, life, and retirement
By Catherine Higgs

Steve Ash is a happy man. He fell in love with the history of the Civil War—the subject of his scholarly work—at age twelve in 1960. This youthful obsession led to a still greater love: While a student at Gettysburg College in the late 1960s, he fell in love with Jeannie. They will celebrate their forty-fourth wedding anniversary in June 2014.

When Steve and Jeannie graduated from college, they headed to Wash- ington, DC, where both worked for the Social Security Administration. The jobs paid well but neither could imagine a lifetime as bureaucrats. After eighteen months, they hit the road in a Volkswagen bus. After a year playing at being hippies, boredom struck. Steve decided to try to turn his childhood love of the Civil War into a career as a historian.

The UT history department snapped him up into its graduate program. Knoxville and UT became Steve’s third love: “When I come here in 1973, I felt for the first time like I’d found myself. I was happy; it changed my life.” Jeannie took a job as a newsreader for WIVK radio. For twenty years, she was one of the most recognized personalities in Knoxville, beloved for her humorous interactions with the station’s DJs. She retired in 1994 and opened a business that takes travelers on guided tours to China. The next year the UT history department hired Steve as an assistant professor after a decade spent as a freelance historian and a journeyman lecturer at East Tennessee colleges.

By 1995, Steve was an established author and editor. He quickly became a respected member of the UT National Alumni Teaching Award in 1999. For Steve, it was mutual admiration. “I really loved teaching undergraduates, inspiring them to love history,” he says.

For graduate students, Steve’s goal—with red pen and Struik and What the hand—was to train them to become public historians. To do so, far, four of the ten PhD students Steve supervised have published their dissertations as a first book.

Steve, meanwhile, published seven books while carrying a full teaching load. A Year in the South (2002) became a bestseller and prompted the funniest e-mail on the best office door in the history department: a plea from a young man asking Professor Ash to synopsise the book for him before he attended class that afternoon at a different university. That office door captures the essence of Steve, a lover of books, rock and roll, good bourbon, jokes—good and bad—and his friends.

In retirement, he will continue to write—his eighth book, A Massacre in Memphis, was published in 2015. Jeannie will travel. Steve’s friends will look forward to joining him as often as he invites us, for a drink on the Cumberland strip. Knoxville and UT are home.
Steve Ash’s most recent book is A Massacre in Memphis: The Race Riot That Shook the Nation One Year after the Civil War (2013). It is the first book-length study of the horrific, three-day-long Memphis riot of 1866 during which rioters murdered forty-six black men, women, and children; assaulted, robbed, and raped many others; and burned down every black church and school in the city, along with many dwellings. One of the most sensational events of the post–Civil War era, the riot spurred Congress to take action to protect the South’s ex-slaves and helped launch Radical Reconstruction.

In spring 2013, Ernest Freeberg published The Age of Edison: Electric Light and the Invention of Modern America, a history of the social and cultural impact of electric light. The Washington Post has called the book “a captivating intellectual adventure that offers long-forgotten stories of the birth pangs of the electrical age that are amusing, surprising, and tragic.” Freeberg has been sharing his findings with audiences across the country, including appearances on National Public Radio and C-Span. Catherine Higgs is the author of Chocolate Islands: Cocoa, Slavery, and Colonial practice, celebrations, and resistance and rebellion. The book summariz-es recent monographs on the colonial experience, supporting them with anecdotes from the authors’ archival research in Guatemalan. Preference is given to the experiences of Africans and their descendants, the least-stud-ied of the peoples of three continents who came together to create Latin America.

Robert (Jeff) Norrell has published a novel, Eden Riser (2013), in which Tom McKee, a white college freshmen, returns to his Alabama home in 1965 and here becomes embroiled in civil rights conflict that splits his family, his town, and his own identity. McKee’s powerful family is not prepared for the effects of the Selma march. John Gregory Brown, writer-in-residence at Sweetwater College, says Eden Riser “offers a dramatic and beautifully written examination of racial injustice and violence in the South during the tumultuous 1960s,” and that Norrell “demonstrates that he’s not merely a profoundly-ly insightful historian, he’s a first-class novelist as well.”

Recent books by faculty

Africa (2012), which traces the early-twentieth-century journey of the Englishman Joseph Burt to the Portuguese colony of Sio Tomé and Principe—the chocolate islands—through Angola and Mozambique, and finally to British Southern Africa. The English chocolateier Cadbury Brothers had hired Burt to determine if the cocoa it was buying from the islands had been harvested by slave laborers forcibly recruited from Angola—an allegation that became one of the grand scandals of the early colonial era and which echoes still in the early twenty-first century.

In Bloody Breathition: Politics and Vio-lence in the Appalachian South (2013), Robert Hutton offers an account of the inter-section of power and brutality between the Civil War and the Progressive era in one tumultuous community. In the late 1800s, Brattleford County, Kentucky, seemed to be the quintessential “feud” locale, a remote mountain anomaly bereft of New South progress. In fact, Brattleford County’s violent history reflected events far beyond its borders. “Feud,” and all it entailed, was only one of many descriptive names for killing that continue to distort the causes of violent death all over the globe.


