

## PROVIDING PERSPECTIVES IN TUMULTUOUS TIMES

Along with teaching students and writing books, our faculty members spend a good deal of time bringing history to the wider community. We give lectures to groups big and small, from senior centers and civic clubs to major national museums and conferences. Perhaps more than ever, many seek some historical perspective on our own tumultuous times.

To take a few examples—Dan Feller has been busy this year talking to the public about the limitations of making glib analogies between the populism of Andrew Jackson and the politics of the Trump administration. Vejas Liulevicius has given talks across the country helping people understand the long shadows cast by Europe’s Great War. Lynn Sacco has spent the spring semester fielding calls from media outlets across the world who are fascinated by her new honors course on Dolly Parton’s America.



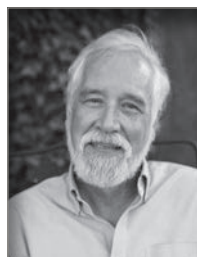
We welcome these opportunities to serve the widest possible public, to show how a historical perspective can shed light and spark good questions, even if it does not always deliver peace of mind.

All who give public talks like these, however, notice that the audience is almost always older. Many of them come forward after the presentation to testify

that when younger they had never fully appreciated history, that history once seemed like a litany of dead presidents, and that only life experience made the study of the past seem interesting and vital.

Of course, we try to combat that short-sightedness every day in our classes. We make history relevant and stress that a well-educated citizen must not only know some facts, but also learn to think historically, to appreciate the interplay of many forces shaping our world. At a time when history majors are on the decline at many universities and colleges, we are pleased to be maintaining a robust group of majors and hope to rescue many more young people from the curse of launching into their lives unaware of all that has come before.

Thanks to the efforts of Pat Rutenberg, we are also working to recruit the next generation of history students. A senior lecturer, Pat has organized our UT Bridge to AP US History project. Now heading into its fourth year, the program connects our American history faculty with students from Fulton and Austin-East High Schools who are taking Advanced Placement US History. These are classes blessed with talented and motivated teachers and students we think should join us as history majors at UT. After we visit their classes throughout the school year, the bridge program culminates in a campus visit, where students enjoy a history lecture, get advice on admissions, take a campus tour, and go home with a bag of Big Orange souvenirs.



It’s a great success, and we are grateful to Pat, and all the faculty volunteers, who are working to recruit the next class of history majors; and we don’t even need to borrow the athletic department’s plane to do it.

**-ERNIE FREEBERG**  
Professor and Head  
Department of History

# Telling Life's Stories

By Meredith McGroarty



The ability to cut through the digital flotsam and connect with an audience, whether it is a group of corporate executives or a grandmother in Flatbush, is a skill as prized in the professional world as a head for numbers or a sharp working knowledge of digital branding strategies. Storytelling, the ability to synthesize and present information in a compelling way, however, is a skill that forms the bedrock of the study of history. Three graduates of our history program in three very different fields say this core skill set, honed in college, was the most vital to their career choices and achievements.

Addressing potentially the widest audience is **Bo Saulsbury** ('86), senior R&D staff member in the energy and transportation science division at Oak Ridge National Laboratory (ORNL). Saulsbury manages the division's Fuel Economy Information Project, which aims to provide information to the public about fuel efficiency for various types of vehicles, including those using petroleum, electric, diesel, and other types of energy sources, as well as hybrid vehicles. Studying history helped Saulsbury develop two major skills necessary to his current work.

*"The main thing history contributed is that there was a strong emphasis on critical and independent thinking in history class," Saulsbury says. "The second thing that was valuable was learning how to communicate information through discussions, presentations, and debate topics where you have to defend your point of view."*

Saulsbury noted that energy research ties in heavily with climate change, both on a technical level—hybrid vehicles perform differently in different climates—and on a larger, geopolitical one. Here, the specifics of history come into play, with past events serving as cautionary tales. He pointed to the 1970s when the fuel embargo caused wide-scale social disruption and provided a lesson on the dangers of relying on a single source—natural, political, or corporate—for one's energy supply.

