

*The Roger R. Trask Award and Fund was established by the SHFG to honor the memory and distinguished career of the late SHFG President and longtime federal history pioneer and mentor Roger R. Trask. The award is presented to persons whose careers and achievements reflect a commitment to, and an understanding of, the unique importance of federal history work and the SHFG's mission. Victoria A. Harden was the founding director of the Office of NIH History and the Stetten Museum and served as SHFG president in 1998–1999. She delivered the Trask Lecture at the Society's annual conference at the Robert C. Byrd Center for Legislative Studies on April 24, 2015.*

## **Federal History in the Digital Age**

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It is an honor to give this lecture named after Roger Trask, a federal historian who devoted much energy to encouraging and sustaining the Society for History in the Federal Government (SHFG). One of my most vivid memories of Roger, one that impressed me about his commitment to this Society, occurred in 1996, with publication of his history of what was then known as the General Accounting Office (GAO). He dedicated the book to “the officials and staff of GAO, past and present, and to my close friends and colleagues in the Society for History in the Federal Government.” Roger valued his associations with other SHFG members and set a standard for participation in the Society that we all should emulate.



To launch this year's program, “Across the Great Divide: Historical Research in a Digital World,” I want to look back at the history of the digital age, survey what happened to history during these decades, and suggest what special skills and obligations we bring to the future of federal history in the digital age. Let's begin with the recent history of the computer and the Internet as they have changed our ways of communicating historical scholarship. In 1979, when I began my Ph.D. program in American history at Emory University, I bought a portable typewriter to use for research papers. I had also just learned from a secondary school colleague about new and wonderful computerized typesetting

machines and had learned my first keystroke, Control-C, to send a command. That typewriter gathered dust because Emory had recently expanded its data processing computer from running payroll exclusively to compiling and executing other programs. These included a rudimentary text editor accessible to faculty and students. I also signed up as the first graduate history student to take a computer language as a second language. Since no one had done this before, we created from whole cloth the series of classes that qualified. I studied Basic, “baby Fortran,” and a language called PL-1 (Programming Language 1). I learned to write simple programs such as having the computer ask for input and then generating output. For example, the program would instruct the computer to print “What is your name?” When the user typed “Dana,” the program would instruct the computer to print “Hello, Dana, I am your computer. Nice to meet you.” Studying computer languages, I believe, taught me two things that helped me in my career more than learning an additional human foreign language ever could. First, I gained knowledge about how computers worked and what could be expected of them. Specifically, I was thrilled with the power they held to correct mistakes without my having to retype an entire page. This was only a tiny segment of their real power—and “power,” the power to manipulate data and words that heretofore we could only dream about, was the principal descriptor one felt compelled to use for these new machines. Second, I learned that I could get hooked trying to solve a simple programming task and spend hours determined that a mere machine would not beat me. I viewed computers as a tool to assist humans, often difficult to manage but still only a tool that could be harnessed, not some mysterious and fearsome technology.

In 1979 a key aspect of graduate training in history was learning to use quantification in historical research, a subject I will come back to in more detail later. At Emory, we were taught to use the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), which required inputs in Fortran that were then compiled and run on the mainframe computer and produced numerical output of the mathematical analysis specified in the program. One misplaced semicolon in the Fortran input could cause the program to crash, so one learned to be a careful proofreader. To earn money one summer, I wrote a simplified SPSS manual for historians faced suddenly with these new machines but without the computer training I had taken. It was called *A Cookbook Approach to SPSS*, and it sought to convey in the most simple and clear language I could muster how to deal with the new technology. Looking back, I view this effort also as a clue to my interest in writ-

ing for a nontechnical audience instead of in arcane language for those already conversant in a subject.

In 1981 IBM introduced the personal computer, which required software on a floppy disk inserted into a drive labeled *A*, and a blank formatted disk to hold user-created files in a drive labeled *B*. In 1983, a 10-megabyte hard drive was available, somewhat obviously called the *C* drive. I was sure this would be the last computer I would ever need—who could possibly use more than 10 megabytes of storage space?! Of course, this was just the beginning, but for those of us using the computer primarily for word processing, we viewed the computer as a vastly improved typewriter, so black and white screen colors, which simulated paper and ink, were sufficient. We did not even imagine what the introduction of color, multiple fonts, images, video, and sound might require in terms of computer storage or offer in terms of enhanced communication opportunities.

