



QUEENS COLLEGE

# History Alumni News

Volume 4, No. 1 Spring 2002

## A Letter from the Chair

Every year I hope to get the Alumni Newsletter out earlier in the Spring. And every year I fail. But here we are, and I would like to report to you on some developments within the History Department. This year, especially last fall, has been difficult. September 11 resulted in the death of former history majors, Matthew Garvey, Class of '99, Christopher Santora, Class of '00, and Gary Lutnick, the son of former colleague, Sol Lutnick. Matthew, a student of mine in two classes, and Christopher were members of the New York City Fire Department. They were among the many brave firemen who lost their lives. From an article in *The New York Times* about the Lutnick family and from a recent note to the department from Edie Lutnick, Gary's older sister, I know that it has been a difficult time for them. Many other lives at the College were also impacted.

In addition, in September, Philip Cannistraro, our Distinguished Professor of Italian history, entered the hospital for what turned out to be a far longer stay than anticipated. He is now home recovering. And in January, Jay Gordon, who had retired to San Diego, died. Thus it was both a difficult and a sad year.

On a brighter note, the College administration has done an excellent job increasing enrollment and translating the increased revenue into new lines. The result was that last June we completed a search in ancient history and hired Joel Allen, a recent PhD from Yale, who began teaching in the fall. Joel has already proved to be an exceptional teacher and has reinvigorated our ancient history offerings. We have also just concluded searches in Latin

American and modern European history. The Latin American search was made necessary by the retirements in February 2000 of Jay Gordon and Jay Kinsbruner. The Modern European search was made necessary by the retirement of Vivian Gruder in February 2002 and by Marion Kaplan's acceptance of a chair at New York University. Amy Chazkel, who will receive her PhD from Yale in June, will fill the Latin American position, and Julia Sneeringer, a University of Pennsylvania PhD whose book on how German political parties during the Weimar Republic appealed to women is due this spring, will fill the Modern European position.

In June 2001, Professor Stuart Prall retired. A former chair of the department and former Executive Officer of the Graduate Program in History at CUNY, Stuart was a remarkable teacher, an important scholar, and a dedicated contributor to the life of the department and the College. Some of the photographs in the newsletter are from last May's History Honors and Awards ceremony where we honored Stuart.

Professor Elena Frangakis-Syrett continued her role in organizing a series of lectures and seminars on Greek history and culture under the sponsorship of the Stavros J. Niarchos Foundation. Last fall, Professor Roderick Beaton of King's College, London, spoke on the Greek author and diplomat George Seferis. And Professor Speros Vryonis has just concluded a two-week residency in which he gave a large public lecture, two lunch-time talks, and led two classes. One of the additional benefits of these programs is that I get to renew acquaintances

and meet history alumni. At one of the recent Vryonis luncheons, a history alumnus from 1960 came up to me and we reminisced about Richard Emery, Salvatore Saladino, Charles Van Duzer, Tom Kendrick, and Charles Hallberg. Professor Frangakis-Syrett deserves credit for providing the College and the community with three years of exceptional lectures.

For those of you who are interested in retired history faculty members, I am in frequent touch with Michael Wreszin. Mike recently edited a collection of Dwight Macdonald's letters and last month read from the collection at the Labyrinth Bookstore in Manhattan.

I attended the 80th birthday of Andrew Whiteside, who still looks 40, and I have spoken on occasion with Alan McConnell and Paul Avrich, who are doing well. And I am in occasional e-mail contact with Ralph Della Cava and Jay Kinsbruner. Also, although she is not a retiree, I keep in frequent touch with Marion Kaplan.

This year I had the assistance of Justin Engel, one of our excellent history undergraduates, in preparing this newsletter. Justin wrote to several of our alumni asking for brief remembrances of their years at Queens College. Three answered, and their replies are printed here. Edith Blicksilver '47 has had an interesting and rewarding academic life as a scholar who has helped recover the voice of American women. Laura Oren '66, a history PhD and a professor of law, was a student of mine in my first (1964, I believe) undergraduate seminar—a seminar I remember for its intellectual pleasure (including Laura using “the

yellow brick road" as a metaphor in her paper) and for the friendliness of the students. One of the students, Maddy Heller Landau, became a lifelong friend. Finally, Edward Bayone, Class of 1975, received an MA in history from the University of Rochester and an MA in International Affairs from Columbia University before going on to a very successful career in business (it was a contribution from Edward that originally started the Alumni Newsletter). After receiving the replies, I asked Justin and Jessica Singer, co-presidents of Phi Alpha Theta, to write their own thoughts about Queens and the History Department. Jessica graduated in February 2002; Justin will graduate in June.

I hope that those who were not able to reply to Justin's request this year will be able to reply during the coming year (address replies to me at the History Department). In addition, anybody else who would like to send me his or her remembrances should do so.

