

# History Happenings

*A newsletter published by the Department of History  
The University of Memphis*

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## In This Issue . . .

*"History is the witness that testifies to the passing of time,"* wrote Cicero, the statesman of ancient Rome. *"It illuminates reality, vitalizes memory, provides guidance in daily life, and brings us tidings of antiquity."* The articles that follow suggest the ways that historians at The University of Memphis are bearing witness to the past.

Dr. Stephen Stein, a professor of military and diplomatic history, is also the Director of our Online Program, and he describes how our department is using innovative teaching techniques that welcome new technology. Dr. Andrei Znamenski, our historian of Modern Russia, explains how his research and reputation brought him to a most unlikely place: the very tip of the Aleutian Islands. Dr. Guiomar Dueñas-Vargas tells us not only about her exciting new research on the elite women of nineteenth-century Colombia, but also about living in Bogotá, walking amongst their ghosts.

Speaking of ghosts, graduate student Laura Cunningham has published a fun and enlightening book of local history called *Haunted Memphis*, and she has survived to tell the tale. Dr. Kent Schull, our historian of the Middle East, relates the details of the department's annual Sesquicentennial Lecture by Dr. James Gelvin of UCLA and his thoughts on political Islam. Finally, one of our most recent Ph.D. graduates, Dr. Joshua Gorman, describes the tribulations and triumphs of his unconventional approach to historical research, identity-building, and memory amongst the Chickasaw Nation.

We hope you enjoy this new edition of the newsletter. Please visit us on the web at <http://history.memphis.edu/> (we will soon be moving to a new website — watch for the announcement) and e-mail our department chair, Dr. Janann Sherman, at [sherman@memphis.edu](mailto:sherman@memphis.edu).

Happy reading!

## *The Future is Now*

*By Stephen Stein*

Last fall, the History Department launched an online program that allows students to complete an undergraduate degree in history no matter where they live. It is one of only a handful of online undergraduate history programs in the country and has proven very popular with students. Course enrollments have grown from fifty last fall to 270 this fall in a dozen sections of six different courses. We expect more than 300 course enrollments this spring and continued growth in the future as we advertise our program nationally. We receive inquiries about the online program from potential students every day. The History Department has become a model for online teaching throughout The University of Memphis and across the historical profession, as the American Historical Association recently recognized: we will be featured in a short film presented at the AHA's annual conference in San Diego this January.

The majority of the students enrolled in the department's online courses take a mix of online and traditional classroom courses. Online courses help students balance work, school, and other responsibilities and allow students to continue their educations despite busy schedules, health issues, or relocation. Many students who take online courses would not otherwise be able to attend college. While our program is still very new, several of our history majors are taking all their courses online, including one in Germany and another who was deployed to Afghanistan last year.

The success of the online program has helped the financial position of the History Department, which, like most academic departments around the country, has experienced sharp budget cuts. Revenue from the online program has allowed the department to increase research funding for both faculty and graduate students. In addition to supporting faculty and student research trips this year, the program funded dissertation fellowships for two graduate students. We expect rising online revenues to allow the department to increase funding even further in the upcoming year.

Unlike with many online programs, full-time faculty teach the majority of our courses, particularly the upper-division courses. These currently range from military history to the history of childhood. We are regularly adding new courses





in a variety of fields including African, ancient, American, Middle Eastern, and Asian history. Several faculty members including Dennis Laumann, Kent Schull, and me have developed courses for the program in their respective fields. Beverly Bond, Peter Brand, and Janann Sherman will be offering new online courses this spring in African American, ancient, and modern American history, and other members of the faculty are also developing new courses for the online program.

In addition to new undergraduate course offerings, we are expanding the number of graduate courses we offer online. Recently, we finalized plans to offer an online MA degree,

which currently awaits approval by the Tennessee Board of Regents. The History Department's successful online program places it at the forefront of college history education.