Although the details of what and where now escape me, at some gathering in 1993 the next phase in the digital revolution, the World Wide Web, was brought home to me. A senior archivist from the National Archives made a presentation, saying with wonder in her voice that she had recently viewed something called a Mosaic browser and “seen the future.” Mosaic was software that permitted the transmission of images. Wow—for historians, images meant that all sorts of photos, maps, and drawings, might be made available to the public to enhance text! The next year, a doctoral candidate at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Judith Donath, introduced something called the electronic postcard. She was astonished at how much people liked it and attributed it to their need in a hectic life to stay in touch without having to write a long letter—another prescient view of digital life that today has come to mean 140 character conversations.<sup>1</sup>

By this time, at my agency, the National Institutes of Health (NIH), I was primed to embrace any sort of digital help in responding to historical inquiries. With assistance from NIH’s fine Medical Arts and Photography department, in 1996 we proudly uploaded our first website, *www.history.nih.gov*. I was happy to be able to

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<sup>1</sup> Rebecca J. Rosen, “The Early Days of E-cards,” *The Atlantic*, December 25, 2011, <http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2011/12/the-early-days-of-e-cards/250492/>; Judith Donath, “Inhabiting the Virtual City: The Design of Social Environments for Electronic Communities,” Ph.D. thesis, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1997, <http://smg.media.mit.edu/People/Judith/Thesis/ThesisContents.html>.

post basic NIH history and information about the multiple institutes on a public website to which I could direct internal and public inquiries without having to type and retype the same information onto paper memos. In addition, I wanted to share the exhibits about NIH history that we were doing with a broader public. The first exhibit on our website featured the work of Marshall Nirenberg, the NIH scientist who broke the genetic code and the first federal scientist to win a Nobel Prize. Once Michele Lyons had joined the office, she worked on an exhibit about the Laboratory Instrument Computer (LINC), the first computer that scientists could have in their own laboratories for analyzing data, as opposed to one single mainframe computer for all to use.

Our Society similarly adopted digital communication via the internet as early as 1996. As the initial SHFG website was being developed, I remember Executive Council discussions about when it might be appropriate to save money on printed communications and use the website and email instead for communication with SHFG members, given that our members spanned the paper/digital divide and some strongly resisted having anything to do with computers. Throughout the next two decades, the SHFG website evolved alongside the rest of the web, and more and more member communication became digital.

The federal government began slowly, then gained momentum, in making digital information available to citizens. Today, among many other digital conveniences, one may file tax returns online, download travel information from the State Department and health information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention about countries one plans to visit, view high-resolution renderings of art from Smithsonian museums, and communicate with the White House and Congress. During this revolution, of course, there have been those who resisted the transition, and there were many missteps in its execution. Recent criticism of the Library of Congress as slipping behind in worldwide leadership for lack of human leadership on the issue is one example. The slow pace of shifting to electronic records management at the National Archives—admittedly a daunting task, given the variety of agency records in various digital forms and classification statuses—is another. The recent flap over lost emails at the IRS and Hillary Clinton’s use of a private server for government business has likewise focused attention on what, to many Americans, would seem to be a simple process of bringing all government email under one system. As with other records of government, what the public doesn’t understand about the challenge of archiving federal email is the size of government, the development of email systems for individual agencies by private

contractors to meet specific needs, the instability of some agency servers, and the human need to get federal business done while not connected to a government email account.<sup>2</sup>

For historians, the power of the Internet to reach public audiences can now be coupled with the power of analytical data programs to mine large data sets. In 1994 the late Roy Rosenzweig founded the Center for History and New Media, now named after Rosenzweig, at George Mason University. His aim was to develop and promote the use of computers for humanists. The Rosenzweig Center developed widely used tools such as Zotero for bibliography and note taking and the THATCamp movement, THAT standing for “The Humanities and Technology,” with the “camp” representing informal conferences at which humanists can learn, share, and move forward with studies involving technology. The Rosenzweig Center also has compiled digital archives, including the September 11 Digital Archive, the Hurricane Digital Memory Bank, and the Papers of the War Department 1784–1800.<sup>3</sup> In 2004 my office at NIH collaborated with the Rosenzweig Center on a digital exhibit about the development of the home pregnancy test, the research for which was conducted at NIH. We wanted to make it possible for viewers to share their own stories about the test. As a federal agency, however, NIH could not create a public database because of Privacy Act provisions. Existing as a state university, the Rosenzweig Center could create and store the database, so we simply inserted a link telling viewers that they were being