"Investment in alternative energy forms, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and fighting climate change are all vitally important," Saulsbury says. "The only way to bring that about, however, will be through educating the public, conveying facts about energy sources and efficiency, as well as a sense of context about the wider issues we all face."

**Claire O'Neill** ('08) also noted that her history degree helped her gain a sense of context which, along with the ability to present information in a compelling way, is a necessary skill in her profession – journalism.

O'Neill recently became creative director of the climate desk at the *New York Times*, a position created as part of the paper's drive to expand its coverage of climate change. O'Neill, who had previously been a producer at NPR, said her history degree helped her learn how to draw from different disciplines to research and tell a story.

"Training in history – research, analysis, writing, and storytelling – means you're better equipped to understand the complexity of an issue, situate it in historical context, and understand how that will inform what happens next," O'Neill says.



Such training was useful for her NPR job where she had to move deftly from one topic to another, from medium to medium, as the situation demanded.

*“One day I might be working with the science desk on a story about pollution; the next, I could be working with the politics team to analyze inauguration speeches; and the day after that, I could be recording a live performance with a musician,” she says. “I love the variety.”*

Both O’Neill and Saulsbury said studying history helped them convey complex information clearly to a wider audience. Tailoring information to specific audiences, however, is exactly what **Blake Renfro** (’07) does for a living.



Currently a program manager for executive development at the University of North Carolina (UNC) Kenan-Flagler Business School, Renfro conducts management consulting and executive-level seminars with a variety of clients, many of whom are corporate executives or members of the military.

*“Making intelligent, well-informed connections between ideas and conveying important information*

*to different audiences are things I do on a daily basis,” Renfro says. “Being able to tell a compelling narrative and tailor a narrative to different audiences is one of the most powerful things you can do. I learned that as an undergrad at UT.”*

Whether addressing a general audience or a specific one, being able to have confidence in one’s ideas while being open to other perspectives is a valuable skill in the workforce and one that Renfro believes faculty in the UT history department do a good job conveying. Career-wise, being able to demonstrate how one can apply these critical thinking, analytical, and communication skills to a specific job will be key to obtaining employment, he added.

“There are a lot of employers who’d rather have people with a specialized business or accounting degree, but if you can demonstrate how your skills can be applied, you’ll be better off than other majors,” Renfro says. “Being able to demonstrate that the degree is useful and you do have the skills to do these jobs is key to getting them.”

The path to a dream job may not be linear; it may branch and loop back, but anyone who has studied history knows there are lessons and pleasures in the detours and side alleys. Applying the knowledge gained through history study often makes visible the hidden connections between topics, fields, and listeners. Life is a story; and history helps you write your own.



## **Scobey** Named 2017 Outstanding Alumna

**Margaret Scobey**, a longtime public servant and former US Ambassador to Syria and Egypt, received the **Department of History’s 2017 Outstanding Alumna** award during the annual honors ceremony April 12, 2017.

Originally a political science major, Scobey switched to history due to the quality of the professor who taught her western civilization course. According to Scobey, the intellectual training and writing standards of the discipline of history has served her well in the diplomatic life.

*“A diplomat’s job to explain the social, political, and economic realities of another country is not dissimilar to a historian’s effort to explain the social, political, and economic realities of another time,” Scobey says.*

“The requirement to not only explain, but also to provide support for your conclusions in concise language – the work of a historian – is also necessary for a successful diplomat.”

To learn more about Scobey and her career as a diplomat, visit <http://tiny.utk.edu/Scobey>.

# Unusual Sources of Evidence

History comes in all shapes and sizes. Historians and their archives are like peanut butter and jelly - the two just go together. There are, however, many sources for historical evidence beyond the archive. A few of our faculty have discovered history in some unusual places.



## Charles Sanft, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR

During the early imperial period, especially between about 100 BCE and 100 CE, there was a significant military presence in the area of what is now Gansu, Xinjiang, and Inner Mongolia. The military bureaucracy in charge of that presence left behind its documents, and the arid environment helped preserve them. Those documents provide information about the functioning of military institutions and the lives of soldiers and others who lived in the area.

