THE VIEW FROM THE CHAIR’S OFFICE

A year ago A.V. Huff stated that yours truly had left the cares of the Chair behind and was at ease and smiling. Well, thanks to A.V., the situation has changed. I’m back!

We have had a tumultuous year. Jim Smart stuck to his guns, and in spite of our entreaties has retired. This has left all of us missing his kindness, solid and understated professionalism, and, most of all, his constant contributions to the department in ways too numerous to list.

During our search for Smart’s replacement, Tracey Rizzo informed us that she had been offered a position at U.N.C. Asheville. Her contributions to and impact on the department are undeniable, and she too is missed.

But the most dramatic development of the year was the announcement of the choice for the new Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean: A.V. Huff. In a blink, we had lost our Chair and the most distinguished member of the department. Of course our loss was the university’s gain, but our genuine happiness for A.V. is tempered with a sincere sorrow.

To strengthen our temporarily depleted ranks, we have added Tim Fehler, who has a Baylor B.A. and a Wisconsin Ph.D. Tim is a specialist in Renaissance and Reformation History. Danny Varat, Furman class of ’88, has joined us for this year, after having earned his M.A. at L.S.U. Diane Vecchio, a Ph.D. from Syracuse, is also assisting us by teaching a course in European Women’s History, as well as Western Civilization. We are planning to hire permanent replacements to fill at least two positions during the year.

In spite of all the turmoil, the history machine rolls on. We continue to have a healthy number of majors. Our department remains one that is noted for good teaching and members who are at the forefront of serving the university in responsible positions of all kinds. There could be no better manifestation of this general strength than the fact that David Spear was a winner of the Alester G. Furman, Jr., and Janie Earle Furman Meritorious Teaching Award for 1994-95. Although David’s selection came as a surprise to none of us, his being recognized with the coveted award was very gratifying. His excellence has long been obvious, and as one student told me: “I have never known anyone who didn’t like Dr. Spear.” Nor have I.

All the rest of the crew: Benson, Jones (in China for the fall and threatening to retire), Lavery, Leavell, O’Neill and Strobel are their usual provocative and productive selves, inspiring students and keeping the university running. And we have three former colleagues, Al Sanders and Bill Leverette as well as Smart, who are living in happy retirement and whose influence on you and us continues to be a source of pleasure. All of us are interested in all of you. Please stay in touch and come to see us.

John M. Block
BOOK REVIEWS


Events surrounding the O. J. Simpson trial in Los Angeles attest to this country’s enduring preoccupation with race. And despite the oft-stated dream of a colorblind society and the increasingly popular belief that prejudice no longer warrants government remedy, racial problems seem to loom dark on the horizon of the twenty-first century. Harry Ashmore, native Greenvillian and Pulitzer-Prize-winning journalist, helps explain in a highly readable memoir this persistence of race in American life. Ashmore is uniquely suited to merge autobiography with a survey of this nation’s racial history over the last half century. As a respected journalist, prolific author, friend and advisor to presidents, he has had access to the important people who shaped that history. Ashmore invites the reader along as he cultivates personal or professional ties with the likes of Strom Thurmond and Thurgood Marshall, Orval Faubus and Malcolm X, Martin Luther King and Lyndon B. Johnson, Colin Powell and Bill Clinton. Ashmore is never shy about sharing his sentiments concerning these figures whose actions defined the age.

Even if the nature of the book invites some harsh judgments of individuals and policies by the author, his thesis—that much racial progress has been made, but more is needed—remains understated until the end of the book, when he examines recent political developments. Ashmore is best described as a New Deal liberal, a rare commodity in the South during much of the time in question and an increasingly endangered species anywhere in the nation in the 90s. Thus his call for more government activism as the only remedy to persistent racial inequality in America runs headlong into political trends championed by the Gingrich-led Republican Revolution of the mid-1990s. His scathing treatment of the Reagan-Bush presidencies is foreshadowed by his defense of the premises undergirding Johnson’s Great Society. He admits that many of the specific programs were “ill-conceived” or “maladministered”, but at the end of the book implies that only a national recommitment to social reform will make equal justice a reality for all Americans.

