



QUEENS COLLEGE

# History Alumni News

Volume 3, No. 1 Spring 2001

## A Letter from the Chair

The third annual *Alumni Newsletter* is arriving later than I had hoped. Various departmental activities kept pressing, but here we are. I hope everyone has had a good year. I was on sabbatical in the Fall, and while I was away Professor Elisheva Carlebach served admirably as chair, proving that her talents extend beyond being a magnificent scholar and teacher.

Since last year's newsletter there has been some sad news for the department. The saddest news occurred in late December when Professor Frank Merli died suddenly. Frank had been enjoying a well-earned sabbatical when he died. And last Fall, Emeritus Professor Alan Schulman died in Israel, where he had retired.

In February Professor Stuart Prall retired. The member of the department with the longest continuous service, Professor Prall taught British history to generations of Queens College students. He also served as chair of the department in the mid-1980s and later served as Executive Officer of the history program at the Graduate Center.

Last July the department moved to the third floor of Razran Hall (the building without windows as many of you will remember). Because I was away in the Fall, I am still getting used to the new surroundings, but the move itself was achieved with less disruption than anticipated.

The Niarchos Foundation Program in Hellenic Studies continues under the energetic leadership of Professor Elena Frangakis-Syrett. During the Fall term Professor Gregory M. Sifakis of New York University spoke on "Aristotle and

Music in Classical Greek Tragedy." Later that Fall University of London Professor Mark Mazower gave a fascinating lecture on "Greeks and Jews: Salonika in the 20th Century." This past April Professor Richard Patterson of Emory University spoke on Plato in a lecture entitled "Word, Image, and the Understanding of Philosophy." On May 3 Dr. Helen C. Evans, Curator of Byzantine and Medieval Art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, addressed "The Glory of Byzantium: Art and Diplomacy in the Middle Byzantium Era." I have been pleased to see a number of history alumni from past years among the large audiences.

In the Fall of 2000, Professor David Syrett became Distinguished Professor Syrett. As many of you know, David is the author of numerous books on naval history during the American Revolution and World War II. This past Spring Pro-

fessor Premilla Nadasen won a Presidential Research Award that has allowed her to take this semester off to continue her research and writing. Also last Spring, Professor Jyotsna Uppal was one of the main organizers of a highly successful conference on feminist pedagogy, multiculturalism, and learning.

It may not surprise many of you to learn that Queens College's financial situation has been poor (a large understatement) for the past few years. Russ Hotzler, our interim president, has focused on the key issue of raising enrollment, and there have already been good signs on that front. However, budget difficulties have continued to translate into a shortage of new lines. This is a difficult problem for departments like history that have been hit with a large number of retirements. We are now 30-35 years past the "good years" of the mid-60s to the early 70s when most of the department



Left to right: Niarchos Program Professor Elena Frangakis-Syrett, Interim President Russ Hotzler, Speaker Mark Mazower, Professors Elisheva Carlebach and Frank Warren

was hired. This explains the retirements over the past few years and the more to come over the next few years. History has been one of Queens College's leading departments in terms of scholarship and teaching, and we are anxious to maintain that excellence. In order to do so, we are fighting for new lines. In March we received the good news of a line in Ancient History. Just as this newsletter was about to go to print, we received two additional new lines—one in European History and one in Latin American History.

Speaking of retirements, we continue to keep in touch with our retirees. Professors Whiteside, McConnell, and Saladino frequently attend our student honors party in the Spring. I see Professor Wreszin quite often in the city. I am in e-mail contact with Professor DelaCava, and hear from colleagues about Professors Avrich and Eubank. I saw Professor Kinsbruner at the American Historical Association Conference in Boston. He has taught as a visiting professor at the University of Miami and Cornell and has moved recently to Florida. Professor Gordon has moved to the West Coast.

I continue to be impressed by the quality of the History faculty's publications. While we do not have any

new books this year, I once again recommend to you some of our recent publications: Marion Kaplan's *Between Dignity and Despair*, the moving story of daily Jewish life, especially women's lives, under the Nazi regime; Stanley Hirshson's *The White Tecumseh*, a major biography of General William T. Sherman; Elisheva Carlebach's *Divided Souls*, the fascinating, if disturbing, history of Jewish conversions to Christianity between the middle ages and the 18th century; and Joshua Freeman's *Working-Class New York: Life and Labor Since World War II*, a compelling history of the influence of workers and unions on the life of New York City. *Between Dignity and Despair* will be published in Germany this summer, and Professor Kaplan will be participating in a book tour there in July.

