FROM THE CHAIR

John Barrington, November 2012

This past year has been an eventful one for the History Department. One of the most exciting developments has been Furman’s decision to take over the operation of the Upcountry History Museum, located in downtown Greenville. The History Department has long had a close relationship with the Museum. Steve O’Neill played a central role in its founding, and Courtney Tollison has supervised numerous undergraduate interns there and organized a score of public events—perhaps most notably, a prize-winning exhibit on the Upstate during World War II. Now, with Furman directly controlling the Museum’s operations, the History Department enjoys an enhanced role in bringing academic history before the general public. Lloyd Benson has organized a series of lectures and conferences to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation. The series kicked off in September with a lecture by Vernon Burton, former history major at Furman and now professor of history at Clemson University. Another distinguished alum, Tomiko Brown-Nagin, winner of this year’s prestigious Bancroft Prize for American history, gave a public lecture at the Museum on the Supreme Court and Civil Rights. Several members of the department have given lunchtime talks on a variety of topics. The lively interest shown by the local community in all these presentations reminds us that our teaching and research resonate far beyond the walls of academia.

We have been fortunate this year to welcome Carolyn Day, our new historian of modern Britain. Day, who started this past August, comes to Furman after graduate study at Cambridge and Tulane Universities, and she brings a unique mixture of medical and fashion history—along with an endless supply of energy and enthusiasm.

Historians make excellent administrators, thanks to our ability to analyze complex situations with detachment and fairness. Many members of the department have been or are at present chairing significant university committees. This year, Tim Fehler took up his new position as director of Undergraduate Research and Internships. Fortunately, his duties still allow him to teach three courses a year, so we have not been deprived of one of our prize-winning teachers.

Travel Study continues to be an extremely important component of a Furman education, and the department has been very active in this area. During 2011–2012, Tim Fehler took students to Eastern Europe; Steve O’Neill and Erik Ching led an expedition to Central America; Diane Vecchio co-directed a program to Italy; and during Maymester Wendy Matsumura introduced students to Japan. Lane Harris is now teaching Furman undergrads in China, and future programs include study in New Orleans, Continental Europe, India, Edinburgh, Brussels, Japan again, and a tour of several cities in the United States and Canada.

This coming March, our department will host the annual conference of the regional branch of Phi Alpha Theta, the national honors society for historians. Lane Harris and Jason Hansen have worked hard to organize this event, and we look forward to meeting professors and students from other colleges and universities, and to demonstrating what our majors can do.

Once again, the History Department’s reception at Homecoming was well attended, with alumni from the Class of ’67 to the Class of ’12, as well as Emeritus Professor Ed Jones, joining us. We enjoy hearing your news and meeting your families, and urge you to schedule a visit to Furman and to the History Department for Homecoming next year.
By Timothy Fehler and Grace Culleton (’12)

"Ye, West Virginia, there is a Santa Claus," read the headlines after the Christmas 2002 Powerball lottery drawing when West Virginian Jack Whittaker became the single largest-ticket winner in international lottery history. Stating that he had been "blessed my whole life," Whittaker promised that his first three checks would be written to three local church pastors. Before spending any money, he pledged to tithe 10% of the winnings to his church. Controversy spread across Upstate South Carolina, as many religious leaders argued whether lottery winnings should be used by the church; many conservative Protestant pastors argued vehemently that they would not accept such sin-tainted money: "Money that is it gained like that is not scriptural, not blessed to the church; many conservative church leaders of both Geneva and Emden. From the consistory records, however, it seems that the practical problems associated with religious beliefs; for instance, "All luck is in God's hand, as we understand; I purchase 2 lots," "God's foreknowledge must occur; 1 Lot," "God gives, God takes away, if God give me a lot, let it come my way, 5 lots," and "I would like a good lot with God; purchase 3 lots." (see image for example).

I am intrigued by the language used in Calvinist Emden as the officials sought both to operate and to prohibit certain games of chance. Here is one example:

"Lottery-Dirick Heinens"

"Predestination."

The most rewarding aspect of this summer research experience was insight into a possible career path. Despite my initial wish to pursue museum work, I discovered after my internship that my love for going to museums did not end there and that I was interested in and that I was asking more questions than I was answering.