If you want to keep up with the History Department's publications, look this fall for the publication of Stanley Hirshson's major biography of General George Patton and—a little later—for Jon Peterson's comprehensive study, *City Planning in the United States, 1840-1917: The Birth of a Comprehensive Vision*.

And, oh yes, we are still in Razran Hall 360—the building with no windows and erratic heating. Hopefully we'll be back in a renovated Powdermaker in the fall of 2003.

Finally, enjoy the pictures!

Frank Warren

### Remembering Queens College

**Edith Blicksilver '47**  
**Associate Professor Emerita, Literature**  
**Georgia Institute of Technology**

Queens College, then the youngest and smallest of the New York City institutions of higher education, celebrated its tenth anniversary when our class graduated in 1947.

We came mostly from immigrant families, were taught patriotism with our pabulum, and fulfilled the American dream of upward mobility, knowing that a college degree would provide us with untold opportunities. We were the elite, smart enough in high school for taxpayer dollars to provide us with a free education, paying only a \$25.00 registration fee. Used texts were available for those unable or unwilling to purchase new ones.

The young men had to maintain a "C" average, and the young women a "B" to remain in good standing. Coeds never questioned these requirements since we expected eventually to become wives and mothers after a brief career, with husbands the breadwinners. As first and second generation immigrant children, we were taught to respect authority figures, such as parents, teachers, religious leaders, and government officials.

Our freshman year was mostly exciting, but sometimes frightening because in 1943 the world was at war. I became a history major with a minor in English, worked hard, and became a favorite of Chairman Perry Pritchett, Henry David, and Richard Emery, the latter attending my wedding. I met my beloved husband Jack in his class, and we became college teachers after completing our education.

I was the ideal student, delighting in every course, loving the campus atmosphere, and even working a few hours a week to file papers, and type letters for the History Department.

I received the History Department award when I graduated from Queens College. Enthusiastic letters of recommendation from some professors enabled me to do graduate work at Smith College as a Sophia Smith Scholar.

Our teaching careers took Jack and me to South Dakota, where some of our students were Lakota Native Americans. Later, we were active in the integration movement when we became Atlanta teachers, Jack at Georgia State University, and me as the first woman hired in the English Department, at Georgia Tech in 1961. The school had no women and no ethnics, either as faculty or students until that time.

With three children, I taught only a few courses at night, and then, after publishing numerous scholarly papers, I became an anthology, *The Ethnic American Woman: Problems, Protests, Lifestyle*, which won the Best Non-Fiction Book of the Year Award by The Dixie Council of Authors and Journalists (I donated a copy to the Queens College library). In 1999 I limited my teaching at Georgia Tech to an occasional lecture about ethnic literary contributions. I enjoy teaching at Emory Senior University, occasionally using the same notes from my college courses.

My five decades of teaching have been rewarding and fulfilling, with many happy memories of Queens College.

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**Laura Oren '66**  
**Professor of Law**  
**University of Houston Law Center**

As you requested, I'm sending you some news. I live in Texas with my family where I teach law at the University of Houston Law Center. It was a surprise to end up here, and a surprise to end up in law, after getting my graduate degree from Yale in modern British history, and doing a stint teaching in that field.

The economics and logistics of getting jobs for two historians in the same family proved insurmountable, especially as the market was quite depressed in the 1970s. So we ended up here. The happy circumstance is that I sneak history into my classes and into my writing when I can. I am married to Bruce Palmer, who is a Southern historian. We have a daughter who just graduated from college, and a son who is just beginning college.

The campus where I teach has certain similarities to QC. It is largely a commuter school and a large urban university where there are many students who are the first generation to attend college. Law students are a little different population, but we still have many who are the pioneers in their families. At graduation time, whole clusters of excited family come with noisemakers and cameras and whoop and holler as their student crosses the stage. We also have more than the typical law school contingent of older returning students, something that was not quite so common at QC when I was there, but there were some. I remember mothers and (adult) children being in school together.

Dr. Warren was certainly one of those professors who influenced me greatly. Ironically, as a law teacher, the American history he taught me is very relevant. I also still can close my eyes and visualize the all-encompassing, every-fact-in-the-universe, mid-term exam that Dr. Pine gave us. Then he just figured that we knew it all and the final was pure essay pleasure.

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**Edward Bayone '75**  
**Chief Credit Officer**  
**FleetBoston Financial**

I graduated in 1975 and look back on my studies in the History Department as critical to my intellectual development and preparation for my future career. My happiest memories are in the classes taught by Profes-

sors Avrigh, Merli, and Alteras. Indeed, all my professors were wonderful, but these three stand out, each for different reasons. Professor Avrigh had a passion that was inspirational. On any given day, he could communicate to his middle-class audience the pathos of the Russian Chronicles (how I still remember, "there once was a town called Riazan") or the utter betrayal of the Kronstadt sailors. Each semester, I took his course not particularly caring about the subject but knowing that by the end of the term, I would know every detail and feel the pain of every fallen soldier or prophet. Professor Merli, whose untimely death has saddened us all, taught me the power of diplomacy and made me think long and hard about empire and conquest. And Professor Alteras, how he loved European history! And I loved it too.