The image to the left, shows an example of wooden writing strips from China's desert northwest. These strips contain a brief text explaining how to evaluate swords. It advises the reader about how to identify high quality blades based on visual examination.

Image source: Hu Zhi, ed., *Han Strips from Juyan, Inner Mongolia*, vol. 2 (Chongqing: Chongqing Publishing, 2008), 13.

## Alison Vacca, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR

At the end of the 10th century, a scion of the Armenian royal house founded a monastery at Hałpat and celebrated his good deeds by erecting a statue of himself on its façade. We find an inscription on this statue where the weave of his turban breaks pattern: *shāhanshāh Anih al-malik, King of Kings of Ani, King.*

Ani, known as “the City of 1,001 Churches,” is now a haunting city of ruins in eastern Turkey. At the end of the 10th century, however, it was the heart of the thriving Kingdom of Armenia. On the face of it, this inscription reveals nothing but a claim to kingship and capital, both easily corroborated elsewhere.

Yet we can in fact learn a lot from this inscription. *Shāhanshāh* is the title of the kings of the pre-Islamic Iranian Empire, which had collapsed centuries earlier. In the 10th century, Muslim rulers across Iran and Iraq frequently borrowed the title to vaunt their own importance. The Armenian nobles express their power in terms that are familiar both to their own history (as a province of the pre-Islamic Iranian empire) and also to



their contemporary Muslim neighbors. They announce themselves in Arabic (*al-malik*), but also Persian (*shāhanshāh*) instead of their native Armenian.

While the words of the inscription bring nothing new to the table, we still learn that expressions of power were rooted in the pre-Islamic Iranian past, that the regional language of power was Arabic, and that Christians formulated their claims to power in dialogue with their Muslim neighbors.



**Philistine Pottery, 1200 BCE**  
(photograph by J.P. Dessel)

## J.P. Dessel, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR

Archaeologists deal with stuff—material culture—and there is no stuff more ubiquitous on archaeological sites than ceramics. Ceramics have an extraordinary range in both high- and low-tech applications from water filters and dinnerware to joint replacements and tiles on the space shuttle. Our cultural landscape is populated with iconic characters made from clay such as Gumby, Wallace and Gromit, and the California Raisins. A world without ceramics would be unrecognizable.

Ceramics have a long history, reaching back to the Upper Paleolithic, around 28,000 BCE. Archaeologists found human and animal figurines made from clay at Dolní Vestonice in the Czech Republic. Whether these figurines were intentionally heated (making them ceramic) is still up for discussion, but clearly the very first use of clay was non-utilitarian, used to express religious, artistic, or abstract ideas.

A more functional and quotidian use of ceramics to produce pottery for food processing, storage, and transport began roughly 7000 BCE in the Near East, or perhaps as early as 10,000 BCE in Japan. This led to the accumulation of surplus and wealth, allowing the creation of markets and credit. It also led to an expansion of the culinary arts as new methods of food preparation and new foods such as cheese, beer, and wine were invented. The production of pottery eventually became a specialized skill and led to manufacturing concepts such as standardization.

Pottery also served as a blank canvas for communicating social information. Decorative schemas told stories. Activities, such as feasting, used well-made or highly decorated pottery as a means of projecting social status and wealth. The study of ceramics enables archaeologists to piece together the social, economic, and even political worlds of the past.

## Julie Reed, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR

From her winding intellectual path to become a historian of Native Americans, Professor Reed is comfortable with out-of-the-ordinary primary materials. If she learned two years ago, however, the next archive she entered would require a helmet and knee pads, she would not have believed it. Yet, her newest archival materials include writings in several caves located in what was the Old Cherokee Nation before forced removal (1838-1840).

As Cherokee people faced increasing pressure to remove west of the Mississippi, Sequoyah, an illiterate, monolingual Cherokee speaker, invented a written language. Its ease of use led to its widespread dissemination. Sequoyah moved west voluntarily in advance of forced removal, while his invention remained in the east and went west. Cherokee people used this writing in many expected ways: they wrote letters, established a bilingual newspaper, published their laws, and recorded history.