As I entered my senior year as a history major, I, like many others, could boast a resume full of a variety of history classes along with research and response papers to prove it; however all of those research papers and class lectures on historiography did not fully prepare me for undertaking a research project of this level. One example of a road block I encountered was the fact that my sources, the Consistory Records, were written in 16th-century French and first had to be translated to English. While my reading ability in French is passable, the foreignness of the 16th-century vocabulary and grammar was time consuming and terrifying. Translation issues, along with other frustrations, such as a limited number and nature of sources, were eye-opening as I came to more fully understand the time and effort that goes into studying in depth even such a narrow and specific topic. The most rewarding aspect of this summer research experience was insight into a possible career path. Despite my initial wish to pursue museum work, I discovered after my internship in Scotland that my love for going to museums did not translate into a career. While this project was overwhelming at times, I realize that this was a learning experience and one that I would like to continue to explore.
Two weeks before Katrina I had begun teaching my very first course at Louisiana State University. Once classes resumed, my course was double the size and filled with many new and frankly shell-shocked faces. I learned very quickly that we all were negotiating and attempting to craft a new normal under extraordinary circumstances. Academic expectations had to be maintained but in an environment marked by the reality and awareness of not only your own struggles but also those of your students, colleagues, and family members who were experiencing extreme stressors ranging from the loss of family members, friends, homes, communities, and sense of identity. In the long run, teaching under these circumstances imparted an awareness, early on in my career, that effective teaching requires an holistic approach to the student and moves beyond the confines of the classroom.

I understand that you are planning on co-teaching a May X course this summer in New Orleans. How will these personal experiences translate into the classroom? Any recommendations on places alumni should see if they come to visit?

The course will focus on building a sustainable New Orleans and is intended to encourage students to think about the city critically and pay special attention to the city's rebirth in the wake of Katrina and the BP oil spill. I hope my experiences can provide an insider perspective and allow the students to develop a personal connection with the city. New Orleans is a fabulous city to visit, and there are various cultural and historical layers that can be experienced not only spatially, but also through the food and music. The French Quarter is of course a must-see, but while you are there, be sure to take in Preservation Hall. The city is also known for its culinary excellence, and you can take in an amazing meal almost anywhere in the city. For a traditional uptown brunch I recommend Commander's Palace. The city itself has so many wonderful things to offer, and I feel as if I have only begun to scratch the surface.

What's the last non-history related book that you've read?

I am thrilled to live in a place with topography, and I am truly enjoying the change. I am also looking forward to exploring more of the city, such as Creole Creamery or beignets at Café du Monde. For a traditional uptown brunch I recommend Commander's Palace. The city itself has so many wonderful things to offer, and I feel as if I have only begun to scratch the surface.

You've spent considerable time in your career in the state of Louisiana, including living through Hurricane Katrina. What was that like?

Although I had always loved the subject, I never had any intention of becoming an historian. Instead my sights were set on a career in microbiology, although feeling history would provide a nice break from genetics and organic chemistry I decided to double major. While in high school, I became intrigued by the problem of Pseudomonas aeruginosa infections in Cystic Fibrosis and was able to conduct research, present, and publish my findings, the process was eye-opening. I realized that as much as I enjoyed the intellectual process, lab work was not where my passions lay. After graduation, I spent time exploring alternate careers in science as well as history and it was my position as the Interpretive program developer and historian for all the state parks in Louisiana that cemented my desire to become an historian.

What's the last non-history related book that you've read?

I love the title of your book (in progress): Drop Dead Gorgous: Tuberculosis and Victorian Ideals of Beauty. It's a little strange though to think of TB and beauty as being related. Can you walk me through the basic argument? How did you get interested in this subject?

I agree, the idea of disease and beauty seem to be diametrically opposed, and it was that very detail that sparked my interest. During the late 18th and early 19th centuries there was a chasm between the gruesome biological manifestations of tuberculosis and the comparatively positive representations employed as part of the socio-cultural strategies for experiencing this illness. During this period, there was a tubercular moment in which cultural ideas about beauty increasingly intertwined with the disease process of consumption to allow for the ravages of the illness to be presented in an aesthetically pleasing light. As a result, tuberculosis was rationalized as an affliction to be emulated both in beauty ideals and dress. Beauty was believed to be one of the noteworthy symptoms of the hereditary predisposition to tuberculosis; furthermore, once established, the symptoms were thought to increase the attractiveness of the sufferer as the disease's effects were visible in the complexion, eyes, and even the smile. There was a dynamic interaction between fashion and disease the period from 1780–1850, as dress was not only accorded responsibility as a causative agent of tuberculosis but the ravages of the illness were also often highlighted by the prevailing fashions.

The topic of disease seems to one that is constantly on the mind of the American public. From movies such as Outbreak and Contagion to news reports over SARS and H1N1, we seem to be constantly talking about this subject. Have you found that these concerns translate into the classroom? Any plans to teach about them here at Furman?

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I have been re-reading Terry Pratchett's Discworld series.

I am planning to introduce a History of Medicine and Disease course at Furman. The class will not only examine medical theories and practices but will also assess the various social, cultural, political, and economic dimensions that underpin and continue to affect the experiences of health and the treatment of illness.