For more information about the program see <http://www.memphis.edu/ecampus/bahistory.php>

# Five Days in Alaska

*By Andrei Znamenski*

In my earlier research, I studied Native American responses to Russian missionaries in the nineteenth century, which included focusing on Alaska, a colony of the Russian Empire until 1867. During my archival and field trips I came to enjoy Alaskan landscapes and people. So when this September, colleagues invited me to deliver the keynote address to the annual meeting of the Alaska Historical Society, I gladly agreed to return to Alaska for the first time since 2001. Their promise to cover my airfare, lodging and food expenses was an additional incentive. Those who are interested in my conference talk entitled "Patriot Games: Alaska in Modern Russian Nationalist Rhetoric" can find its PDF text in "History Happenings" on the [department's website](#).



To bring a bit of variety to their annual gatherings, this year Alaskan historians held their gathering not in a mainland university town as usual, but on Unalaska, a small island located at the southwestern tip of the state. The

conference was hosted by the Museum of the Aleutians and organized by its director, art historian Zoya Johnson. An Armenian expatriate who was educated in Russia and later worked in Siberia, she is currently a United States citizen and an expert in the culture of the Aleuts, native

residents of the island. It took me twenty-four hours and four airport stops before I reached Unalaska; even a trip from the States to Japan that I made in 2003 had taken me only sixteen hours.



The island met me with large puddles and drizzling rain that never ceased during all five days of the conference. In southwestern Alaska this type of weather is natural throughout an entire year. Grim clouds and mist were hiding the tops of magnificent mountains, adding an aura of mystery to the local landscape.

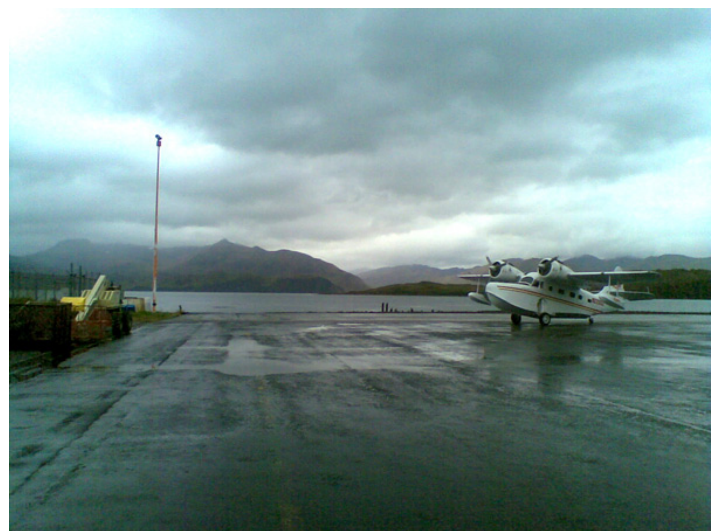
Unalaska, which means “near the peninsula” in translation from the Aleut, is a community of 4,000 people whose life is centered around the local ocean port, school, and three churches: Protestant, Russian Orthodox and Baha’i Center. Native Americans (the Aleuts), who were wiped out by diseases and displaced at first by the Russians and then by Americans, now represent only 7 percent of the population.

“Discovered” in 1759 by Russian and Siberian fur hunters, the island served as a base for the Russian-American Company (RAC), a fur trade monopoly that controlled Alaska from 1799 to 1867. Northern vegetation covers this barren volcanic island. It was amusing to observe dwarf spruce trees not higher than small shrubs. Nineteenth-century missionary Ivan Veniaminov, who wanted to radically reshape not only “savage souls” of native people but also local landscapes, embarked on an ambitious plan to forest Unalaska. He brought spruce saplings from the mainland, planting them all over the island in hopes that they would sprout into mighty trees that RAC could use

for houses and ships. Instead of bending down to the priestly will, nature bent down the trees: the transplanted saplings mutated into tiny dwarf bushes and blended with local tundra landscape.

A visitor who takes a hike over the island will stumble upon remains of concrete bunkers, silent evidence of fights from the Second World War. In 1942 the Japanese Army attacked Unalaska. However, the major war memory for the islanders is a clumsy attempt by the United States Army to evacuate the indigenous population of the island. It degenerated into a bureaucratic nightmare: the Aleuts were taken hundreds of miles away from home and forced into makeshift camps, where they were exposed to cold, starvation, and fatal diseases. Several conference papers explored this botched evacuation from the Aleutian perspective. Other presentations discussed the similarities between Siberian and Alaska indigenous folklore, the Alaska gold rush, and the history of the fur trade.