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<sup>2</sup> Peggy McGlone, “America’s ‘National Library’ Is Lacking in Leadership, Yet Another Report Finds,” *Washington Post*, March 31, 2015, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/museums/americas-national-library-is-behind-the-digital-curve-a-new-report-finds/2015/03/31/fad54c3a-d3fd-11e4-a62f-ee745911a4ff\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/museums/americas-national-library-is-behind-the-digital-curve-a-new-report-finds/2015/03/31/fad54c3a-d3fd-11e4-a62f-ee745911a4ff_story.html) (note: robots.txt disallowed the Wayback Machine to archive the page); “Turning the page: Should the Librarian of Congress Be Term-Limited?” editorial, *Washington Post*, June 21, 2015, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/turning-the-page/2015/06/21/b8de7f10-15fa-11e5-9ddc-e3353542100c\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/turning-the-page/2015/06/21/b8de7f10-15fa-11e5-9ddc-e3353542100c_story.html) (note: robots.txt disallowed the Wayback Machine to archive the page); U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, “Electronic Records Management Guidance on Methodology for Determining Agency-unique Requirements,” August 23, 2004, <http://www.archives.gov/records-mgmt/policy/requirements-guidance.html>; Aliya Sternstein, “Critics: National Archives Lax in Records Management Enforcement,” Nextgov website, October 7, 2009, <http://www.nextgov.com/technology-news/2009/10/critics-national-archives-lax-in-records-management-enforcement/44992/>; Associated Press, “Clinton Email Dustup Latest in ‘Delete, Erase’ Era of Gov’t,” *New York Times*, 30 March 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2015/03/30/us/politics/ap-us-saving-history.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media website, <http://chnm.gmu.edu/>; <http://chnm.gmu.edu/research-and-tools/>; <https://www.zotero.org/>; <http://thatcamp.org/>; <http://911digitalarchive.org/>; <http://chnm.gmu.edu/hurricane-digital-memory-bank/>; <http://chnm.gmu.edu/papers-of-the-war-department/>; <http://history.nih.gov/exhibits/thinblueline/>.

transferred to a site outside the government if they wished to leave an account of their own story or read those of others.<sup>4</sup>

The American Historical Association (AHA), Organization of American Historians (OAH), and other professional societies have also fostered the growth of large-scale digital history.<sup>5</sup> The advantages of digital history were discussed, for example, in an OAH interchange in 2008. For military historians, there are especially rich digital resources. As one graduate student at Northeastern University put it, “Military history is very data driven, and the military keeps a lot of records.”<sup>6</sup> Similarly, other historians are developing databases to study the American Foreign Service. There are summer workshops where historians can learn to use digital data, and there are calls for collaborative research guidelines, which as late as 2008, the AHA said were not needed because “historians did not collaborate.”<sup>7</sup>

I would now like to return to the subject of quantification in historical research—data collection and statistical analysis—and examine the impact of this aspect of digital history on our profession. Until World War II, traditional historical narratives of political, military, and even economic history, many of which historians working in or for the federal government had been deeply involved in preparing, had been grounded in the reading and interpretation of whatever sources individual scholars could access. After World War II, many scholars began to question the traditional narratives. They hoped to use data from election returns, demographic data, and the like to analyze political and economic history. The so-called “New Economic

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<sup>4</sup> “What Historians Can Learn from the Social Sciences and Sciences,” *History News Network*, April 2015, <http://historynewsnetwork.org/article/146894>; Seth Denbo, “Ghosts and Monsters: Human-Scale Digital History at #RRCHNM20,” *AHA Perspectives*, January 2015, <http://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/january-2015/ghosts-and-monsters>.

<sup>5</sup> “Interchange: The Promise of Digital History,” *Journal of American History* 95 (2008), <http://www.journalofamericanhistory.org/issues/952/interchange/>.