Although, I am not a historian of the British Empire, any understanding of Britain of the British Empire here in the U.S. has recently begun to decline as departments have increasingly emphasized the study of the British Empire over the British state. How does the idea of empire fit into your British history course?

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Another altogether different kind of Freedom story from South Carolina comes from the primary source in Figure A., which has brought much head shaking as it has circulated through the Department. In 1887, the Bangor Whig and Courier, of Bangor, Maine, reported that a man living in a narrow valley near Hogback Mountain, a remote town that lies between Travelers Rest, South Carolina, and Tryon, North Carolina, learned of Emancipation 24 years after Lincoln's issue and was freed from servitude.

To shed insight on complex legacy of Emancipation that continued even after those most remote learned of it, we have found an excerpt from the recorded account of Dave White from Congaree, South Carolina. White's story was taken down as part of the WPA Slave Narratives in 1933. White, a former slave, was 97 years old at the time his narrative was taken. He recalls in single thread how his father, a slave, had been charged with courting all the votes from McClennellville to Charleston. When Reconstruction armies came after the war, they said to him, “You are as free as frog, and all your children are free.” His short story seems to frame in a single breath the freedom stories of a hundred years—the transition from being a slave tasked with carrying votes to being a citizen with full voting rights, which occurred over several generations of Dave White’s family.

Each of these stories offers a unique perspective on how Emancipation happened and its relation to our local community. Robert Smalls, Caesar, and Samuel Pringle, the Hogback Mountain man, and Dave White are in some ways worlds apart, though they are related to the tight geographic and chronological space of 19th Century South Carolina that is just the tip of our very broad idea of Freedom stories. The tremendous variety and at times, even dissonance between accounts of how Emancipation happened, challenges us to a truer picture of history—both fractures and veins of gold in the monolithic account of Lincoln’s Emancipation.

We invite and encourage history alumni to join our commemoration project. You are an invaluable link in the relationships between our community of academic historians and the community at large that the Freedom Stories project hopes to cultivate. The lecture series and mini-conference happening in Greenville are open to the public, and our digital history project is accepting online international submissions.

For more information, visit www.furman.edu/freedomstories or contact Lloyd Benson, Furman History Department, 864-294-3492, email: lloyd.benson@furman.edu.
The traditional interpretation of the Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962 is one that was imparted to us by Robert Kennedy in his unfinished memoir Thirteen Days. Published posthumously in 1969, this volume has been widely read and served in 2001 as the basis for the movie of the same name, starring Kevin Costner and Bruce Greenwood. In the book, Robert Kennedy described the personalities involved in the missile crisis, especially of those who participated in ExComm. This was the Executive Committee of administrators, foreign policy experts, and military leaders that met daily in working sessions to resolve the crisis with the Soviet Union and Cuba. As Kennedy told it, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and other “hawks” advocated air strikes and a possible invasion of Cuba to deal with the Soviet missiles being installed just 90 miles from American territory. The book’s contributors, plus the good judgment of his brother the President, who kept the “war mongers” at bay and creatively provided solutions to end nuclear Armageddon.

Such views are now being called into question with the release in early October 2012 of 2700 pages of material from the Robert F. Kennedy papers, lodged at the John F. Kennedy Library and Museum in Boston. Early reports from Sheldon Stern, a former director of the library, who has heard the tapes of ExComm conversations, suggest that Robert Kennedy selectively used these White House deliberations to burnish his own image and that of his brother. According to Stern, Kennedy “created a largely fictional account of the ExComm meetings.” He adds: “In fact, the tapes demonstrate that Robert Kennedy was confrontational and hawkish from day one—through day seventeen—and even beyond into the November post-crisis.” RFK, according to Stern, continued to press for an invasion of Cuba after October 18, 1962, as “the last chance that we will have to destroy Castro.” Kennedy’s recollections about the Jupiter missiles in Turkey, their activation and then removal, also differed substantially from the historical record. Indeed, JFK had not ordered their removal prior to the missile crisis as Robert Kennedy had suggested. Instead, their activation was a key reason for Nikita Khrushchev’s original decision to send nuclear weapons to Cuba. Newly declassified documents from the National Security Archive, a research organization at George Washington University, suggest that even in the weeks following the apparent resolution of the crisis, General Maxwell Taylor felt that nuclear conflict was still possible. In a memo hand-delivered to the White House, Taylor indicated that military planners expected that as many as 18,300 American troops would be killed or wounded in the first ten days of an invasion of Cuba, should one occur—and this would be only for non-nuclear conflict. Soviet forces in Cuba had nearly one hundred small tactical nuclear weapons at their disposal, something not known at the time.

All of this new information suggests that a re-evaluation of the Cuban Missile Crisis is essential. What is emerging now is a more honest and nuanced understanding of the confrontation. Conventional images of key players in the crisis must be revised. The newly released information says much about continuing Cold War tensions, and perhaps contextualizes more fully on-going tensions between the United States and Cuba—a full half century after the world came close to possible destruction.