The real value of this book, however, is not as a political argument: it remains short on prescriptions and long on descriptions. Readers will enjoy Ashmore’s lively prose and his pithy summations of events and individuals. Furthermore, Ashmore’s account will have especial interest to Furman alumni because of the author’s many personal ties to South Carolina and particularly the Upstate. Civil Rights and Wrongs reconfirms Ashmore’s position as one of this nation’s most perceptive and knowledgeable commentators on race, and is a necessary addition to the library of anyone who wants to better understand the roots of today’s racial problems.

Stephen O’Neill


When one thinks of the Middle Ages one probably thinks first of knights on horseback. Dozens of books have been written on feudalism, on knighthood, and on the cult of chivalry, but none, until now, have discussed the medieval horse. It is a fascinating topic, and one which Davis treats briefly (144 pages), lucidly, and with numerous illustrations.

What Davis makes clear is that it is no easy task to begin and then to maintain a breed of horses. The process takes decades, it’s very expensive, and it is all too easy to lose a breed from neglect or from the chaos of invasion. War horses, especially, had to be bred for size and courage, and by the late Middle Ages they reached a height of 17 or 18 hands. But there were work horses, hunting horses, and training horses to develop, too, each bred with specific purposes in mind.

Davis ranges widely. Spain, France, Germany and even China are all considered, although Davis happily admits that most of his evidence comes from England. One of the key events in the spread of feudalism was of course William’s Conquest of England in 1066, and the Normans were among the best when it came to horse breeding and horsemanship. Davis traces these equestrian concerns from the early Franks through the Renaissance, including even occasional mention of events from the First World War! Davis’s book is
certainly not the definitive treatment of the topic--that book hasn’t been written yet--but it is a great introduction.

David S. Spear

HISTORY SOCIETY NEWS

The Gilpatrick History Society awoke from a deep sleep last year. With enthusiastic faculty support, the students really took an interest in seeing the club become a viable entity on campus. The graduating class of 1995 acted as the perfect example to the other classes with their constant involvement and success.

Last year the club sponsored a number of activities, both academic and social. Some members took field trips to the Carter Center in Atlanta and others went to the Carl Sandburg home in North Carolina. Charles Brock, Assistant Dean of Academic Affairs, spoke with members about the history internships available to Furman students. We invited the Faculty of the University of South Carolina Graduate Program in Applied History to speak about their work. On the suggestion of last year’s faculty advisor, Dr. Steve O’Neill, the club sponsored one of its most popular programs: Reel History. We presented four films, Schindler’s List, Hearts and Minds (a Vietnam documentary), Glory, and Mississippi Burning, which we felt had some historical significance and factual validity. Furman faculty were invited to speak on the films. The club was able to secure CLP credit for each film, and the events attracted over 100 students at each showing. The Reel History program was so popular that a committee is already hard at work planning this year’s selection of films.

The students all agreed that the most rewarding aspect of the club was the interaction between students and faculty outside the classroom. The faculty was very excited about the social opportunities the club provided. At the Halloween party, several professors came disguised as their favorite historic figure. Five professors opened their homes and kitchens for a holiday progressive dinner that was attended by at least twenty students and faculty.

This year the Gilpatrick History Society hopes to keep the momentum going. We are continuing the Reel History program, hoping to increase the number of films shown from four to six. The social committee is planning a Fall term cook-out with honored History department guests President David Shi and Dean A.V. Huff. We are also taking volunteers for another progressive dinner. We hope to offer a panel discussion entitled “What Can You Do with a History Major?” for our members. We are also sponsoring a Fall lecture by Dr. Diane Vecchio who will be teaching women’s history in the Winter term of 1996. The students are really interested in seeing this club grow and remain active. Many students from last year are back and there lots of new faces in the group. I find it encouraging that all are willing to volunteer on committees and participate.

Dr. David Spear is our faculty advisor this year. If you have any questions or suggestions, please contact him or me in the History Department.

Trina S. Rossman ‘96
Gilpatrick History Society President

ALUMNI NEWS

The news below represents the harvest of information we received in response to the first volume of our newsletter. We would love to hear from others of you as well, even if you aren't teaching or writing books. You can reply to the newsletter editor, or any member of the department via regular mail, or via e-mail (eg. Spear_David@Furman.edu).

