

THE PUBLIC HISTORIAN

A Journal of Public History

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The Public Historian, a quarterly journal sponsored by the National Council on Public History and the University of California, Santa Barbara, with the support of Rutgers University, Camden, and published by the University of California Press. It is the flagship journal in the field of public history. It emphasizes original research, fresh conceptualizations, and new viewpoints. The journal's contents reflect the considerable diversity of approaches to the definition and practice of public history.

The Public Historian provides practicing professionals and others the opportunity to report the results of research and case studies and to address the broad substantive and theoretical issues inherent in the practice of public history. The journal aims to provide a comprehensive look at the field, publishing articles relating to:

- Exhibition, Interpretation, and Public Engagement
- Public Memory Studies
- Public History Education
- Museum and Historic Site Administration
- Cultural Resources Management
- Institutional History and Archives
- Litigation Support and Expert Witnessing
- Federal, State, and Local History
- Oral History
- Historical Editing, Publishing, and Media
- Archival, Manuscript, and Records Management Preservation
- Contracting and Consulting
- History and Civic Engagement
- History's Publics/Audience Studies
- Public Policy Planning and Analysis
- Philanthropy and Sponsorship

The Public Historian publishes a variety of article types: research articles, essays, and reports from the field. Research articles deal with specific, often comparatively framed, public historical issues. They are based on documentary or oral historical research; in some cases, however, findings from interviews, surveys, or participant observation may supplement historical source materials. These articles should be around thirty pages. Essays are reflective commentaries on topics of interest to public historians. Their length varies, but they are usually about twenty-five pages. Reports from the field are intended to convey the real-world work of public historians by highlighting specific projects or activities in which the author is directly involved; these articles may describe new or ongoing projects, introduce or assess new methodologies, or bring in-the-field dilemmas (methodological, ethical, and historical) into print. Reports from the field should be fifteen-to-twenty pages.

In its review section, *The Public Historian* assesses current publications by and of interest to public historians, including government publications, cultural resources management reports, and corporate histories, as well as selected scholarly press publications. The journal also reviews films and videos, digital and electronic media productions, exhibits, and performances. We do not accept unsolicited reviews but we do welcome suggestions for material to review. If you are interested in becoming a reviewer, please visit our Reviewer page: <http://tph.ucpress.edu/content/reviewers>.

The editors welcome the submission of manuscripts by all those interested in the theory, teaching, and practice of public history, both in the United States and abroad. We are looking for manuscripts that make a significant contribution to the definition, understanding, and/or professional and intellectual progress of the field of public history. We conceive of the term *public history* broadly, as involving historical research, analysis, and presentation, with some degree of explicit application to the needs of contemporary life.

Research articles, essays, and reports from the field are subject to blind peer review and revisions will be suggested, if necessary, before the editors will accept an article for publication.

In general, only manuscripts not previously published will be accepted. Authors must agree not to publish elsewhere, without explicit written consent, an article accepted for publication in *The Public Historian*.

The Public Historian encourages letters to the editor that expand the discussion of topics covered in the journal. If a letter specifically concerns an article or review published in *TPH*, the author or reviewer will be invited to respond. Letters responding to reviews may not exceed 250 words; letters responding to articles may not exceed 750 words. The editors reserve the right to refuse to publish any letter whose tone or content are inconsistent with the conventional standards of scholarly discourse expected in a historical journal.

Please submit manuscripts and letters to the editors by email to the managing editor at the address below.

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On the cover: As they work on the excavation of Hisn Maslama in North Syria (inhabited during the eighth and ninth centuries), villagers express interest in knowing more about daily life during early Islamic times. (Copyright Collection Claus-Peter Haase. Photo by Jens Neuberger, 1995, CC-BY-NC-ND)

Letter to the Editor

There is much truth in the articles by Bob Clark, Benjamin Hufbauer, and Michael Devine on the future of presidential libraries. But my personal experience as director of the FDR Library and Museum (1999–2011) taught me one additional truth: NARA does not want to be in the museum business, or in the business of public programming more generally.

Despite the presence of museums within all of the presidential libraries, NARA has defined its mission solely in terms of its archival and records storage functions. For years it has deliberately and quite consciously “outsourced” its responsibilities for museums and public programs to presidential library foundations. As a result, despite its responsibility to administer these museums in keeping with professional standards for balanced historical interpretation, NARA has not done so when faced with opposition from library foundations.

The consequences of NARA’s failure to embrace the presidential library museums have been grave and are at the root of the ongoing crisis. NARA made a policy decision that congressionally appropriated funding can only be spent on archival and preservation functions, building security, and maintenance; it cannot be spent on museum exhibitions and other forms of public engagement. Monies earned from visitor admission fees, gift shop sales, and private contributions may be used for exhibits and public programs, but those funds are

also required to support staff salaries for individuals involved in public programming. Little remains for exhibits, which are expensive undertakings.

Exhibits are therefore where foundation support becomes crucial. Other federal agencies depend on private foundations to support part of their programmatic mission, but they do so under the terms of an operating agreement that spells out mutual expectations and requirements. Not so with NARA. Its philosophy is quite simple—with the power to fund comes the power to dictate content. Moreover, with no programmatic operating agreements, library foundations are not obligated to support the libraries at all.

Library foundations may have offices within presidential libraries and conduct fundraising campaigns in the libraries’ names, but NARA does not require any fixed contribution in exchange for their privileged use of the presidential library “brand.” (The large sums raised as “endowments” for new libraries—discouraging as they are to the development of a fruitful public-private partnership—are dedicated to offset building-operating costs, not to support current exhibits and programs. And of course older libraries have no endowments whatsoever.) As Michael Devine points out, library foundations support a range of worthy projects but these activities have little or nothing to do with the libraries. The result is that exhibits in libraries are often underfunded and outdated—or

their content is subject to foundation approval if the library's foundation agrees to fund an exhibition.

Devine also describes the tortured relationship between library directors and their foundations. I experienced some of the same stresses. I believe the source of the problem was that until recently directors of the older presidential libraries like Roosevelt and Truman were civil servants hired with the understanding that their libraries could be administered professionally. We believed that we had the authority and job protection to run the libraries without political interference, but our position was often contested since lines of authority were never clarified by NARA. Directors of the "newer" libraries have traditionally been members of the executive service and their job performance is understood to be subject to the approval of living presidents and their families. Now all presidential library directors are part of the executive service and there is no expectation of job protection should their professional judgment run counter to the requirements of the foundations.

NARA's abnegation of its professional and public responsibilities must be

recognized for what it is—a result of the ongoing influence of money and politics within one of the most important historical agencies of our government. It undermines the professionalism of government employees and corrupts public understanding of presidential history; it also leads to public confusion about the administration of these ostensibly government-run institutions. Despite Bob Clark's eloquent argument for the Roosevelt model of a single institution with a dedicated professional staff that houses presidential papers as well as artifact collections and museums, the sad truth is that FDR's idea of the presidential library is largely gone. In its place is the "new model" that NARA has been moving toward for decades—one that divorces presidential archives from presidential libraries and abandons even the pretense of operating professionally sound museums.

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