After the conference was over, despite pouring rain and slippery routes, I was determined to climb one of the volcanic mountains and take a look at the island and surrounding ocean waters from high above. By the evening, drenched and pleasantly tired, I returned rewarded with several nice pictures I took on my way up the mountain.



The next day, a small two-engine airplane carried me away from “near the peninsula” to the mainland peninsula. When we were up in the air, the clouds that were hiding the sun gradually scattered away. I looked down in hopes of seeing the mountain that I climbed the day before. Yet Unalaska had already turned into a small dot, lost in the middle of the dark ocean.



# Walking History's Streets

By Guiomar Dueñas-Vargas

Thanks to a sabbatical granted by the university, I spent last year writing my next manuscript, entitled *Gender, Kinship and Politics in Nineteenth Century Colombia*. As soon as the spring semester ended I rented my house, packed my books and clothes, and took a flight to Bogotá. I remained there for the entire year, except for short visits to Tucson to see my new granddaughter Amelie, to Boston to see my beloved son Arturo, and to attend some international conferences.

Going to Bogotá was the right move, not only because the national and local archives are located twenty minutes from my apartment and a specialized library on the nineteenth century was just around the corner, but also because I could immerse myself in the lives of the characters in my book. I strolled through the same streets that they did a century earlier, went inside the houses they used to live in, and visited the churches in which they were baptized, got married, and received their last benedictions.

I also resumed, as I do every summer, my conversations with my former colleagues at the Department of History in the National University about nineteenth-century society and culture. One of the most rewarding aspects of my stay in Bogotá was my return to my feminist group, "Women and Society," which always accepts me as the prodigal daughter. These women have been a source of inspiration for my academic work.

In my manuscript I examine the transformation of elite women's roles within the public and private spheres in

Colombia. Over the course of the nineteenth century, elite women played an increasingly important role in the family and in Colombian politics. Uncovering female participation in this era helps us understand the nation-building process in Colombia, because the current historiography almost exclusively dwells upon issues of warfare, male politics, and the rivalry between Liberals and Conservatives (Colombia's two main political parties at the time). The important functions of women in kinship alliances and within the family during this critical period have not received major scholarly attention.

My first goal was to construct the history of upper-class women after independence from Spain (1810-50). This was a period of transition towards nationhood while patriarchal colonial institutions and values were still well-rooted in society.

Amid political uncertainty, families filled the power vacuum. Although the current historiography does discuss the role of elite families in Colombia's party politics, it focuses exclusively on male family members. My manuscript fills this gap by demonstrating how women shaped party politics via their positions within the kinship network, particularly by diffusing political rivalries, promoting

social cohesion, and cementing family alliances outside the family clan. They expanded legal and political kinship networks, thereby enlarging familial influence and power.

My second goal was to examine the role of women and families once the consolidation of the liberal republic was achieved (1850-1903). A new gender system and family



order appeared. By mid-century the extended kinship family type was declining and families evolved towards a companionship marriage that benefited the position of women within the home.

I address here the supposed disconnect of women from the public sphere under the liberal state. The liberals came to power around mid-century. They advocated free trade, private property, and anticlericalism. They believed it was the natural right of men of wealth to exercise political authority, and they established a polity based on restricted representation, with the right to vote limited to wealthy men. Women, therefore, were denied the political rights offered to some men by the liberal republic.

nurses, and journalists. There were also noticeable changes at the level of the home. The house was increasingly restricted to a couple and their children. Intimacy and privacy were encouraged. A general move toward a constructive vision of femininity, one based on marital relations reformulated as complementary and companionate, led me to believe that a construction of modern gender identities was developing, albeit within the confines of patriarchal modes of thought and practice.