We do have books that have been accepted for publication. In 2002 look for Jon Peterson's *City Planning in the United States, 1840-1917: The Birth of a Comprehensive Vision*. To be published by Johns Hopkins University Press, the book is the definitive history of city planning during the 19th and early 20th centuries. Having read the manuscript, I can say that Professor Peterson presents the history with great learning and in a graceful style.

Also in 2002 look for Stanley Hirshson's biography of General George Patton, to be published by HarperCollins. It promises to be the definitive biography of this controversial individual.

David Syrett's work on communications intelligence and the Battle of the Atlantic for the British Navy Records Society should be published in the near future. At present, Professor Syrett is researching Admiral Sir George Brydes Rodney during the American Revolution. Professor Syrett describes Rodney as "totally unpleasant—avaricious, difficult, and uncongenial—but nevertheless one of the great fighting admirals of the Age of Sail and an original thinker in naval matters."

As impressed as I am with the faculty, I am equally impressed with the students. Last Spring we had so many students who deserved departmental prizes that we had to create co-winners in many categories, including our top prize, the Koppel S. Pinson Award, shared by Esther Hoffman and Michael Firestone.

Student prizes lead me once more to express my deep gratitude for your contributions to the History Alumni Fund. Through it, we have been able to improve our office equipment and technology and to support conferences and, in times of

### ALWAYS PROUD OF OUR AWARD-WINNING AND PRIZED STUDENTS



Student Michael Firestone flanked by Professors Vivian Gruder, Stuart Prall, and Edgar McManus (in background)



Professor Warren with students Caroline Bennett and Sari Halpert

financial emergency, contribute to the library for the purchase of history books. But at the center are the student prizes. Last year, through your gifts, we created a prize for junior history majors. Even in this category, the competition was so close that we gave two prizes—to Caroline Bennett and Sari Halpert.

### What will you find in this issue?

Three memorials: The first is the memorial I read for Frank Merli at a meeting of the Queens College Academic Senate in February 2001. The second is a letter of remembrance of Frank Merli from a former Queens College master's student, William Stueck, now a professor of history at the University of Georgia. The third is my tribute to a former student.

In addition, Mark Willner of the Class of 1961 recently won the National Social Studies Supervisors Association's Award for the Outstanding Supervisor of Social Studies in the United States for 2000. I have asked Mark, who is now an Assistant Principal in charge of the Supervision of the Social Studies Department at Midwood High School, to write a brief remembrance of Queens College and how it contributed to his career.

Finally, there are the pictures. Many are from last year's Student Honors/Faculty Retirement Party where the students received their honors prizes and we honored Professors Della-Cava, Gordon, and Kinsbruner on their retirements. Others are from a Fall luncheon where Daniel Chung, Class of 2000 and now a medical student at Downstate, received the Arnold Franco Essay Award. Finally there is a picture from the fall Niarchos program in which Professor Mazower spoke.

*Frank Warren*

## Spring Honors 2000/Retirement Party Album



**Professors Evelyn Silverman (Library)  
Frank Warren  
Jon Peterson  
Frank Merli**



**Professors Nicholas Jordan (Philosophy)  
Martin Pine  
Salvatore Saladino**

More photos on pages 6, 7 and 8.

### REMEMBERING QUEENS COLLEGE

Mark Willner '61

I enjoyed being a history major at Queens College, 1957-1961.



Mark Willner

This was due to the quality of the faculty in the department, moderate size classes, informative texts and other readings, and a lively History Club. There was a good balance of courses, particularly in American and European History. While there were fewer offerings in the African-Asian-Latin areas, as was true in colleges throughout the nation at that time, Queens was a pioneer in making such courses available.

The History Club was quite active. We met two or three times a month and enjoyed a close link with the department's instructors. They were willing to make presentations on topics of significance.

My background at Queens stood me in good stead as I embarked on a teaching career. I had no trouble passing both the New York City Board of Education written and oral exams in social studies. When I began teaching at Morris High School in the South Bronx in 1963, I frequently relied on my college notes and texts in constructing lesson plans. The department chairman, who hired me, was impressed with the fact that I graduated from Queens with a B.A. in history. He thought admirably of the College's History Department.

Although several of my teaching colleagues wanted to move ahead in the Board of Education System by vying for both subject area and non-subject area higher license positions, I wanted to go further solely in social studies.

Consequently, amidst much competition, I was delighted to accept the position of department chairman

at Midwood High School in 1973. I am still currently in that role, and have enjoyed the chance to make contributions to the social studies education of a large student population (almost 4,000). In addition, with a teaching staff that has ranged in size from 18 to the current 28, I have welcomed the opportunity to mentor new teachers, work with veterans, purchase worthy texts, etc.