<sup>6</sup> “Military History in the Digital Age,” Northeastern University College of Social Sciences and Humanities blog, October 20, 2014, <http://www.northeastern.edu/cssh/blog/news/military-history-in-the-digital-age>.

<sup>7</sup> The Early American Foreign Service Database, <http://www.eafs.org/> (note: robots.txt disallowed the Wayback Machine to archive the page); Digital National Security Archive, <http://nsarchive.chadwyck.com/marketing/index.jsp>; Seth Denbo, “Doing History Digitally: Taking Advantage of Training Opportunities to Learn New Methods and Approaches,” *Perspectives in History*, <http://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/december-2014/doing-history-digitally>; J. B. Owens, “On ‘Doing History Digitally,’” letter to the editor of *ibid.*, March 2015, 39, <http://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/march-2015/letter-to-the-editor-owens>; *idem*, “For Historians: Collaborative Research Guidelines,” [http://www.academia.edu/685722/For\\_Historians\\_Collaborative\\_Research\\_Guidelines](http://www.academia.edu/685722/For_Historians_Collaborative_Research_Guidelines) (quotation regarding “historians do not collaborate” comes from this document; see also Seth Denbo’s response to Owens’s letter in the same article).

History” debuted in 1958 with the publication of an article in the *Journal of Political Economy* titled “The Economics of Slavery in the Antebellum South” by economists Alfred H. Conrad and John R. Meyer, in which they argued that slavery would have continued without the Civil War.<sup>8</sup> The issue was brought to national attention in 1974 with the publication of *Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery* by Robert William Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman.<sup>9</sup> This book was one of the hottest texts when I entered my Ph.D. program in 1979. By applying statistical methods from the social sciences to history, they were creating a technique they called “Cliometrics.” In 1993 Fogel shared the Nobel Prize in economics for his work.<sup>10</sup>

Meanwhile, in the 1960s other historians utilized statistical methods with large quantities of data to write about the lives of common people, and with them the new social history was born. From the French *Annales* school, whose adherents analyzed medieval and early modern history through the study of parish records, to American scholars who wanted to tell the stories of immigrants, racial groups, industrial workers, women, and other previously undocumented groups, historians mined data and produced books that stressed analysis over narrative. It also led to fragmentation of the field and a focus by practitioners on aiming their work at a smaller and smaller audience of their peers, instead of at a broader public.<sup>11</sup> Speaking in some hyperbole, the historian Herbert Gutman wrote in 1976 that “a biography of an ‘Irish born Catholic female Fall River Massachusetts textile worker and union organizer involved in the disorderly 1875 strike’ would require nine different specialized sub-studies.”<sup>12</sup> One critic of the results described historians as now writing “defensively, not fluidly”; another said that we sound as if we wrote “with our elbows.” Educated potential readers often put such books aside because they required a great deal of intellectual work to wade through. Instead, they turned to journalists who explained ideas in more accessible language.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Alfred H. Conrad and John R. Meyer, “The Economics of Slavery in the Antebellum South,” *Journal of Political Economy* 66 (1958): 95–130.

<sup>9</sup> Robert William Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman, *Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1974).

<sup>10</sup> The Sveriges Riksbank Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel 1993, [http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/economic-sciences/laureates/1993/](http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/economic-sciences/laureates/1993/).

<sup>11</sup> Wikipedia alone lists eleven subfields of social history: Demographic history, Black history, Ethnic history, Labor history, Women’s history, Gender history, History of the family, History of education, Urban history, Rural history, and Religion. See “Social History,” [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social\\_history](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_history).

<sup>12</sup> Herbert G. Gutman, *Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America: Essays in American Working-class and Social History* (New York: Vintage Books, 1976), xii.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas Bender, “How Historians Lost Their Public,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, March 30, 2015, <http://chronicle.com/article/How-Historians-Lost-Their/228773/>; Anthony Grafton and James Grossman, “The Imperative of Public Participation,” *AHA Perspectives*, May 2011, <http://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/may-2011/the-imperative-of-public-participation>.



