



GORDON
COLLEGE

Department of History

Spring 2012



"History Alive!" performing at Salem 1630: Pioneer Village

From the Chair

In this issue I forego the chair's message and gladly yield space to others: what they say in these pages more than makes up for what's lacking from me. I only call your attention to a major upcoming event: next October, Gordon hosts the bi-annual meeting of the Conference on Faith and History, a gathering of historians from Evangelical colleges across the country. History classes will be canceled during the meeting so that department faculty as well as our students can attend sessions and give talks presenting original research. If you live in the area, you may want to attend: the program goes through Saturday. See our departmental website later this summer for a full schedule of the meeting.

Steve Alter, Chair of the History Department

Conference on Faith and History comes to Gordon College: October 3–6, 2012

The Conference on Faith and History is a community of Christian scholars exploring the relationship between faith and history. This year's theme, "Cultural Change and Adaptation," is a deliberately broad designation intended to encompass how people and organizations interact with their culture in various geographical areas and historical periods.

Carlos Eire Speaking at Conference on Faith & History: October 4, 2012 - 7:00 PM - 8:30 PM

Carlos Eire specializes in the social, intellectual, religious, and cultural history of late medieval and early modern Europe, with a strong focus on both the Protestant and Catholic Reformations; the history of popular piety; and the history of death. Currently he is Riggs Professor of History and Religious Studies at Yale. A past president of the Society for Reformation Research, Carlos Eire is a member of the editorial board of the journal *Church History* as well as of the publications committee of Yale University Press.

Introducing a New Department Member: Agnes Howard

Note: This article begins a series of faculty profiles.

Where did you go to college and graduate school? What did you study there?

I went to Cornell and then did graduate work at the University of Virginia. In the midst of that beautiful campus dedicated to the spirit of Thomas Jefferson, I decided to study Puritan New England. My dissertation looked at Puritan religious education, where high emphasis on personal experience coexisted with communal commitment to handing down truth.

Who were your most inspiring history teachers, and what made their teaching inspiring?

I had wonderful history teachers in college. Their lectures linked together things that beforehand had not seemed related. It was not so much their making students feel like “you were there” in the past, but encouraging students to take things as things as seriously as people did in the past. Especially with events that might seem less exciting today: it’s not so hard to take Nazi Germany or the U.S. Civil War as historical big deals, but they did it for the Seven Years’ War, the telegraph, the election of Al Smith—and they were right to do so. Also, at both Cornell and Virginia I studied under political historians who left me with a high estimation of the American party system that I find hard to shake.

In what other historical topics have you developed an interest?

Some aspects of women’s history, though none of my education included that. In the context of the Reformation in Europe, especially, I see how differences in doctrine could change the way women lived their entire lives. I.e., was monastic life an option or not? What spiritual implications came with marriage? Whose job should it be to teach children?

What research project do you hope to do in the future?

The culture of childbearing fascinates me. What we take for granted in the last century or so as the normal way of having children—overseen by a doctor, delivering in a hospital, being more or less in control—deserves explanation through a mix of cultural history and history of science. I also would like to examine how religious communities have mediated the acceptance of reproductive technologies—why, say, a couple in one kind of church rather than another would think they should talk to their pastor about doing in vitro fertilization.



Putting Shoe Leather on History

by Libby Baker '12



As an intern at the Wenham Museum, I spend my Wednesdays in a shoe shop. Called a “ten-footer” because of its small size, this little building once housed craftsmen artfully manipulating leather, wood and nails to create shoes before the era of industrialization. Wenham is lucky to possess a ten-footer in its collection. Moreover, the shop is full of uncataloged tools and other objects useful for interpreting the North Shore’s social and labor history. My internship consists of happily dusting, labeling, measuring, and cataloguing the various tools lying haphazardly on benches or hidden away in drawers. The chance to spend a portion of my week working (and freezing) in an un-insulated nineteenth-century building, handling nineteenth-century objects, has truly been a delight. Accessing history in all of its dusty glory, away from the library, is an experience I would recommend for every history student.

History Reinscribed

by **Gabriel DiMauro '10**
Gordon Program at Aix-en-Provence
First Year Masters student at La Faculté Jean Calvin

Once each semester I take my students to jail. Or rather, I take them to a 13th-century dungeon in southern France called La Tour de Constance. Guided by the faint light that filters through narrow slits in the circular walls, we crouch down to trace an unfamiliar word etched in the limestone floor: "REGISTER." Translated from the langue d'oc, the word means "RESIST."