My other current pedagogical endeavors are as Social Studies Supervisor with the NYC Board of Education Evening High Schools and as a teacher of Jewish History at the Temple Emanu-El Religious School.

Given the needed and welcome curriculum changes in New York State's social studies requirements for graduation from high school, I have sought to enhance the scholarship of fellow pedagogues in the New York City metropolitan region. These changes, particularly in Global History, have taken place over the last five to ten years. Accordingly, I have introduced and supervised in-service courses on China, India, Japan, Korea, the Middle East, and the Holocaust. These have been conducted in affiliation with such organizations as the China Institute, Columbia University, the Consulates of Japan and Korea, the Anti-Defamation League, and the Museum of Jewish Heritage—A Living Memorial to the Holocaust.

*Mark Willner is the Outstanding Supervisor of Social Studies in the U. S. for 2000.*

### MEMORIAL FOR FRANK MERLI

Frank Warren

Delivered at the Queens College Academic Senate, February 2001

Professor Frank Merli of the History Department died on December 22, 2000. Professor Merli joined the History Department in 1968. The following year he was made the Graduate Adviser, a post he held until his death. As graduate adviser, he was the vital person in developing one of the most successful M.A. programs on campus. In his graduate seminar, he taught hundreds of graduate students his love of history, his fascination with historic documents and how they may be interpreted in a variety of ways, and the rigors of researching and writing.

His own book, *Great Britain and the Confederate Navy, 1861-1865*, is an essential book in the naval history of the Civil War. At the time of his death, he was in the process of completing his research on the *Alabama*, a Confederate ship, whose history fascinated him throughout his academic life. His expertise on the *Alabama* resulted in his being chosen in 1990 to edit a special *Alabama* issue of the *Journal of Confederate History*.

Professor Merli once told his sons that he thought he was more at home in the 19th than in the 20th century. Composing his writings in long-hand, never owning or using a computer, without voice mail or e-mail, he may well have been right.

**The department is presently considering the best manner to honor the memory of Frank Merli. Anyone who would like to contribute to the Frank Merli Memorial Fund should send their checks to the Queens College Foundation, Kiely Hall 143, Queens College, 65-30 Kissena Boulevard, Flushing, New York 11367. Attention: Mario DellaPina, and mark on the check Frank Merli Memorial Fund.**

It could be exasperating to try to reach him without e-mail or voice mail, but his colleagues and the secretaries always forgave him because of his fundamental kindness.

His colleagues remember him for his quiet humor, his willingness to do the most mundane task cheerfully, and his thoughtfulness to everyone in the department. Those of us in the department whose careers go back to the 1960s came to look at Professor Merli as an institution, or, to use a cliché—but a true cliché—as a solid brick in the basic foundation of the department. It is an understatement to say that his colleagues will miss him deeply.

### REMEMBERING FRANK MERLI William Stueck

I was saddened to hear of Frank Merli's untimely passing. Although I never took a class with him, he and I did have substantial contact while I was a master's student at Queens College off-and-on from 1967 to 1971.

I had grown up in a small town in Connecticut and attended a college of less than 1,500 students as an undergraduate. New York City was a big, impersonal place to me and, despite the excellent teaching to which I was exposed by such professors as Frank Warren, Mike Wreszin, and Salvatore Saladino, in general Queens College fit the pattern.

It changed rather dramatically for me when Frank Merli took over as graduate adviser sometime in 1969 or 1970. By that time I was working on a master's thesis in American foreign policy and looking toward applying to Ph.D. programs.

Frank and I were in the same sub-field. For that reason, and because he was a warm, caring human being, he took a particular interest in guiding me through both the last stages of my M.A. program and the process of applying to Ph.D.-granting institutions. In the time I spent in his office,

I learned a good deal about the more subtle workings of the profession. The knowledge served me well over the next decade, the most precarious time in my professional life.

I will miss knowing that Frank Merli walks the ground with me, but I will not forget the contributions he made while he did; nor will I forget that, in his thoughtfulness and gentleness toward others, I should be more like him.

### REMEMBERING FRANCES LBOVIDGE Frank Warren

Frances Lebovidge died in December 2000. She was somewhere in her 80s. She entered my survey class in the late 1980s and must have been 70 then. She and Lester, her husband, took the class together, Frances for credit, Lester as an auditor. Shortly before the mid-term, she told me that she had severe arthritis of the hands and asked if she could dictate the exam to Lester or another person. I told her that either was fine with me. I think that started our friendship.