For most early 19th-century Cherokee people, caves were not unknown. In fact, caves occupied a significant place within older cosmological understandings of the world, which is reflected in some of the writings on the cave walls. Cherokee people also used this space to record recent events; they recorded history.

What makes this archival record so profound is that rarely are collisions of the changes and continuities over time that historians study so obvious. Cherokee people used Sequoyah's new technological innovation in an old and powerful space to convey more ancient understandings of the world. The archive, the cave itself, and what it contains, the texts, are both primary documents. So, whether she expected it or not, Reed is there—in a cave—conducting archival research.

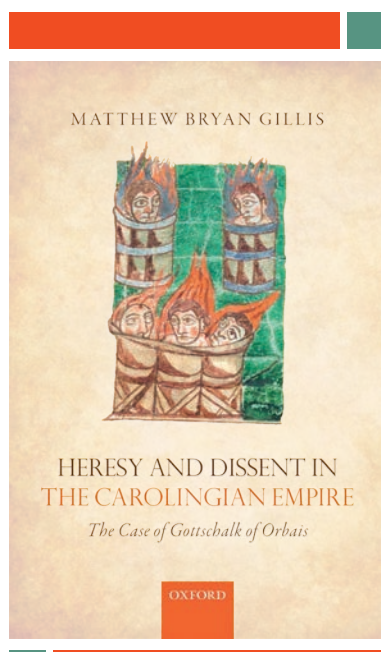


# Faculty Updates

**From published articles in a French newspaper to interviews in Lithuania, our history faculty have had an exciting and productive year!**

Learn more about what our faculty are up to at

<https://tiny.utk.edu/faculty-news>.



**Matthew Gillis**, assistant professor of history, recently published a book about Gottschalk of Orbais, who Gillis calls “the Carolingian Empires’ greatest trouble maker.” Read the entire interview with Gillis.

<https://tiny.utk.edu/Gillis>.

# Writing Tutors Pay Off

**Graduate students in our department play an important role as writing tutors for undergraduates in history courses.**

Tutors help navigate the particular challenges historical writing poses, such as organizing evidence from primary sources, constructing sophisticated arguments, and citing sources correctly. Writing tutors provide students an additional set of eyes and an advanced editor for their work. The move also frees up professors and teaching assistants for the large survey classes so they can concentrate on lesson preparation and grading.



We expanded the program in during the 2016-17 academic year when Josh Hodge, Brad Phillis, and Josh Sander served as tutors. Available to students during extended office hours throughout the week, the tutors worked with more than 100 students, mainly from the survey courses, over the course of the academic year. Some students brought their work to the writing tutors several times in order to write the best paper possible. Other students come during the planning and outlining stage of their papers and work with the tutors throughout the entire process of writing a paper.

Regardless of when they come or how long they stay, tutoring services are paying off. Several professors have noticed a marked improvement in the writing by students who work with our graduate student writing tutors. We look forward to another successful academic year!



*To read more news about our outstanding graduate students, please visit us online.*

<https://tiny.utk.edu/graduate-news>



# Remembering the Great War

As Americans join our European counterparts in remembering World War I, UT historians helped the campus and community honor this centennial and reckon with the war's meaning.



The war destroyed three vast European empires and gave rise to new countries such as Poland, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia. Britain and France also carved up the Middle East along arbitrary lines and created borders for modern-day Iraq, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia, disregarding how they divided tribes and pushed together ethnic groups that had centuries-old feuds.

"The borders drawn then are the ones being contested today," says **Vejas Liulevicius**,

director of the Center for the Study of War and Society (CSWS) who also lectures on the fact that many of today's news headlines can be traced back to decisions made after the war.

In addition to redrawing the world map, the Great War changed our culture in profound ways.

"The English language was never the same," Liulevicius says. "Words like honor, sacrifice, and duty could never be completely unproblematic again."