Faculty fellowships, 2013-2014

F urbund by a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Hu-manities, Thomas E. Burman will spend 2013-2014 writing a draft of his third book, The Hounds of the Lord and the House of Islam: Do-minicans, Islam, and the Scholastic Project, 1220–1320, a study of seven members of the Order of Preachers who sometimes joked that in their religious zeal they were not so much Dominicans, but Domini canes, “hounds of the lord” and their interactions with Islamic belief, Arab science and philosophy, and the immensely powerful and alluring Islamic empire. This project will also examine the coalescence of Arab-Islamic civilization and Christendom, and explore the ways in which this process shaped their sense of themselves as “Detroit Strong.”

Detroit strong: Cynthia Griggs Fleming

F reedom at Midnight is the working title of Cynthia Griggs Fleming’s fourth book, one of several projects she plans to pursue when she retires from the university this spring.

Freedom at Midnight is an oral history of the rise, decline, and remaking of Detroit through the eyes of its black citizens. Detroit, with its booming automotive industry, was the birthplace of the American middle class, Fleming argues. The city had a profound significance for African Americans. Detroit’s codename on the Underground Railroad was “Midnight.” Real “freedom.” Fleming contends, emerged only after Henry Ford introduced the five-dollar day for auto workers in 1914. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, Detroit emerged as the most important industrial city in the United States. African Americans found good jobs that allowed them to own their houses, send their children to competitive schools, and retire on secure pensions. This was the Detroit where Cynthia Fleming was born in 1949 and which

started using a modern concept of science several decades in advance of other European nations, and Phillips’s research explains the reasons for their precocious adoption of this category. In Armies of Heaven: The First Crusade and the Quest for Apocalypse (2011), Jay Rubenstein retells the story of the First Crusade in a way that draws forth the apocalyptic motiva-tions and beliefs that underlay the unprecedented brutal battles that it spawned. In 1096, tens of thousands of warrior-heroes from France, Germany, and Italy, marched east with the goal of reclaiming the city of Jerusalem for Christendom. Their mission, later known as the First Crusade, reached its culmination four years later and in the process inaugurated a new kind of warfare: holy, unrestrained, and apocalyptic.

Communication and Cooperation in Early Imperial China challenges longstanding notions of the Qin dynasty, China’s first imperial government, and especially on the communica-tion necessary for it. Sun links together events and actions that past scholars have viewed as separate and explains them as comprising a set of early media for mass communication over the whole of the realm, toward the goal of successful governance.

Steve Ash’s most recent book is A Massacre in Memphis: The Race Riot That Shook the Nation One Year after the Civil War (2013). It is the first book-length study of the horrific, three-day-long Memphis riot of 1866 during which rioters murdered forty-six black men, women, and children; assaulted, robbed, and raped many others; and burned down every black church and school in the city, along with many dwellings. One of the most sensational events of the post–Civil War era, the riot spurred Congress to take action to protect the South’s ex-slaves and helped launch Radical Reconstruction.

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The James K. Polk Presidential Papers Project

By Tom Chaffin, director and editor of the Correspondence of James K. Polk

The James K. Polk Presidential Papers Project is pleased to announce the publication of Volume 12 (January–July 1847) of the Correspondence of James K. Polk. This latest installment in the Polk series, published by the University of Tennessee Press, documents a critical seven months in one of America’s most transformational presidencies.

A former Tennessee governor and congressman, Polk was the eleventh US president (1845–1849). Many of the new volume’s letters chronicle his prosecution of the Mexican War, a conflict that, along with his 1846 acquisition of what is today’s Pacific Northwest, increased by one-third the size of the United States. The letters—gathered from the Library of Congress and other repositories, most of them until now unpublished—also lift the veil on the personal, life and business affairs of one of the most private men ever to occupy the presidency.

While many letters document the Mexican War, others reveal lesser-known foreign-policy interests under Polk, including Hawaii, Cuba, and Europe. Still others concern Polk’s business and personal affairs. Volume 12 also introduces several editorial changes to the series—including the inclusion of birth and death dates for all individuals identified in the volume’s notes. Another change concerns additional information on slaves referred to in the volume’s letters. As I write in the volume’s introduction, much of the extant Polk historiography, most of it focused on policy issues, also tends to shed scant light on the identities of these individuals.

Volume 12: January–July 1847

Correspondence of
JAMES K. POLK

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☐ The William Bruce Wheeler Endowment, which funds graduate student research

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  - Scholarship awards to support a number of undergraduate history majors, some for financial need, others to reward excellence in undergraduate research
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  - A time of declining financial support for the humanities at the state and national level, private donations are crucial. Your dollars will be gratefully received and carefully stewarded, supporting a dynamic department that is leading the way in UT’s drive to be a Top-25 university.

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FOOTNOTES

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The UT history faculty: (front row) Monica Black, Dan Feller, Chad Black, Margaret Cook Andersen, Laura Nenzi, Ernest Freeberg, (second row) J. P. Dessel, Tore Olsson, Lynn Sacco, (back row) Luke Harlow, Jay Rubenstein, Charles Sanft, Jacob Latham, Bob Bast, Catherine Higgs, and Vejas Liulevicius