

Queens College

History Alumni News

Volume 6, No. 1 Spring 2004

A Letter from the Chair

Every year I resolve to get the History Alumni Newsletter out earlier in the semester, and every year I fail. The spirit is willing, but something always seems to come up.

The History Department has had a number of positive developments during the past year. But we have also suffered a deep loss. On December 26, 2003, Professor Stanley Hirshson died after a short illness. The author of five books and a dedicated teacher, Stanley was a stalwart of the department for forty years. His death came as a shock, especially to those of us who had taught with him during those forty years. He will be remembered as an outstanding scholar, as a teacher who had a remarkable ability to impart his love of research to his students, and as a generous and thoughtful colleague.

In a letter to me, his thesis advisor and mentor, David Donald, wrote: "Unassuming in manner, tireless in research, Stan Hirshson enjoyed writing, he enjoyed teaching, he enjoyed his close friends, and he enjoyed his family. He may have been the happiest historian I have ever known." Those alumni who would like to send a note of condolence to his wife, Janet, and his son, Scott, may write to them at 59 Wilson Place, Closter, NJ 07684. Anyone wanting to make a donation in his memory should do so to the Patient-Family Assistance Fund at the Cancer Center at Hackensack Hospital, 20 Prospect Ave., Hackensack, NJ 07601. This newsletter includes a remembrance of Stanley by Stuart Knee, a student of his who went on to also become a fine historian.

Among the positive developments for the department has been the successful completion of our search in Russian history; Kristin Roth-Ey, a recent Princeton PhD, will be joining the faculty this fall. In addition, Sarah Covington, our recent hire in British history, published *The Trail of Martyrdom: Persecution and Resistance in Sixteenth-Century England*. Morris Rossabi will have two books coming out in 2004: *China's Multiethnic Frontiers* and *Modern Mongolia: The Descendants of Khubilai Khan in Transition*.

We are also very pleased that Premi-lla Nadasen and Julia Sneeringer were

awarded tenure last fall. In terms of working conditions, the History Department moved from the windowless confines of Razran Hall to a newly renovated Powdermaker Hall last fall.

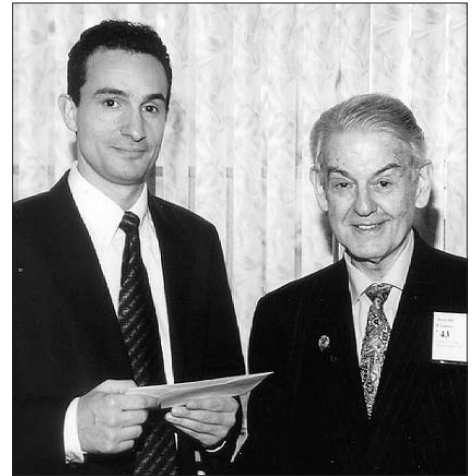
Among the events of the past year, we had our annual fall Franco Prize luncheon in which Arnold Franco, Class of 1943, presented the Franco Prize to Anthony Santagato for the best essay on a topic related to historical revisionism. Also in the fall, the department helped sponsor a conference on McCarthyism at Queens College. Along with Queens alumni, Larry Kaplan and Dorothy Pita, Professor Joshua Freeman and myself were active in organizing the conference, which brought together talks by academics and remembrances of the fired professors by alumni. Vera Shlakman, one of the fired professors, attended the conference.

The transition of the History Department continues. Professor Jon Peterson will be retiring this spring. Jon has been one of the most dedicated members of the department. He has been chair. He has been advisor to Phi Alpha Theta. He has been the graduate advisor. He has been a liaison between the department and the redesigners of Powdermaker Hall. As chair, I have leaned on him for help and advice for many years, and he has always been forthcoming. The department will be honoring him at our May honors party.

The kind of dedication to scholarship, teaching, and service that Jon and others of the "older" generation in the department have shown over the years continues to be one of the gratifying things about remaining as chair. Another gratifying development is the enthusiasm that our younger faculty have brought to their scholarship and their teaching, and to serving the department and the college. Starting with historians such as Koppel Pinson, Gaudens Megaro, Henry David, and Richard Emery, the Queens History Department faculty has always been outstanding. As I look at our younger faculty, I am confident that they will keep alive this tradition of excellence.