I followed my years at Queens College with advanced degrees in history and international affairs at, respectively, the University of Rochester and Columbia University. At Rochester, I studied European history, hoping to follow in the footsteps of my great professors at Queens College. But the truth is that the competition in the mid-1970s for every table scrap of a position was intense. In that environment, I simply was neither good enough nor rich enough to continue, and I left Rochester with a master's degree. After a year of managing a family business, I entered Columbia University's School of International Affairs, and earned a master's degree with a specialization in banking and finance. Upon graduation, I joined the First National Bank of Boston as a management trainee.

What attracted me most to the bank was its expansive international operations and the promise was kept. I spent a fascinating four-and-a-half years in Germany, from January 1985 to the months leading up to the fall of the Berlin Wall. Later in my career, I traveled extensively around the globe during a three-

year stint as the bank's International Credit Officer. For obvious reasons, that was a great job! I am in my twenty-third year with what is now called FleetBoston Financial. I am its Chief Credit Officer, responsible for managing a worldwide organization that oversees \$80 billion in corporate loans both here and abroad.

I have long believed that Queens College, more than any other institution, prepared me for my greatest professional challenges: helping manage the bank's vast Latin American portfolio in the wake of the disastrous December 1994 devaluation of the Mexican peso, and then doing the same for our Asian portfolio after the collapse of the Thai baht in 1997. Weighty issues required quick thinking based upon experience, rigorous analysis, and knowledge of history, economics, culture, and language.

Each of my international adventures is a letter or talk in itself. Some are more personal than professional, such as participating with my wife during our extended stay in Germany in actions to protest the opening of a virulently anti-Semitic play in Frankfurt or President Reagan's tragic decision to honor Nazi war dead at Bitburg. Without my education, I would have understood neither the enormity of the issues nor the imperative to act.

I should mention that I am an adjunct professor at the Graduate School of International Economics and Finance at Brandeis University. The dean at the school has given me the wonderful opportunity to design and teach courses in credit risk analysis and country risk analysis. Each semester, I have a marvelous time with a crowded room of graduate students. I feel that I am "giving back" some of what I received at Queens College and other institutions.

I have lost track of most Queens College classmates and hope that this letter helps renew some lost but treasured friendships.

**Justin Engel, June 2002**  
**BA History**

I entered Queens College knowing that I wanted to be a history major. Since high school, I had been drawn to the amazing, strange, and sometimes beautiful stories of the past – of war, intrigue, last-minute peace, bittersweet romance. History was the only subject that seemed to explore the depth of the human experience in an accessible manner.

And though I knew I wanted to be a history major, I was still one student among a campus population of over 10,000. In the grand scheme of things, I was a tiny little ant, trying to find my way in a new school, surrounded by new people, living through new experiences, and doing it all frightfully alone. But as luck would have it, my first two history professors—my first two professors ever—at Queens College helped me find my way. Dr. Warren taught an American history course that covered the period from 1865 to the present and I remember sitting through class and realizing that college professors aren't the evil psychos my older friends had made me believe they were. Dr. Warren has been an encouraging, thoughtful, and insightful voice in my otherwise chaotic and insane life. Dr. Gruder, who taught Modern Europe to 1815, was quite literally my first professor at Queens. She had a presence and a store of knowledge that I still find amazing. I learned so much in that one class—things that I still remember four years later. I took three more classes with her and am very glad that I did.

Everyone at the History Department has impacted my life in some way, from Dr. Prall, the man who made me love England, to Dr. Frangakis-Syrett, the most dedicated woman I have ever met. These are all people that I will greatly miss when I graduate.

But even though I leave Queens

College at the end of this semester, I will take a part of it with me in the form of the lessons I learned inside and outside the classroom.

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**Jessica Singer, February 2002**  
**BA History/Jewish Studies**

History majors across the country have probably encountered the popular assumption (or misconception?) that a career in education is their only viable option. After much investigation, it is clear to me that history students who have gainfully opened themselves to an understanding of the world of the past have the capability and skills to encounter and benefit from the world's vast opportunities. This invigorating and comforting realization is a result of much exploration—both of the self and of the world that extends beyond Melbourne Avenue. Moreover, this motivation directly stems from ongoing discussions and extensive interaction with professors and fellow students in various departments of Queens College.

