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The e-Newsletter of the Department of History
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A New Year and New Distinctions

With this issue, the history department's e-newsletter returns for its second year. The academic year 2006-2007 is now half over. It has been turning out to be very busy and, we hope, also extremely productive. A total of 3,544 students enrolled in undergraduate and graduate level history courses this semester, a new record. The department is conducting three job searches—one in U.S. women's history, to replace Mary Neth, whose unexpected death last year was a shock to the department; one in European intellectual history, to replace Richard Bienvenu, who retired last summer, after 32 years at the University of Missouri, and one in South Asian history. Future issues of this newsletter will be reporting on our new hires.

In the interval, you can check the department's web site for the latest news on the progress of the searches. That web site, <http://history.missouri.edu> has been updated and upgraded with more information about history faculty and history graduate students. We invite our friends and alumni to visit the home page and see some of the changes that have been introduced.

One of those changes is the drawing up of three lists of faculty members: those who have received scholarly prizes for the [books they have written](#); those who have been [recipient of major grants](#); and those who have received [awards for excellence in teaching](#). Many of the department's professors are on one of these lists, and a few are on two of them, but there is just one colleague whose name appears on all three. This is Professor Carol Anderson, who added to her distinctions this fall as recipient of the 2006 Maxine Christopher Shutz Award,

given to MU professors whose teaching shows extraordinary efforts to personalize instruction and to provide active learning experiences for undergraduates. Alumni who have taken courses with Professor Anderson will know just how appropriate this award is.

Many of the department's alumni will remember Professor Susan Flader, and the courses they have taken with her on the history of Missouri, the history of the environment, or the history of the American west. Flader was the 2006 recipient of the University of Missouri Alumni Association's Distinguished Faculty Award. This award is the highest honor that the Alumni Association bestows, and is a fitting distinction for Professor Flader, in view of her many accomplishments as a scholar, teacher, environmentalist, and concerned citizen of Missouri, the United States and the entire world.

The highest academic honor the University of Missouri can bestow is an appointment as Curator's Professor. This summer, [A. Mark Smith](#), professor of medieval history and of the history of science received such an appointment, in recognition of his decades of scholarship into the development of the understanding of optics and visual perception from the ancient world to the era Galileo and Newton, the age of the scientific revolution. Admittedly, this sounds rather abstruse, but has implications across a wide variety of fields of scholarship, from the history of science, to philosophy to the history of art. A future newsletter will include a feature on the department's new curators' professor.

In this issue of the newsletter, you will find the news section and the historical reflections section

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merged in a copy of Professor Flader's acceptance speech at the Alumni Association's Awards banquet, held in Columbia on October 27. In her speech, Flader elaborated the links between her teaching and scholarship on the one hand, and her belief in the ideals of citizenship on the other, and how these links were reflected in her life experiences from Missouri, to China.

We would very much like to have a newsletter section on activities and accomplishments of the department's friends and alumni, so please feel free to send us your news. If you have a longer piece in mind that might be appropriate for this newsletter, we would like to hear about it. Please send your changes of e-mail address, addresses of people you think might like to receive the newsletter and any other such details to the history department's administrator, Ms. [Melinda Lockwood](#). Suggestions about new features, possible improvements, friends and alumni news and comments on the newsletter more generally can be sent to the history department chair, [Jonathan Sperber](#). Please send comments on the department's web site to the departmental webmaster, Professor [Jeff Pasley](#).

The next issue of the newsletter will be out toward the end of February. In the meantime, on behalf of the faculty, staff, and students of the department of history, I would like to wish all our alumni and friends their choice—depending on their preference—of very happy holidays or a very merry Christmas, and, certainly, to all, a peaceful and prosperous New Year.

Jonathan Sperber
Chair, Department of History

Considering making a donation to the history department? For information on doing so, click on this [link](#). The department chair and the development office of the College of Arts and Sciences will be pleased to discuss with you any plans you may have to help the department of history.

News and Reflections:

Professor Susan Flader's Acceptance Speech at the Alumni Association Banquet, October 27

This is a signal honor and I am so grateful to be here in the company of so many friends and colleagues. I would like to acknowledge a few: Arvarh Strickland and Charlie Timberlake and their wives Winnie Pearl and Pat welcomed me as a history colleague in 1973 and are a large part of the reason I stayed in Missouri; John Karel found his way to my environmental history class my first year at MU and has been a friend and associate in environmental organizations ever since; and Chen Hou is here representing my "Chinese family"—he earned his Ph.D. in physics at MU in 2005 and now has a dream post-doc at the Santa Fe Institute. And there are so many others.

Looking back on more than three decades of teaching here at MU, I suppose my most consistent theme has been citizenship—perhaps in an effort to justify my own involvement in a wide array of organizations and issues over the years. But it was not until I spent a year abroad as a Fulbright lecturer in Finland that I really began to think consciously about it. The Finns I knew belonged to a multiplicity of organizations—poetry groups, music, mushroom gathering—but not much by way of civic or environmental engagement—largely, they explained, because they had so much confidence in their government's ability to deal with these matters. I began to realize that we have a very different tradition in the United States, going way back in our history—a healthy skepticism of government, a desire to limit its reach, and a concomitant emphasis on citizen action outside of the formal channels of government, what historian Gordon Wood called "the people out-of-doors."

And I realized that there were differences among the states too—all the way from my home state of Wisconsin with its wonderful progressive tradition

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to my adopted state of Missouri with its extreme skepticism of government and aversion to funding it. But then I began to realize that if citizens are not going to empower their government they have to take more responsibility themselves for action out-of-doors. And Missouri has a vibrant tradition of citizen engagement—something I have tried to impress on my students, and another large part of the reason I have remained in Missouri.

This emphasis on citizenship has even influenced my interpretation of Aldo Leopold. In my early work I presented him as the consummate professional constantly trying to prod his professions of forestry and wildlife management to accept more responsibility for the condition of our environment. But now I think his role in fostering citizen engagement is even more significant. As he explained in his best-known essay, “The Land Ethic”: “In short, a land ethic changes the role of Homo Sapiens from conqueror of the land community to plain member and citizen of it. It implies respect for his fellow members, and also respect for the community as such.”

One of my most satisfying engagements over the years was with Columbia’s beverage container deposit ordinance—remember that? It was initiated by a group of students in our environmental history class back in the mid-70s, put on the ballot by initiative petition, defended all the way to the Missouri Supreme Court by Darwin Hindman *pro bono*, and then saved by Columbians from attempted repeal in three more elections in the 1980s. The last attempt to repeal was in 2002. By this time I had been using this story of citizen action not only in my own courses on Missouri and environmental history at MU but also in lectures around the world as an example of how American democracy works.

I flew to China on election day 2002—having voted absentee in advance—and was informed by Chen’s mother on arrival that my first lecture would be the next morning. “But, But—I want to end with the Columbia deposit ordinance and I don’t know what

happened in the election yesterday,” I protested. Lots had changed in China since I first went there twenty years ago, and Chen had now wired his parents to the internet. So I logged on to the Digital Missourian and what should pop to the screen but “CAN BAN CANNED.” I was stunned, and had no idea what I would say when I stepped to the podium an hour later before hundreds of Chinese students. I think I said something about Columbia’s recent growth and our failure to educate our new citizens adequately on the issue, that you don’t always win but you don’t lose heart, and you keep working to make your community a better place. And I still believe that.