Darrell Perkins ('50) lives in Marietta, Georgia and is retired from the Lockheed-Martin Aeronautical Systems where he was manager of technical publications. His interest in history was first sparked by Dr. Gilpatrick in Renaissance and Reformation History and continued in U.S. History when he was student assistant to Dr. Walter Hacock during his senior year. He received his MED Degree from Georgia State University in 1974. Darrell’s son, Dr. Davis Perkins ('74) is now president of the Presbyterian Publishing Company. Sidney R. Bland ('59), teaching history at James Madison University, has recently published Preserving Charleston’s Past, Shaping its Future: The Life and Times of Susan Pringle Frost (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press).
David M. Head ('73) received his Ph. D. from Florida State University, then taught as an adjunct at FSU, spent a dozen years at two community colleges in Georgia, and then moved to John Tyler Community College (Virginia) in August 1993, where he is now associate professor of history and program coordinator for social sciences at the Midlothian campus. His book, "The Ebbs and Flows of Fortune: The Life of Thomas Howard, Third Duke of Norfolk," is being published by the University of Georgia Press. Bruce Kleinschmidt ('74) received his law degree in 1978, and a library science degree in 1991, and is now working as librarian at the University of Tennessee. Bruce has been engaged in legal research which "gives one many opportunities to do historical research. In particular, I've been doing research, in connection with a book I am writing, on the investigation by Naval Intelligence of homosexuality and drug use at the Newport Naval Station and War College. FDR was personally involved in overseeing this venture and it got him called before the Senate for hearings on the inappropriateness of the entrapment techniques they were using." After teaching international law in England, David Tolbert ('79) is now practicing it in Vienna, where he is Legal Officer for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. "It has been an interesting time to work on issues involving the Mid-east and to be living on the edge of eastern Europe. Dee and I have been able to travel throughout Poland as well as parts of Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Hungary, with trips planned for the Ukraine and Romania."

Cathy Hand McBride ('80) is working for IBM. Lance Richey ('88) is currently finishing up his dissertation (on Schopenhauer and Saint Augustine) at Marquette University. Lance married Carol Jean Doerr of Nebraska in 1992, and has a daughter who was born in 1994. Scott Spearman ('87) received a Master of Arts in Religion degree from Westminster Theological Seminary in California. Scott married Karen Pyles ('88) who he met on Furman Baltic foreign study program, when Dr. Block "was our fearless leader." Scott, father of three young boys, is now working in Savannah, Georgia as a manufacturing Project Manager at Gulfstream Aerospace Corporation ("where we build the world's largest, fastest, bestest, most luxurious and expensive business jets in the world"). Steve Spearman ('87) is working as a salesman for Patient Care Technologies in Atlanta. He has two children.

Ernest Jenkins ('90) is completing his doctoral work in medieval history at the University of Kansas. Brian Davis ('92) is currently employed as a Senior Account Executive for Dun & Bradstreet in Charlotte, NC. Erin Snyder Shelor ('92) is enrolled in the masters program in history at East Tennessee State (Johnson City), and will be finishing her thesis and degree this academic year. Her thesis concerns the development of the British medical profession in the Victorian period, as it went from a loose confederation of practitioners to a formal professional and social group. She recently won a fellowship which will enable her to finish her thesis without devoting time to a teaching assistantship or other part-time job, and is now looking into graduate schools for her Ph.D. Rusty Godfrey ('92) was named one of Greenville County Teachers of the Year. He teaches American History at J. L. Mann High School. Drew Felgh ('93) is currently working on his M.A. at the University of Kentucky. His thesis concerns the Baptists of South Carolina, 1750-1860. Eric Shaffner ('93) is working as a Peace Corps volunteer in West Africa. Russ Merritt ('93) has completed the M.A. in history from USC, and has just started his second year teaching history at Hammond School in Columbia. Robbie Higdon ('94) has her Masters in Education from James Madison University (Virginia). She is now teaching Social Studies at Lakeview Middle School in Greenville (SC). Brad Sauls ('94) has recently begun work in the Applied History program at USC. Diana Dimitrova ('94) is in graduate school in history at Clemson University. Rick Womble ('94) is studying at St. Andrews University in Scotland.