My examination of the rich array of elite correspondence uncovered the complex meaning of privacy in nineteenth-century Colombia. Women's letters depict a multi-textured history of submission and helplessness, but also one of

contestation and negotiation. There was a great concern for women's honor and anxiety about their reputation, but I also found a vast territory of meaningful day-to-day relations in which women and men constantly confronted each other. I also discovered that women's influence was not limited to their homes. They were active as social agents in the public sphere, primarily in terms of their influence upon their husbands' political decisions.

The year went by very fast, but I was

able to accomplish most of my goals. By the end of the summer I returned to the United States to resume my activities in the department. Returning to Memphis was coming home again. I missed the changing rhythms of the seasons and the peace and quiet of the city. I have missed my students, my colleagues, and the neighbor's cat who visits me every day looking for food and a place to relax.



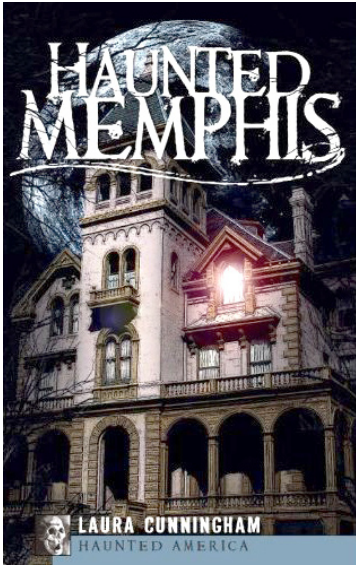
Some feminist scholars in Latin America have argued that the liberal republic expelled women from the public sphere altogether – I disagree. Women's participation in the building of the new state was restricted by the lack of citizenship, but women's spheres of action actually grew under the liberal government. Formal female education increased, access to publications of books and newspapers became available to women, and some became teachers,



# History Hauntings

By Laura Cunningham

In October of 2008, I began working in the History Department's Memphis and Shelby County Room at the Memphis Public Library. Despite living in the Memphis area most of my life, I never knew the extent of the library's collection until I started working there. For the first weeks, I came to work constantly amazed at what was available, regretting not having known about it sooner. I was most impressed with the Memphis Information Files. Beginning in the 1930s, librarians from the old Cossitt Library on Front Street began clipping and indexing newspaper articles from the local daily papers. Seventy years later, the library has a room filled with vertical files on nearly any Memphis-related subject imaginable.



Two of my co-workers had written books, and after talking with them, I began thinking this might be something I could do, too. As a graduate student in the Department of History at The University of Memphis, I have always enjoyed conducting research. Having so much information at my fingertips proved too tempting to pass up. I knew I wanted to work on some type of project, but I could never narrow down a topic.

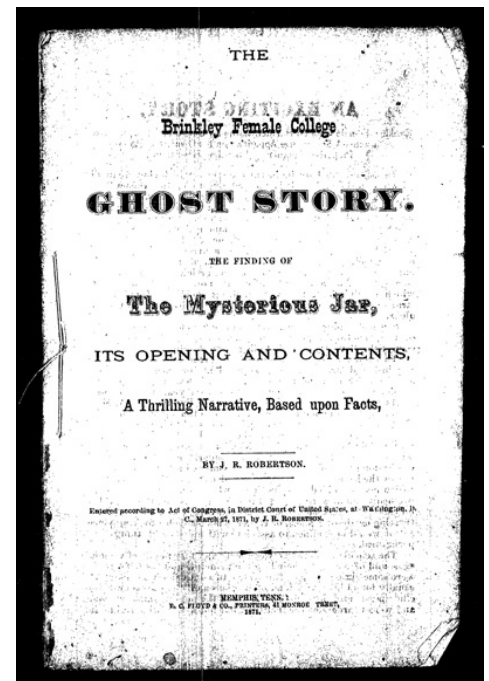
In early January, I halfway jokingly asked a co-worker if we had a file in our collection on Memphis ghosts. I was actually surprised when he said “Yes, we do” and brought me a manila folder with a handful of newspaper clippings. Several years ago, I had been the facility coordinator at the Mallory-Neely and Magevney House Museums. I had also conducted walking tours of downtown Memphis, Victorian Village, and Elmwood Cemetery. One of the most commonly asked questions was “Is this place haunted?” Over time, my co-workers began sharing ghost stories they knew. Soon I had a growing collection of Memphis ghost stories, superstitions, and folklore. After I looked through the folder at the library, I decided that this would be the topic for my book.