By Brian E. Strobel
Charles Atkinson (‘01) continues to work at Wilkes Law Firm, P.A., in Spartanburg. He now serves on the Board of Directors of the Blue Ridge Council, BSA and as the Staff-Parish Relations chair at Lee Road United Methodist Church in Taylors.

Sidney Bland (‘93) was invited to give the “State of the Field” address at the 2012 Advanced Placement U.S. History Reading in Louisville, Kentucky. The address features a scholar who has published in a particular setting up and heading the company’s IP program.

Rev. Dwight R. Mays (‘67) recently retired from The Christian (Disciples of Christ) Church in Virginia after thirty-five years in ministry (M.Div, Duke University Divinity School, ‘82).

After twenty-five years of practicing law, James A. Taylor (‘83) has taken a sabbatical (winter and spring 2012) and has enrolled in the graduate history program at the University of Central Florida.

After graduating, Hugh Williamson (‘08) has had a number of different jobs: a pizza cook to cover gas costs for job searches, a biodiesel plant manager where he was one of five workers, an employee in a start-up company, and a banker for Wells Fargo working to aid people with their finances. Recently, he embarked on a new journey as a commercial Insurance Agent with BB&T and bought a house in his hometown of Athens, Georgia.

In January, Andrew Foy (‘00) left his job at HP as a patent counsel for HP Labs, HP’s advanced and exploratory research arm, and joined MicroStrategy, a business and social intelligence software company. For MicroStrategy, he is the company’s first in-house IP attorney charged with setting up and heading the company’s IP program.

After thirty-one and half years of service, E. Jens Holley (‘81) retired from the Clemson University Libraries.

Susan C. Kenny (‘91) works at AT&T doing online marketing (att.com).

Marion Leach (‘43) was the guest of honor at a celebration ceremony dedication of a new building named in honor of her late husband, Col. James H. Leach. She welcomes students of history to take a field trip to “Leach Hall” at Ft. Benning in Georgia.

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FACULTY BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS

Jason Hansen recommends the novel The City & the City (2010) by China Mieville, a murder mystery that takes place in a fictional city divided between two countries. The catch is that in many places both are in the mind. Thus individuals can be in the same room and yet not acknowledge the existence of each other. It’s a great commentary on the ways that we create our own borders, not just in the political sense, but also culturally and socially.

Erik Ching recommends From the Ruins of Empire: The Intellectuals Who Remade Asia (2012) by Pankaj Mishra. The Indian-born Mishra has made a career for himself as a roving intellectual and essayist. One of his more recent works, a 5,000-word critique of Niall Ferguson’s Eurocentric treatise Civilization (2011) in the Times Literary Supplement so riled Ferguson that he has threatened a law suit. In this work Mishra offers an engaging look at some Asian intellectuals’ attempts to understand the meaning of their own countries and Asia more broadly in light of European colonialism. Mishra attributes these intellectuals with laying the foundation for the later anti-colonial movements. Mishra is not a historian by training, but he does a good job of blending primary and secondary sources into a readable narrative.

HISTORY IN THE NEWS

Savita Nair recommends a three-fold examination of Timothy Messer-Kruse’s The Trial of the Haymarket Anarchists: Terrorism and Justice in the Gilded Age (Palgrave-Macmillan, 2011) and The Haymarket Conspiracy: Transatlantic Anarchist Networks (University of Illinois Press, 2012) in conjunction with the National Public Radio (NPR) story about a surprising tension between a historian’s craft and Wikipedia’s mission. Start with the news story. The NPR piece describes how Messer-Kruse uncovers new primary source evidence about this pivotal event in 19th century American labor history that puts the so-called “anarchists” into new and less heroic light. However, in a fascinating 21st century open-source twist, the self-described “collaboratively edited…encyclopedia,” Wikipedia, refused to change its website’s entry about the Haymarket riots on the premise that there weren’t enough “hits” of verifying secondary sources. Critics rebuke Wikipedia for narrow-mindedly accepting a notion that truth, or rather Wikipedia’s preferred term “verifiability,” is held with mass consensus. Messer-Kruse, who is trained as a historian and is a professor of ethnic studies at Bowling Green State University, would rebut that “truth” is best approached through primary source evidence. The news story, the published primary-source based research, and the drama of Wikipedia’s refusal to fully amend its “Haymarket Riot” site shed light on the vagaries and challenges of doing history. Despite what we know, will others ever listen and act accordingly?

To listen to the NPR story, read the article by Messer-Kruse in The Chronicle for Higher Education, and/or review the Wikipedia Haymarket riot site, see: