By Thomas Sakmyster

John Alexander came to the University of Cincinnati in 1969 from his native Oregon via Chicago. During his sojourn in the Windy City he acquired excellent training in early American history at the University of Chicago, where he worked with the noted scholar Jesse Lemische, and life-long membership in that most pitiable of all sports groups: the forlorn fans of the Chicago Cubs.

Since he arrived at the end of the 1960s and is leaving now in the 2010s, John can claim the distinction of having taught in the Department of History in six succeeding decades. His was a career notable for its overall excellence and well-roundedness. The publication in 1980 of his monograph on the responses to poverty in Philadelphia in the last half of the 18th century firmly established his national reputation as a historian of the Early American Republic. There followed a large number of articles in scholarly journals and a second book on the newspaper coverage of the Constitutional Convention of 1787. John’s dogged research over the past decade into the life of Samuel Adams bore fruit in 2011 when his biography of that important “American revolutionary” appeared. The book has already won impressive accolades, including selection as an “editor’s pick” by the History Book Club and as a Choice Outstanding Academic Title.

John’s commitment to professional service to the department, the university, and the community has always been strong. Over the years he has served on innumerable committees and taken on a variety of departmental chores, some of them the kind that his colleagues shunned as tedious or too time-consuming. John could always be counted on to make a thorough study of any proposals for academic change or reform. He was a man of principle and refused to accept a pragmatic solution when it violated those principles. On many issues he was the conscience of the department,
although he from time to time ended up as a lone voice crying in the wilderness. But he always yielded gracefully to the majority and did not gloat when, from time to time, his warnings about the dire consequences to be expected as a result of certain changes proved justified. As a lecturer in the Greater Cincinnati area John has been indefatigable. The list of school, church, and community groups to which he has spoken is impressively large. On the national level he served a long term as a member of the Citizens Coinage Advisory Committee.

As a classroom teacher John Alexander can have had few equals at the University of Cincinnati. He has won all the available teaching awards, including the Dolly Cohen, Distinguished Teaching Professor, and Ohio Academy of History award. He had a particularly strong commitment to the American history survey course, of which he annually taught a large section. Students clearly respected and admired Professor Alexander for his dedication, enthusiasm, and oratorical skill. For many students his classes were the highpoint of their career at UC, as can be seen in the numerous unsolicited letters they later sent to him or the Department. John had a natural classroom presence that suggests he might have pursued a successful career on the stage. Students appreciated and were inspired by some of his creative teaching methods, such as when he appeared in class dressed as a representative figure from the American Revolution, one day arguing the British point of view, the next day the American. John was a popular teacher despite his reputation as a hard grader: there were no easy A's in his classes. Nor did he ever rest on his laurels. He constantly revised his lectures to incorporate the latest scholarship, and considered it a point of honor always to make sure his final lecture in the survey brought the narrative up to the present day.

In retirement John will probably want to finish off one or two history projects, in which he will have the encouragement of his wife, June, herself an accomplished historian. There will surely be time to devote to his hobbies and passions: tennis, Jane Austen, his collection of historical posters and ephemera (especially dealing with Pearl Harbor), and, alas, the Chicago Cubs.

TRIBUTE FOR JOHN K. BRACKETT

By Sigrun Haude

After twenty-five years in the History Department at the University of Cincinnati, John Brackett decided to become a full-time writer and researcher and to retire from his teaching position at UC. A Renaissance scholar, he received his B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. from the University of California, Berkeley (1978, 1981, and 1986 respectively). The first focus of his research was violence and criminal justice, which resulted in his
monograph, Criminal Justice and Crime in Late Renaissance Florence, 1537-1609 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). The book explores the Florentine criminal justice system under the reign of the first three Medici grand dukes. In articles and professional presentations, Brackett expanded on this topic by investigating issues often located at the margins of society, such as poverty and prostitution. In this vein, most recently his attention has converged on both the reality and imagination of Africa and Africans in Renaissance Italy. Specifically his publications and papers have investigated Alessandro de’Medici, the first Medici Duke of Florence, and his race and rulership – material, which Brackett is now setting out to turn into a monograph.

John Brackett has been a dedicated and sought-after teacher of Renaissance Europe. Particularly in the small seminar setting but also in his upper-division courses, students noted and appreciated his enthusiasm for the topic and his dedication to the students. One former graduate student wrote: “John was at his best and most comfortable leading small discussions, and I remember fondly the discussions I enjoyed in his Renaissance Women course and his history and theory class. John has always supported me and kept up with my work. During my years at OSU I occasionally met with him in Cincinnati. His guidance at UC helped prepare me do graduate student work at OSU. He trained me to think as an historian.” An advanced undergraduate commented: “Dr. Brackett is a gifted scholar and teacher. His classes in the Renaissance went far beyond names, dates, and places to explore the political, artistic, and societal themes that have resonated throughout history and continue to have implications for our time. Dr. Brackett’s love for his field and the enthusiasm with which he shared that love were evident to students who were fortunate enough to be in his classroom. I consider myself one of those lucky ones.” John Brackett was also appreciated as a compassionate and open-minded mentor of teaching assistants: “Dr. Brackett always showed great interest in the lives and well being of his TAs. I found him to be very personable and willing to converse with us on many topics.”

Among John Brackett’s many contributions to this university are his service as department head of African and African-American Studies from 1995-1999 and 2002-2007 and as acting head of the History Department (July-December 2008). Moreover, for many years he was active in the AAUP, both on campus (eventually as its president) and nationally, and worked tirelessly to preserve the rights of his colleagues.

For many years John Brackett has been a quiet, warm, and often smiling presence in the halls of McMicken. He will now turn more forcefully to finishing his monograph on Alessandro de’ Medici. But importantly he also hopes to be able to immerse himself more fully in his other passion, the writing of crime stories set in Over-The-Rhine. We wish him well but we will miss him.

AWARDS AND ACCOLADES

Professor Steve Porter has been awarded a Residential Research Fellowship for next academic year at the Institute for Historical Studies at the University of Texas, Austin. The theme for next year’s fellowship program is Rethinking Diplomacy which correlates to Porter’s interest in the roles of humanitarianism.
and public-private governance in both international affairs and domestic milieus of the United States. The fellowship will provide him the time and other resources for completing his book, "A Benevolent Empire? Refugees, NGOs, and the American State," as well as related projects.

Professor Shailaja Paik has been selected as Yale University’s (CT) top-choice for a Post-Doctoral Fellowship by the South Asian Studies Council at the Whitney and Betty MacMillan Center for International and Area Studies. Yale welcomes her as the Malathy Singh Visiting Assistant Professor of South Asian Studies for the 2012-13 academic year.

Professor Paik also reviewed two articles for two refereed journals--Women's History Review and the Radical History Review (Duke University Press). She has been invited to review an article for Gender, Place and Culture too. As such, Paik is recognized as a leading scholar in the fields of women’s history, gender, and caste. She was also interviewed by a high-school student from Kentucky for his project on Indian nationalism for the National History Day Competition. Paik thinks that students should be taught inside and outside the classroom. These exercises allow them to make connections between their class readings, discussions, and the sociological community of which they are a part. She took her students from History 121 "Introduction to India," on a field-trip to the Hindu Temple of Greater Cincinnati. Students’ emphasised that in the past they never had an opportunity to visit a temple, they also had some inhibitions, and hence this exercise helped them to acquire a first-hand knowledge of the beliefs and practices of Hindu religion. Further, they also thought that the visit allowed them to re-think, question, and engage with the different viewpoints they encountered--scholarly readings, views of the Hindu priest, and another Hindu layman.

Professor Man Bun Kwan will be on special leave next year to conduct research on the history of chemical fertilizer in modern China. Funding for his research is being provided by UC, American Council of Learned Societies, and The National Endowment for the Humanities.

Professor Ethan Katz was awarded year-long writing fellowships for 2012-2013 by both the Taft Research Center at UC, and the Frankel Institute for Judaic Studies at the University of Michigan. He has elected to accept the Taft Fellowship and decline the Frankel. He invited, nonetheless, to visit the Frankel Institute to participate in a few seminars, so that he may still be part of their 2012-2013 conversation on "Micro-histories of Encounter." During his fellowship year, Professor Katz will be completing his manuscript on the history of Jewish-Muslim relations in France since World War I. Meanwhile, Ethan has recently published an article entitled "Did the Paris Mosque Save Jews? A Mystery and Its Memory," in Jewish Quarterly Review 102.2 (2012), and in late March, he gave an invited lecture on the same topic at the University of Kentucky.
UC HISTORY
FACULTY: NOTES
FROM THE FIELD

In December, Professor Rob Haug presented a paper, “From City of Merchants to City of Murabitun: The Origins of Baykand’s 1,000 Ribats,” as part of a panel on Central Asian history at the annual meeting of the Middle East Studies Association in Washington, DC. In February, he appeared on the Chris Smitherman radio show on 700AM WLW to discuss the uprisings against Bashar al-Assad and the violent government response in Syria.