Liulevicius is the author of two books that explore the impact of the war on Germany and Eastern Europe and produced a 36-lecture recorded course on WWI with The Great Courses company. He serves as a member of the Tennessee Great War Commission. Last fall, he was featured in a historical documentary on the Eastern Front in WWI, which aired on German and French public television. He also was invited to speak at the National World War I Memorial and Museum in Kansas City.

Closer to home, the war left a conflicted legacy over the expansion of federal power and the rights of citizens to speak out against war.

"People have such strong memories of patriotic posters and victory parades, but we forget how divided the American public was in April 1917," says Ernest Freeberg, head of the Department of History.

"Many felt the European war was not America's problem to solve, and the sympathies of American immigrants were torn. Religious pacifists, political radicals, and many people of German, Irish, and Jewish ancestry were deeply ambivalent, and some openly resisted the call to war."

The government's effort to rally American support included the nation's first massive propaganda campaign and the arrest of almost 2,000 anti-war speakers. Stirring war fever, the government inspired a wave of vigilante violence against war dissenters. Freeberg is the author of a book exploring the imprisonment of Eugene V. Debs, the Socialist leader sentenced to 10 years in prison for speaking against the war. As part of the Great War centenary, Freeberg has been sharing the story of Debs's arrest, and the civil liberties movement that won his release, with audiences both on and off campus and historical societies in Tennessee and surrounding states.



To ensure that people do not forget the legacies of World War I, staff at the CSWS organized a series of events funded by a grant from the Library of America (in cooperation with NEH and the Gilder Lehrman Institute). Programming kicked off in February with co-sponsorship of the Fleming-Morrow lecture, which featured military historian **Chad Williams** of Brandeis University, who explored the role of 380,000 black soldiers who fought and labored in the US Army during the conflict. In April, CSWS partnered with the McClung Museum to host a public hands-on examination of artifacts of the war from museum collections.

For more information about the Center for the Study of War and Society, visit [csws.utk.edu](https://csws.utk.edu).



*Liulevicius' lecture at the National WWI Memorial and Museum can be viewed on YouTube: <https://tinyurl.com/Liulevicius>*

**DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY**

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## Learning from the past and finding a path to the future.

The Department of History provides an engaged and exciting environment to think and learn about the past and develop perspectives for the future.

**Gifts to the department will:**

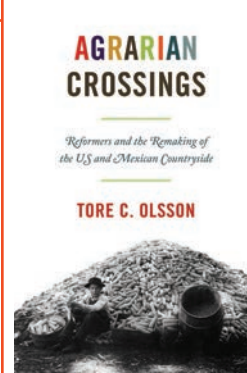
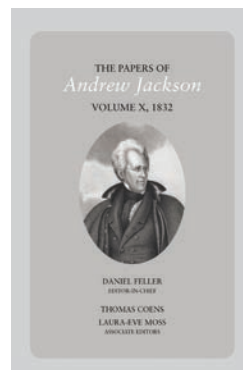
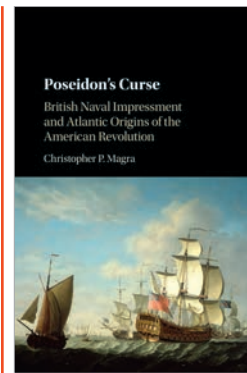
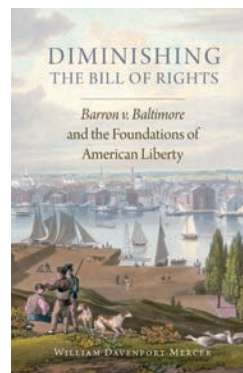
- Help dynamic and accomplished faculty in their mission to produce ground breaking research.
- Train a new generation of professional historians.
- Extend the benefits of an excellent liberal arts education to more citizens of the state.



*Your donation to the department counts more than ever.*

We are grateful for our alumni, donors, and friends who support history at UT. Join us on our journey with your gift today!

To donate online, visit [history.utk.edu](http://history.utk.edu)



## From the Bookshelf

From navigating the high seas to understanding the US-Mexican countryside, faculty in the Department of History are busy publishing research about a variety of historical topics.

Learn more at [history.utk.edu](http://history.utk.edu)