Unlike the famous mottos of red-capped French revolutionaries or fedora-wearing resistance fighters, this wasn't a call to arms. Rather, this inscription was scratched into the stone by a young Protestant woman named Marie Durand, jailed in 1730 along with her friends and female relatives for holding a minority faith.

Durand lived and died in obscurity, yet her name is etched in the memory of Huguenot Protestants. For the Huguenots, who today constitute barely 2% of the French population, the 16th-century Wars of Religion, the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes by Louis XIV, and the decades of persecution suffered by their ancestors, are not distant memories. They are real and present in a way that Americans find difficult to understand. To this day, Huguenots have difficulty trusting their Catholic compatriots, and Marie Durand's injunction to "RESIST!" is recalled by many Huguenot families.

American Protestants live in a climate of ecumenism and religious toleration, and thus find it hard to understand why our French counterparts feel so strongly about past conflicts. After all, the persecution ended over three hundred years ago, so what's all the fuss about? Yet as I lead students through the vestiges of former times—Roman ruins, medieval fortresses, the Papal Palace—as well as the famous monuments, such as the majestic halls of the Louvre, the Versailles gardens, and the grand Parisian boulevards, the answer becomes clear: for the French, History is not past. In fact, it's omnipresent, inescapable, and continually memorialized in the national psyche.



In my roles as Resident Assistant, Teaching Assistant, and Tour Guide for the Gordon-in-Aix program, I try to help students understand how this long history contributes to the present French identity and how we as Americans can relate to their culture. As a student in the local theological seminary, I explore the unique ways in which Protestantism has evolved in France and what the implications are for Church History. But the more time I spend living in France, the more I find that I don't just study this history; I live it each day. Every time I worship with Huguenots, listen to their stories, and travel through their hereditary lands (especially here in the south), I participate in this rich, intricate, and textured history. I am not only learning what their history was; I am learning what their history means and continues to mean today.

Syriac Comes to Gordon

by Jennifer Hevelone-Harper, Professor of History

What exactly is Syriac? Syriac is a dialect of the Aramaic language spoken by Jesus and his first disciples. It has been used by Christians throughout the Middle East from the second century onwards, forming the third branch of the early Christian community, along with Greek and Latin-speaking Christians. Syriac is important for understanding ancient biblical texts, as well as the practices and beliefs of early Christians. The language is used by Syriac Christians in their worship today in the Middle East, India, and in the worldwide Diaspora. Today in Iraqi Kurdistan, Syriac is the language of instruction in newly built schools where both boys and girls are taught.

Last fall the history department offered for the first time Introduction to Syriac: Language and Literature. The course, co-taught by Dr. Ute Possekkel and Dr. Jennifer Hevelone-Harper, covered the basics of Syriac grammar and introduced key themes and authors from the history of Syriac Christianity. Students read hymns by St.

Ephrem, a fourth-century poet who wrote theologically rich lyrics for choirs of women, which are still sung in Syriac churches today. Students also had the opportunity to worship with Syriac Christians in West Roxbury, MA. The trip to St. Matthew's Syrian Orthodox Church was a highlight of the semester.

With ten students enrolled (including two graduate students) plus several auditors, the class at Gordon was large compared with Syriac classes held at other institutions. Some students continued in an independent study this spring to complete the grammar and to read passages from the Bible and relevant historical works. Syriac will be offered again in the fall of 2012. Those who take it are eligible to participate in a manuscript research project in the spring of 2013. Dr. Hevelone-Harper and Dr. Possekkel will be translating part of the Codex Climaci Rescriptus, a seventh-century manuscript from Mt. Sinai that contains treatises by St. John Climacus. The manuscript project is made possible by the Green Scholars Initiative of Baylor University.



Seniors Defend Honors Theses

On April 30, Elizabeth Baker '12, Karin Pellinen '12, and Hilary Sherratt '12 successfully defended honors theses before an audience of faculty, students, family, and friends. Elizabeth's thesis was entitled "Strong Shoulders: Culture, Society and Women's Education in Antebellum America". Karin wrote on "The Baltic States: Achieving Peaceful Independence During the Collapse of the Soviet Union", and Hilary discussed "Post-War: Jacques Maritain, Christianity, and the Rebuilding of Europe after 1945". Like all of our honors theses, these works will be bound, cataloged, and housed in Jenks Library at Gordon College.

Alumni and Student Updates

We would love to hear from you! Please send contributions to: elisabeth.whittet@gordon.edu.