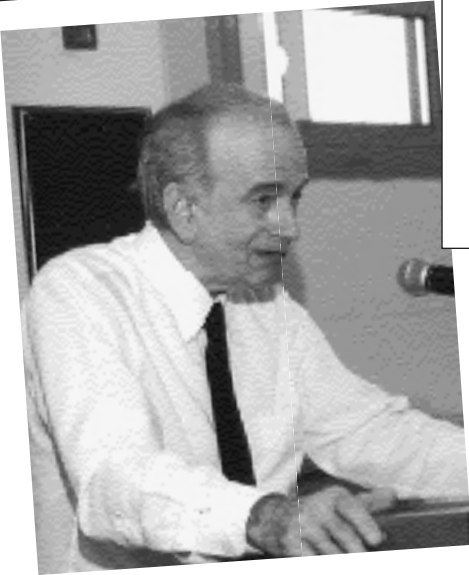
In addition to the pursuit of academic excellence by the students and faculty of the History Department, seeing that our professors truly enjoy benefiting from and contributing to scholarship seems to be nothing less than contagious for myself and my peers. The ongoing accomplishments that have blossomed from students and professors have elevated our feelings of pride and excitement. Influenced by their support and encouragement, many of us continue to engage in intellectual discourse beyond our undergraduate coursework, whether in graduate school, through our careers, or simply by discussing articles (or “discussing ideas”) in the newspaper with friends and family.

One of the most beneficial elements of the education offered in

the History Department is the value of exploring historical ideas and concepts in disciplines such as art, music, film, language, and literature. This openness, seen through a plethora of courses, lectures, and Phi Alpha Theta programs, influenced me to consider diverse careers beyond a classroom setting that combine an intrigue and love for history while interacting in the modern world. These career options ranged from international nonprofit organizations to curatorial positions in museums. Since many of these “ideas” became realistic opportunities for me, I am convinced that majoring in history does not limit us in any way, as many seem to believe. I view my academic background as one that has facilitated openings to many, many avenues.

As I embark on a new stage in life, I am grateful for the opportunities that have stemmed from the History Department and from Queens College in general. I firmly believe that only by contributing to student activities and maximizing the variety of educational resources that exist for students in Queens College and internationally (or “in Queens College and New York City, at large”), will our college experience prove to be enriching, memorable, and enjoyable.





**Professor Speros Vryonis at the  
Spring 2002 Luncheon talk**



**Professor Speros Vryonis, QC President Russ Hotzler and  
Professor Elena Frangakis-Syrett**



**Professors Martin Pine and Joel Allen with  
Secretary Francine Kapchan**



**Professors Elena Frangakis-Syrett and Elisheva Carlebach**

## 2001 History Honors & Awards Party



**Dean of Social Sciences Donald Scott, Professors Jon Peterson, Marion Kaplan, Frank Warren, and Elishiva Carlebach**



**Professor Stuart Prall and Junior Prizewinner, Justin Engel**



**Professor Elisheva Carlebach**



**Professor Marion Kaplan speaking about her departure from Queens**



**Prof. Martin Pine presenting Prof. Stuart Prall his gift**

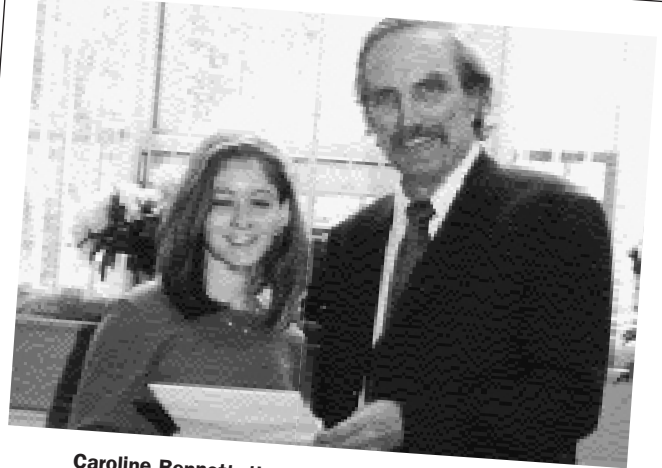
## 2001 History Honors & Awards Party



**Sari Halpert, the Koppel Pinson Prizewinner,  
and Prof. Frank Warren**



**Professor Stuart Prall, who was honored at  
his retirement during the party**



**Caroline Bennett, the Gaudens Megaro Prizewinner,  
and Professor Frank Warren**



**Professors Frank Warren, Martin Pine, Leo Hershkowitz,  
William Green (English Dept.), Stuart Prall, Isaac Alteras, and Paul Avrich**

## The 2001 Arnold Franco Prize Luncheon



Professors Joel Allen, Leo Hershkowitz, and  
Frank Warren



Arnold Franco, Amol Christian, Caroline Bennett,  
Parth Chowlera, and Frank Warren

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