The other features of this newsletter are some impressions of her first year at Queens by Sarah Covington, and three pieces by some of our top majors. I think it is important for alumni to hear from the

Franco Prize Luncheon



Attending the Franco Prize Luncheon were, from left to right above, Anthony J. Santagato, winner, with Arnold Franco, and at right, Professor Jyotsna Uppal



students who continue to take advantage of the kind of quality education that Queens College offers. As a strong believer in public education, I continue to deeply appreciate what Queens has provided for generations of students.

As I write this letter, spring has at last arrived. There are still buildings in need of renovation or replacement, but with the new Powdermaker, the refurbished Virginia Frese Building (formerly the "B" Building), and the tree plantings, the college looks exceptionally well. I invite you to visit the campus and the department (Powdermaker 352; 718-997-5350). And by all means drop me or any of your old professors a line. We love to hear from you, even if we are sometimes delinquent in replying.

Frank Warren

Students Look at History

Laura Greenbaum

I am currently an upper senior History major. My minor is Secondary Education, and I am planning to teach social studies next year in a public high school. Education is my calling in life, and when deciding on a career, I thought it fit to go into teaching the subject I am most intrigued by and most passionate about.

History has always fascinated me. I love to study the themes that make up our past, and how they apply to our society today. The connections between the human past and present are striking; analyzing what was then and what is now is an exercise that proves how we can surely learn from other time periods and other places, and use that information to help guide us today in our decisions. History is such a powerful tool and I believe it is not used enough.

Therefore, I decided to dedicate my career to furthering the power of history. I aspire to share my passion for history and its lessons with my students. I hope to paint history in a new light for them by making it interesting and fun. In addition, I hope to use history to develop all my students' critical thinking skills and civic awareness, and shape them to become productive citizens of our world.

The History Department has served to move me to love history, and has allowed me to develop my knowledge in a laborious, but fruitful way. Some of the professors whose classes I have taken have inspired me to search for more information and concepts for my own gratification; they have also given me fantastic ideas on how to present history in interesting ways to high school students. Professor Cannistraro, whom I took for my colloquium "Fascism in Italy," is a brilliant scholar who motivated me to study more about Italian History. History of the 1920s and the New Deal, taught by Professor Warren, stirred me to form a creative unit on the 1920s for a high school class, focusing on the theme of tradition vs. change. Currently, I follow Professor Troetel's approach to using primary documents to study controversies and interpretations of events in history for my high school classes. These are only some of the professors who have given me knowledge and taught me skills and approaches to the study of history.

I believe that the Queens College History Department has prepared me well for a career in teaching history in high school. I am looking forward to spending my life immersed in history, and thinking of creative ways to present this subject to students. Hopefully, I will succeed in igniting a love for history in my students, or at the very least, showing them how to appreciate the lessons human beings can learn from their past.

Andre Harding

I have always enjoyed history but did not know what to do with it, and so studied business in high school, a valuable experience that still helps me a great deal. Not feeling fulfilled from business, I entered Queens College intending to major in chemistry, which I liked, and to eventually become a Ph.D. researcher. It turned out that chemistry in college is much more difficult than in high school. I needed a change, and quick.

It did not take me long to determine what I should change my major to. My GPA in math, chemistry, and physics was less than 2.5, while my GPA in all other liberal arts courses was greater than 3.9. I had developed a strong writing ability, but apparently did not have the computational or calculation abilities I once possessed. It was easy to decide which subject to choose and, in my fourth semester, I began catching up on my history courses and saw immediate success.

In the History Department, I have dual concentrations in United States history and European history, although my major interest is medieval history and early modern Europe. I am fascinated by church history during the Middle Ages and the monarchies of continental Europe, especially of England, in the early modern era. Also, I am enthralled by the tales of violence my professors relate.

I am often asked what I would do with a history major. If I choose history as a career path, and there is at least a fifty-percent chance I will, I would become a college professor in one or both of my areas of interest. I have been a tutor for many years, and, for a college student, I have extensive public speaking experience, including training by Copeland Companies (of Citigroup) and Toastmasters International. Indeed, what I would most enjoy in graduate school is the opportunity to teach as an adjunct! Of course, training for the professoriate is essential. The idea of having a much lighter work schedule than most professions (though I would need to display my worth to a college or university by producing publications), and having time to follow all of my sports, appeals to me. I like writing and engaging in research; I feel it is unfortunate that undergraduate and even graduate students often do not have sufficient time to devote themselves fully to research because of other responsibilities.

