

## **Editor's Note**

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Eighty-six years ago, a group of historians in Ohio gathered to share ideas and research findings while encouraging each other through fellowship and mutual support. The Ohio Academy of History (OAH) continued this function in our annual spring meeting at the University of Dayton on March 23-24, 2018. Participants included history professors of many ranks from emeritus to adjunct, educators, independent scholars, public historians and aspiring graduate students, all gathered to celebrate their shared passion for understanding the past.

Mutual support is still important as both the constitution of history and function of historians seem to be increasingly challenged in the United States. A few days before our annual meeting, Virginia Scharff, University of New Mexico, wrote in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* on March 4, 2018,

In a world where social media, information technology, and distrust of cultural and political institutions threaten to destabilize the very notion of truth, we need historians and climate scientists and biologists now more than ever. They remind us that what happened did indeed happen, and that it matters.”<sup>i</sup>

Weeks earlier, Tyler Stovall, President of the American Historical Association (AHA), spoke in his Presidential Address entitled “White Freedom and the Lady of Liberty” about the many historical contexts symbolized in the Statue of Liberty.<sup>ii</sup> Stovall piloted the audience through numerous significances of Lady Liberty to individuals and groups in Europe and in the United States, beginning with Édouard de Laboulaye, the professor of law at the Collège de France in Paris, who was one of the originators of the idea of the statue as a monument to republicanism on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. The statue engenders mutuality among persons enjoying or deprived of freedom

by race, sex, national origin, social class and more in the past and even now. Combining these many perspectives on a material item makes us all wiser and perhaps more empathetic with our neighbors, students and the public in general.

Steven Conn, President of the Ohio Academy of History, reminded us in his Presidential Address entitled “Every Historian a Public Historian” that historians yet have a purpose in our republic. Perhaps at the first gathering of our OAH one of the conversations centered on the 1931 AHA Presidential Address given by Carl Becker. Conn refreshed our memories of Becker’s “Everyman” as a microhistorian of the documents of their own biographies. While social media allows anyone to post versions of the past, scholarly or not, he pointed out that this is not the public history that Becker had in mind. Perhaps Becker warned historians against the retreat to the archives that Conn calls “the perils of professionalization.” Some of those who took up Becker’s challenge created the field of public history to engage with public consumers of knowledge about the past. One of the many impactful statements that Conn wrote is this:

I believe that historians have a special and particular public obligation to introduce that historical context as we confront any number of difficult decisions in the wider world.

Those who retreated into the archives and obscurantism must return and re-engage with public historians for the nation needs all of us.

This edition of the *Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Ohio Academy of History* features two articles about local history in national and global contexts and we hope that you will share this knowledge. Rebekah Brown’s “The Ohio Company of Associates, Medical Practice, and Westward Expansion, 1786-1794” invites us to travel through formerly French frontier in the aftermath of the Treaty of Paris of 1783 and the challenge of healthcare for New Englanders and other migrants to the Ohio Country settlement of Marietta. Much literature about Marietta’s founding addresses relations with the Wyandot, Lenape and other existing nations in the area. Material culture in Marietta’s museums makes these stories tangible. Brown contributes to medical history by using endemic and epidemic smallpox as a measure of separation of the United States from Europe. She also

uses the density of medical professionals from New England as a measure of the Ohio Country enmeshing with nascent trans-Allegheny culture. The second article is by Michael H. Taint who also engages trans-Allegheny wartime culture and Ohio aviation history with the First World War and French battlefields as he creates a historical context for what is now called drone warfare, "Unmanned Aerial Systems" or "Remotely Piloted Aircraft." Taint's article, "Twenty-five Years ahead of Its Time: The American Aerial Torpedo in World War I," details Charles F. Kettering, Orville Wright and Colonel Edward Deeds' efforts to develop an aerial torpedo for the U.S. Army Project Liberty Eagle. "The Kettering Bug," as it was known, faced design, sourcing, and budget challenges before the somewhat successful test flight that left the secret testing area near Dayton, Ohio, and flew to Xenia in the next county where it crashed, leaving local police to inform the military that some farmers were still looking for the pilot. Both historians name prominent individuals in their narratives and they also took pains to include ordinary people whose stories may still be told by their descendants.

A statue of a female on an island in New York Harbor, a fortress in Marietta, and a flying and pilotless torpedo and are all examples of the panorama of history that has been written and to which we all strive to add. Each local item, pieces of material culture large or small, is a fixed point in a narrative context that ripples across time and even national boundaries. The research can be isolating but the task is not complete until our findings are delivered to the public to consume. While social media may make us cautious about the quality of information available on the internet, it reminds us that Everyperson is hungry for knowledge about the past. Scharff is correct: historians' work matters. Stovall and Conn are also correct: we must listen to everyone in order to appreciate the complexity of mutuality that is our republic. Brown and Taint demonstrate the connection of local history and Everyperson to national and international contexts. Curiosity binds historians and the public. May we never forget to gather, celebrate and support our shared passion for history.

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<sup>i</sup> Virginia Scharff, "Prepare Your Ph.D.s for Diverse Career Paths," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, March 4, 2018.

<sup>ii</sup> Tyler Stovall, "White Freedom and the Lady of Liberty," *The American Historical Review* 123, no. (February 1, 2018): 1–27, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ahr/123.1.1>.