The timing could not have been more perfect.

The following week, The History Press contacted my manager looking for anyone researching Memphis-related history who would be interested in writing a book. I contacted the publisher with my idea and submitted a book proposal for *Haunted Memphis*, which was quickly approved. The book tells stories “from the restless souls of Elmwood Cemetery to the voodoo vices of Beale Street” as well as “phantom hymns of the Orpheum Theatre and Civil War soldiers still looking for a fight.”

I finished the book in just over three months. From the beginning, I wanted to focus on history and folklore, not the paranormal. I often found myself repeating, “I don’t believe I can prove or disprove the existence of ghosts, nor do I intend to do so.” Along the way, I made compromises, but I learned a valuable lesson: your editor and publisher know the market better than you. For *Haunted Memphis*, I had to write for an audience that shied away from footnotes, and who had no interest in passive-versus-active voice.

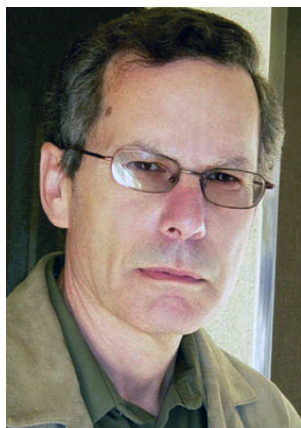
I am currently working on a second book with my publisher. Tentatively titled *Lost Memphis: An Illustrated History of the Bluff City*, it is expected to be released in the Spring of 2010. The book will be photograph-based and focus on local people, places, and events endangered by time.



# Words and Global Wars

By Kent Schull

On November 9, 2009, Dr. James L. Gelvin, Professor of Modern Middle East History at the University of California, Los Angeles, spoke at the University of Memphis, Fogelman Executive Center, as the Department of History's annual Sesquicentennial Lecturer. His lecture, "The Global War on



Dr. James Gelvin

What Exactly? Making Sense of Political Islam," focused on the power of nomenclature. "Words matter" when it comes to labeling Islamic political groups and movements. The Department of Homeland Security has recently shifted from using religious terms to identify al-Qaeda to more generic ones, such as "violent extremists" and "terrorists." In other words, this is a movement from religion to terrorology. Homeland Security now avoids using the term *jihad*, for example,

which is understood among Muslims in very differing ways. For al-Qaeda it connotes armed struggle and is a personal obligation for all Muslims. Many Muslims, however, assign armed struggle to governments, not individuals, and regard as heresy the belief that jihad is a personal obligation. Osama bin Laden seeks to position himself as a *salafist* (one who follows the pious initial followers of the Prophet Muhammad and accepts only the *Qur'an* and *hadith* as authentic sources for Islam) although his education was in business, not religion. He has nevertheless presumed to issue religious decrees (*fatwas*).

Even within Islam and especially among *salafists* there are divergent attitudes about these sources of Islamic authenticity. Some, such as the Taliban, regard them as an instruction manual, to be followed literally. Others, usually called modernists, regard them as points of departure to align Islam with the modern world, finding in them precedents for women's rights, human rights, and democracy. Dr. Gelvin maintains that some of the new terms preferred by the Department of Homeland Security, however, are too

vague to be meaningful, such as "terrorist." Some forty-two groups – including Hamas, al-Qaeda, Hezbollah, Timothy McVey, Basque Separatists, the IRA, and fringe animal rights activists – have been labeled as terrorists, although they differ greatly in their goals, approaches, and ideologies.

In order to accurately distinguish the differences among Islamist groups, Dr. Gelvin argues that one must take their writings and self-classifications seriously. He examined the writings of Ayman al-Zawahiri, generally regarded as the number-two man in al-Qaeda. Zawahiri identified two groups as "fifth column" movements within Islam. The first were those who had abandoned the obligation for *jihad* after having advocated it, such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt (to which he had at one time belonged). The second were those accused of the sin of particularism, working for goals short of universality, such as Hamas and Hezbollah, which concentrate on Islamizing their own nations and liberating them from what they see as imperial or foreign domination. Islamists, he argues, should, therefore, be classified according to social science nomenclature as Modernists, Nationalists, and Anarchists, and not according to the specific tactics they may or may not use.