The reason I have a high GPA in history is that I really am interested in studying it, and a big part of that is the professors whose classes I have taken. Unlike in other places, the staff in the History Department at Queens are people first and professors second. I don't have a favorite professor, but I have taken (or am taking) courses with the following professors: Allen, Alteras, Elinson, Giardina (twice), McGough (twice), O'Brien (twice), Peterson, Van Nort, and Warren (my advisor). These professors have lived up to the billing I re-

ceived from other students when information was available (it's a network . . .), and for the fall 2004 semester I am investigating the courses I will take. I am sure the professors will be human, fair, and knowledgeable as well, and in that order.

Ayelet Katzenelenbogen

In fall 2001 I enrolled for my first semester at Queens College. I knew that I would gear myself toward a career in one of the health professions, so I immediately registered for classes in the sciences. I figured that when the time would come to pick a major, I would choose biology since I had always loved the subject.

My next semester I took a history class with Professor Hershkowitz to fulfill a LASAR requirement. Although it was a class in American History covering topics that I had already learned in high school, it got me thinking about how nice it felt to be learning material that was not related to the medical field. That is when I decided to major in history. In that way, I could broaden my university experience in humanities while at the same time fulfilling all of the requirements necessary for me to apply to medical school. This did of course add to my courseload, but I have no regrets.

The history classes I have taken so far have added to my ability to "think outside the box." While in courses such as chemistry and physics we often learn to solve problems using equations or similar methods, history has provided me with another aspect of learning: learning through discussion and writing. Communication by means such as these is extremely important to attain at some point in one's educational career, as it is imperative to any path in life that one chooses to follow.

Professors in our History Department are experts in different areas and share with students views that cannot simply be read in a book. A lot of what made many of the classes memorable was how the information was presented. One class which stands out in my mind is European History with Professor Rocznik, one of the most entertaining teachers I have ever had. He captivates the class with his sense of humor and acting and truly brings the lessons to life.

For the second half of European history, I took Professor Alteras. I found this class, as well, to be stimulating and entertaining. Professor Alteras has a unique energy that he brings to class, and he teaches in a very organized fashion which helps put things into proper perspective. Until encountering such professors, I never realized how interesting European history could be.

I also took a class with Professor Warren, "FDR and the New Deal." Before starting the course, I wondered how a whole semester could be dedicated to such a specific period of time. After the first day of class, though, I understood that with Professor Warren's expertise on the subject, he had

Martin Pine Retirement Party



From left: Professor Jon Peterson, Professor Martin Pine, and Professor Frank Warren.

McCarthyism at Queens College Conference

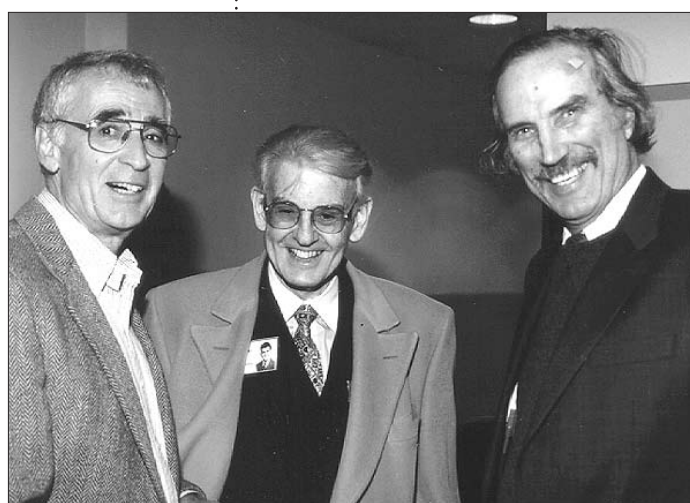


Professor Joshua Freeman chairing McCarthyism Conference.

Orman Prize Winner



Graziela Ionescu, Orman Prize Winner, with Judith Lewis, donator of the prize, at Honors Party.



Alums Larry Kaplan (organizer of conference) and Arnold Franco with Professor Frank Warren at the McCarthyism Conference.

a lot in store for us. Every class was filled with new information and theories related to the topics being covered. Professor Warren also got us to think on our own through analyzing what we learned in class and what we read. He often brought in videos for us which drew us in even more and helped us understand certain events and historical figures in greater detail.