Somewhat later in the semester, she told me that when she was about to become a junior in high school in upstate New York, her father had told her that if she graduated early, the family would move to New York and she could go to Hunter. She took on extra work and graduated, but it was just as the Depression hit her family. She had to go to work as a bookkeeper; her dream of attending college was set aside until her retirement. She entered Queens, as many of our older students have, through the ACE program.

After taking the first class with me, she continued taking history classes including several with me, always with Lester by her side. In the Spring semester of 1991 I was out due to a cancer operation. When I returned in the Fall, there was no Frances and no Lester. When they still did not register in the Spring

of 1992, I called Frances and asked where she was—since she had always been so determined to get her degree. She told me that she too had had cancer, and that she and Lester were feeling discouraged. I told her to come to campus for lunch and over lunch that Summer I encouraged her to complete her degree. I said to her to come back in the Fall, take my course, and see if she could handle it. She did and she handled it and her other courses too. But it wasn't easy. She had a new bout with a different cancer; Lester suffered a heart attack (thankfully not fatal) in the Queens College parking lot.

In 1996 Frances was awarded a prize for Distinguished Scholarship in History and finally received her long-desired degree. But that didn't end her education. She continued to audit history classes until her cancer returned. She seemed to have beaten it for a third time, but it finally caught up with her last year.

Through these times, Frances and I were a mutual admiration society. She would pop into my office from time to time to see how I was doing. I would call her from time to time for the same reason. She would tell me that the Summer lunch in 1992 changed her life, gave it meaning again. I would tell her that she was what teaching was all about—knowing that you have made a positive impact on someone's life. I have taught many students at Queens, but none more courageous, none more determined, none more intellectually curious.

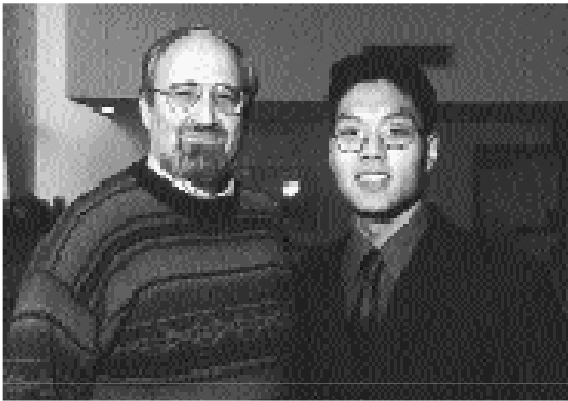
Finally, this memorial is not only about Frances and her drive and determination. It is also about what is best about Queens College: the opportunity it offers for students of different backgrounds and different ages. Frances seized the opportunity with a passion that carried her through till the end.



## Luncheon for Arnold Franco Essay Prize



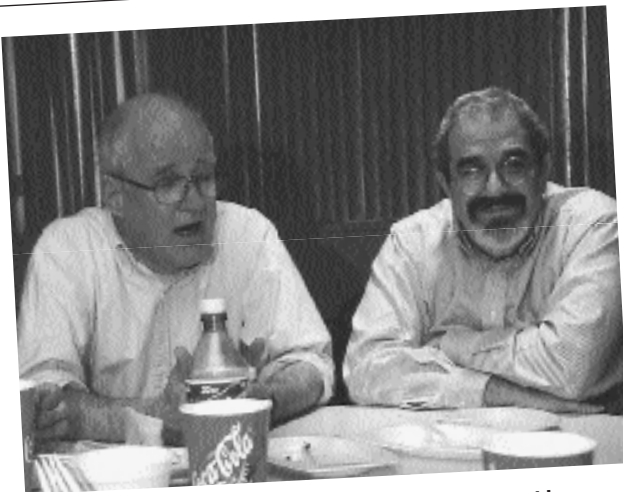
**Arnold Franco '43, Prize Winner Daniel Chung,  
Professors Frank Warren and Elisheva Carlebach**



**Professor Benny Kraut and Prize Winner Chung**



**Professors Stuart Prall and Isaac Alteras**



**Professors David Syrett and Morris Rossabi**



**Professors Marion Kaplan and Elena Frangakis-Syrett**



**Professors Andrew Whiteside, Paul Avrich, and John O'Brien**



**Professor Ralph Della Cava**



**Professor Jay Gordon**



**Professors Jyotsna Uppal, Marion Kaplan, and Premilla Nadasen**

## Spring Honors 2000/Retirement Party Album



Professors Warren and Michael Wreszin with student Chana Wagner



Professor Elena Frangakis-Syrett and Department Secretary Francine Kapchan

**QUEENS COLLEGE**  
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