As to how to classify al-Qaeda and its ilk, Dr. Gelvin said that they should not be regarded as "Islamist-anarchist." For most Westerners, anarchism is taken to be an intellectual tradition that prevailed from about 1880 to 1920. Dr. Gelvin maintains that it is not a tradition, but rather a category of political

phenomena. He said that all anarchists are isomorphic, differing in some details but basically similar at their core. He listed four characteristics. Anarchists are in their rhetoric highly defensive ("Why do we attack you? Because *you* have attacked us."). They are anti-systemic — the system is regarded as the agent of oppression. Al-Qaeda, for example, says that nationalism was imposed on the Middle East to weaken it, and insist that nation-states must be eliminated to restore the *ummah* (the Islamic community). Characteristically, anarchists propose a counter-system or counter-community, which in many cases is only vaguely outlined. Al-Qaeda and other groups often advocate the re-establishment of the caliphate,





but have very differing and opaque views as to how it would operate. Lastly, anarchists draw from the cultural milieu in which they live.

Finally, Dr. Gelvin finds problems with using religious terms to describe political Islam. They mystify the subject and reinforce the idea of Islamic exceptionalism. Likewise, he finds that using terms like “terrorist” mistakes the attribute for the essence and can, at best, only be used as a kind of blunt instrument. He said that we often confuse tactics with

the goals. He quoted writers who say that the United States should declare war only on proper nouns. The United States did not declare war on “sneak attacks” but upon Japan and its ultimate goals when bombed at Pearl Harbor. He suggested, therefore, that a “war on terrorism” is misguided and that the United States might be able to talk with hostile nations or groups today in much the same way it talked with the Soviet Union during the Cold War. While we should have “no truck with al-Qaeda,” talks with Hamas and Iran could be very productive in resolving divisive issues.

# Creating Histories

*By Josh Gorman*

It was starting to rain again. Why couldn't I be a good old-fashioned historian? Why couldn't I be in a cozy library somewhere instead of axle-deep in mud alongside a lonely Oklahoma road? I was out there again, in the Chickasaw Nation, searching for a farm so that I might speak with an old curator of a forgotten museum.

No one really understood what I was doing in Oklahoma. Some of the Chickasaws with whom I spoke assured me that most of their history could be found in libraries in Mississippi and archives in Fort Worth and Oklahoma City. Others had more questions for me than I had for them, as they assumed my tenure as the interim director of the Chucalissa Museum and Archaeological Site might have given me more insight into their history than they possessed themselves. But I was interested in how they were creating a history of themselves – out of the objects and memories and sites they had preserved in their removal to the West.

It was sometimes odd not being a conventional historian. Nevertheless, my committee in the Department of History at The University of Memphis patiently worked with me as I argued that museums and heritage have an important role in the construction of history. They directed me to read and understand the



idea of memory in the construction of our discipline, to consider the still-contentious projection of the West on indigenous history, and to explore the expressions of political communities in heritage representations. I gradually articulated how my meetings and interviews illuminated the construction of history in Chickasaw museums, and how these spaces might be read within the historiography. I defended my dissertation, “Building a Nation: Chickasaw Museums and the Construction of Chickasaw History and Heritage,” in the spring semester of 2009.



**Dr. Josh Gorman**

There is some poetic justice, then, in my return to the museum. I now spend most of my time confined to the archive. As a collaborative researcher with the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Natural History in Washington D.C., my training as a historian makes me most productive as an explorer of boxes of letters and manuscripts. Once I was preoccupied with how the former subjects of history, the Chickasaw Nation and others, create their own history. That has

transformed into an interest in how those communities interact with objects reclaimed from museums. I am interested in how the process of transmitting knowledge from a non-western periphery to the western center might be reversed, and I am working with curators and scholars to effect that change.