Professor Wayne Durrill reviewed a manuscript for the journal titled "Nineteenth Century American History." Professor Durrill has also been appointed to a three year term on the editorial board of the Register of the Kentucky Historical Society.

Professor Fritz Casey-Leininger was quoted in a March 19, 2012, Cincinnati Enquirer story on the history of Cincinnati’s Avondale neighborhood and provided much of the historical background to that story: “Avondale decline snowballed: From the Heart of Jewish Life and Culture to City's Second Black Ghetto in 20 Years.”

He is also currently working with Housing Opportunities Made Equal on a federally required “Impediments to Fair Housing Analysis” for the City of Hamilton, Ohio. He is analyzing census data to determine where there are concentrations of African Americans, Hispanics, and those in poverty and how those concentrations changed between 2000 and 2010.


Professor Chris Phillips was recently featured in the New York Times Opinion Pages. His article, “The Fall of the House of Underwood” is an exploration of the changing lines of loyalty in south-central Kentucky during the Civil War.

Cole Lyon was accepted for a three-month dissertation research scholarship at the Herzog August Library in Wolfenbuettel, Germany which will begin in mid April. The name of the scholarship is called the Dr. Günther Findel / Rolf und Ursula Schneider Scholarship.

Cole was also awarded an academic year’s research fellowship from the DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service), that will enable her to spend an academic year doing research in libraries and archives for her dissertation, a study on early modern conceptions of time.

For the third year Kelly F. Wright is a consultant on a Smithsonian Institution-wide initiative called “Inventing American Photography,” and as part of my work for them She recently gave a paper called “The Daguerreian World in Color” at the Smithsonian National Museum of American History where she also participated in a panel discussion about the Museum’s holdings and how the project should move forward.

In March, she delivered the Leland Brown Annual Lecture in Science and Art at Transylvania University in Lexington. The lecture was called “Fur, Feathers, and Fashion: Decorating with the Dead in Victorian America.”

GRADUATE STUDENTS MAKING HEADLINES
Priyanka Srivastava (PhD candidate) has accepted a tenure-track assistant professorship in the Department of History at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst.

**ALUMNI NEWS**

Bill Bergmann (Ph.D. 2005) who currently teaches at the Northern Michigan University has just accepted an appointment as an assistant professor at Slippery Rock University just outside Pittsburgh, PA. His book will be coming out with Cambridge University Press in 2013.

Mary E. Lindemann (Ph.D., 1980) has been named Chair of the Department of History at the University of Miami. Her dissertation, published as Patriots and Paupers: Hamburg, 1712-1830 (Oxford University Press, 1990) and named “An Outstanding Academic Book for 1990” by Choice,” was directed as a dissertation by James Laux. Dr. Lindemann has received many major scholarly awards including an NEH Fellowship for 1997-98 and a John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship for 1998-99.

Jessica Biddlestone and Jay Carroll (MA, 2010) have accepted offers to pursue doctorates in modern European history at Northwestern University. Amy Selby (2009), who went on to pursue an MA in African history at OSU, will now also go to Northwestern for her PhD.

VON ROSENSTIEL SPEAKER SERIES

Relations between the religious and secular worlds have rarely been so beset by tension and misunderstanding as they are today. Yet in recent years, scholars across the humanities have begun to rethink many of their assumptions about how the "secular" world emerged, and also about its relations with the religious world. Increasingly, these scholars have come to understand that the modern world is deeply shaped by religion, and that the religious and secular can rarely be separated. This year the History Department has hosted a series of speakers whose work addresses such issues. Don’t miss the final guest.

Final Speaker (May 9-10): Lisa Moses Leff, Associate Professor of History, American University

Book Seminar: Discussion of Leff, Sacred Bonds of Solidarity: The Rise of Jewish Internationalism in Nineteenth-Century France

Lecture: 'Sacred' Remnants for a Secular History? Zosa Szajkowski and the Creation of French Jewish History.