Critics of Cliometrics and other statistically based scholarship weighed in early. Perhaps the most famous was Carl Bridenbaugh, who, in his presidential address to the American Historical Association in 1962, argued that “the finest historians will not be those who succumb to the dehumanizing methods of social sciences, whatever their uses and values, which I hasten to acknowledge. Nor will the historian worship at the shrine of that Bitch-goddess, QUANTIFICATION [emphasis in original].”<sup>14</sup> Bridenbaugh has primarily been remembered for this outburst and consigned to the category of historical dinosaur, but in that same address, he also observed, “With more and more scholars employing all the tools and techniques, using all the data processing machines, and also those frightening projected scanning devices, which we are told will read documents and books for us, there is still no machine for digesting the sources.”<sup>15</sup> The training we receive as historians, I would argue, should teach us not only to “digest the sources”—i.e., analyze and interpret—but also to communicate it in a publicly accessible format as well as in arcane language suitable for professional journals.

As for the responsibility of historians to provide context for current political debates, scholars also differed strongly. Some believed that historians should play a major role in influencing current policy decisions. Others argued just as strongly that this was futile and an arrogant pretense, that history could never point the way to the correct decision for politicians. Ernest May argued in his 1953 book, *Lessons of the Past: The Use and Misuse of History in American Foreign Policy*, that “if history is to be better used in government, nothing is more important than that professional historians discover means of addressing directly, succinctly, and promptly the needs of people who govern.” Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., in contrast to his own later active involvement with the Kennedy administration, countered May’s argument in his review of May’s book, stating his belief that “it may well be more important for professional historians to write the best professional history they can and trust to the multiplier effect.”<sup>16</sup>

Knowledge of how the U.S. government misled the public about the Vietnam War and the confrontations between police and students during some campus riots for free speech or against the war had a chilling effect on young professionals trained

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<sup>14</sup> Carl Bridenbaugh, “The Great Mutation,” *American Historical Review* 68:2 (January 1963): 315–31.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., Review of Ernest May, *“Lessons” of the Past: The Use and Misuse of History in American Foreign Policy* (Oxford University Press, 1973), *Journal of American History* 61 (September 1974): 443–44.



in the 1960s. Many historians wanted the profession to go on record against various government actions. In his 1991 AHA presidential address, William E. Leuchtenburg described his opposition to such actions: "I would no more want to inflict my views on others than have views inflicted on me, nor would I wish to see us torn apart by factional fights over such issues." He went on to say, "I hope never again to witness a night like the one at the AHA convention [in 1969] when historians grappled with one another for control of the microphone during the bitter debate over resolutions on Vietnam and civil rights with [AHA President C.] Vann Woodward, in the words of the *New Republic*, "presid[ing] over the cacophony with the puzzled air of a kindly Southern judge at a hearing for psychiatric commitment." In the 1970s came the brouhaha of a highly publicized court case involving the hiring policies of Sears, Roebuck & Company with respect to women and men as salespeople for large appliances. Female historians testified for both the plaintiff and the defense arguing different cases for whether women aspired to such specialized job opportunities. I remember this case as extremely divisive within the nascent Coordinating Committee on Women Historians. It also led one writer to assert that all expert witnesses were "whores."<sup>17</sup> Some scholars have also argued that historians trained in the 1960s, many of whom were able to enroll in graduate study only through federal education programs, largely came from a middle class demographic less comfortable offering advice to national political leaders than their predecessors, who had come from well-to-do families and were accustomed to interacting with political elites.<sup>18</sup>

Whatever the specific reasons, a generation of academic historians emerged who often cast government as inherently bad in all situations, whether or not they had facts to support their arguments.<sup>19</sup> This view also colored academic historians' view of their colleagues who worked in federal agencies or who produced histories on contract. Both were viewed as inherently tainted, "court historians." It was easier for academic historians to turn inward, to pursue the ever-narrower subcategories of social history, emphasizing methodology, writing for the handful

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<sup>17</sup> William E. Leuchtenburg, "The Historian and the Public Realm," *American Historical Review* 97 (February 1992): 1–18; J. Morgan Kousser, "Are Expert Witnesses Whores? Reflections on Objectivity in Scholarship and Expert Witnessing," *The Public Historian* 6 (January 1984): 5–19.

<sup>18</sup> I thank participants in the discussion at a historians' luncheon group on June 3, 2015, especially Amos Loveday, for this observation.