The History Department is full of excellent professors, all having their own style of teaching and communicating. It is up to the students to take advantage of the available resources. I know that for me, majoring in history has been extremely beneficial. Although history speaks of the past, much of the material covered helps one understand current politics and events. Even if one does not want to major in history, I would strongly suggest taking a class or two and at least get a taste.

When Professor Stanley Hirshson wrote

STANLEY HIRSHSON: A REMINISCENCE

“pretty good” on a research paper I submitted, I knew it was his way of saying “not good enough!” Indeed, he was a diplomatic yet discerning critic and, even when I was a teenager, I was smart enough to take his opinion seriously. After all, “a word to the wise is sufficient.” Yes, when I was a teen, I took life very seriously – maybe too seriously – and Stanley Hirshson was the first professor I really sought out in the History Department after I switched my major from pre-med.

That first encounter occurred in the fall of 1965, when Stan was not yet the preeminent scholar he would become. Yet, even then, he was the author of a definitive work, *Farewell to the Bloody Shirt*, which became the standard monograph on the Republican Party’s post-Civil War leadership crisis. Actually, as I entered his office,

it was the thought of his book that gave me the jitters and not his title – “Professor.” Deep in my heart, I wanted to publish too but as a junior in college, I wasn’t ready – perhaps never would be.

He seemed younger in person than in the classroom, gently drawing me out of my shyness, in a sort of teasing fashion, which I discovered he reserved for those he cared about. We had a serious talk about something historic; I can’t precisely recall the content of the conversation but I can see in my mind’s eye his smile, always accompanied by a humorous anecdote or a wry observation that put me at ease. All he wanted was for me to find my voice, and, thanks to him, I did.

After graduating in 1967 with a BA in history, I hung around a couple of additional years until I received an MA. By that

time, Stan was more than my teacher; he was also my mentor since he supervised my thesis. I went on for my PhD and he went on to write several brilliant biographies, which further informed his distinguished career. I own one of these biographies, imaginatively titled *The Lion of the Lord*. It's a great read but the book's personal inscription moved me most:

For my good friends
Sonya and Stuart Knee,
With best wishes,
Stanley P. Hirshson

*Stuart Knee, Department of History
College of Charleston
Charleston, SC*

My First Year at Queens College

by Sarah Covington

Queens College was not unfamiliar to me before I was hired in the fall of 2003, as I had already spent two memorable semesters and one summer session there, three years before, as a somewhat elusive adjunct professor. I remembered Queens fondly, however, as I moved on through the completion of my studies and PhD, and my subsequent assistant professorship at a small Pennsylvania college. I was not anticipating that a position in my field would open up in its

History Department, nor that I would be considered for such a competitively sought appointment at the best CUNY undergraduate school; expecting to remain ensconced and tenured in Lancaster County, I therefore reacted to the offer of a job with genuine elation and gratitude; and one year later, even amidst the burdens of teaching, grading, and undertaking my own scholarship, those feelings have not diminished.

Though I rate research as the first priority in my life – and I appreciate the support that is given to it by my department and colleagues – I am fond of Queens above all for its students, who are smart, funny, challenging, engaged, and diverse in their interests. While teaching often depleted me in the past, I have never had that experience at Queens, since the students I've encountered have always been energizing and involved; they are also, at least in my experience, active in their reading, and ready for the most part to apply their own understandings and interpretations to the past, teaching me in turn. Above all, I appreciate their diversity in age, and the fact that many of them are returning to school despite some amount of sacrifice on their parts; I was once in a similar position, putting myself through Hunter College and the CUNY Graduate Center while still working at support jobs and

after leaving a field (and an undergraduate degree) that was very different from history. The students therefore resonate with me on a personal level and I have genuine respect not only for their effort but, at Queens especially, for the overall level of their academic work.

Queens's History Department places some degree of emphasis on scholarship as well, as evidenced by the number of books its faculty has produced; I came in with a book already published, though I am embarking upon my second, which I hope to complete in the fall of 2005. I have never felt pressured to produce, but I know that a standard exists, and that my own contributions have the potential of shaping the future reputation of the department. The college is also advantageous in that my new book intersects with art history, religious studies, and literature, and I hope, as a result, to interact with those departments in the future, not only as a possible collaborative scholar but also as a teacher of interdisciplinary class offerings. For these prospects, as well as for the students and the support I have received from the chair and the department as a whole, I finish my first year at Queens with a real sense of contentment and productivity, which I am confident will continue in the years ahead.

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