<sup>19</sup> I personally recall one instance when I asked a presenter at a professional society meeting what evidence supported the argument in his paper that the federal government was at fault. The answer I was given was that the federal government had often done bad things, so obviously it could be judged at fault.

of their peers who shared their interests. Since they also trained the next generation of historians, however, their views came to emphasize a tenured academic career as the only valid goal, the place historians could freely criticize power without consequences and carve their own specialized niche in the historical research edifice. Public history was something not well understood, often viewed as public relations with a glaze of scholarship, a consolation prize if you weren't able to secure a tenure-track job. Sadly, this attitude produced the heartbreaking situation in which rigorously trained young historians felt that they were failures because the tight academic job market left them without their desired academic position.

What I find peculiar about this response from professional historians is the fact that all these same issues came up in the social science disciplines and in the humanities. The economists, political scientists, anthropologists, and the humanist disciplines similarly experienced internal quarrels, but their responses did not include withdrawing from the public sphere. As Leuchtenberg also noted with respect to a proposal in the late 1970s to create a Council of Historians to advise national policy makers, "It will be objected that history is not as technically refined a subject as economics and that historians diverge widely in their views, but it has also been said that if all the economists in the world were laid end to end, they still would reach no conclusion; yet the Council of Economic Advisers has proven to be a constructive innovation."<sup>20</sup>

The professional landscape for the humanities and social sciences in the United States today, then, looks like this. Social scientists are vigorously supporting jobs for their graduates in academia, the private sector, and government. Within the humanities, both philosophy and English support subfields that provide jobs outside academia. A philosophy major can become a bioethicist for a hospital or other medical organization, or he or she can work in government. English literature majors who don't want to teach have two options. They can pursue a career in journalism or become professional writers of novels and nonfiction, or technical writers or editors. History alone has lagged in support for its graduates to enter the private and government sectors. Since 1979 the public history movement, including our Society, has been the principal agency working to open jobs for historians outside academia.

For historians working inside the federal government, I want to ask, "What *should* we be doing for our agencies?" Should we advise on policy decisions? At my agency, political scientists have monopolized the policy analyst function and do not seek

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<sup>20</sup> Leuchtenberg, "The Historian and the Public Realm."

or particularly welcome historical input. Because of this, I took the position that the function of my office would be to help the NIH institutes document their own histories and communicate to the American public what NIH had accomplished with their tax dollars. Historical materials about NIH that my office produced have become foundational documents for the institutes, yet in the larger agency milieu, scholarship in history is still viewed as a nonessential luxury. As a historian trained to want references to primary sources, for example, I was horrified to see the very simple website called “A Short History of NIH,” which I wrote years ago, cited in Wikipedia and other references as the sole historical document about this complex agency. The digital revolution, however, has opened the door to making more nuanced scholarship available on the web, and my office is now digitizing and uploading as much public domain scholarship about NIH as possible. It is my hope that the scholarly books and articles once available digitally will supplant such superficial historical treatment of NIH.

What more do we all still need to do and how can digital scholarship help us do that? My answer is advocacy, starting with simply making sure that our agencies’ websites reflect the scholarly contributions of our offices. As many of us as possible should become Wikipedia editors to help ensure that the history portion of our agencies’ entries adequately reflect historical scholarship about them. We should also make an effort to get major federal history projects featured and work to get more distinguished members of our Society recognized with biographical Wikipedia entries. I would also like to see the creation of more Interagency Personnel Agreements that would offer current graduate faculty the opportunity to gain experience in the public realm or in private sector historical contracting to remove subtle bias against nonacademic history and to give them experiences that can be used to educate their students about nonacademic opportunities that could await them. For those of us who are retired and have the luxury of owning our own time, volunteering in advocacy positions can also pay dividends. For example, I volunteer as the Washington Representative for the History of Science Society (HSS). I read all those policy-related emails that full-time employees don’t have time to read and forward to the HSS Executive Director those relating to legislation affecting the membership or containing opportunities to get members appointed to federal boards. I have also represented HSS at meetings in Washington of the Consortium of Social Science Associations and the National Humanities Alliance and have come to appreciate how much more active the social scientists are in advocacy for their members than humanists have been. And, of course, having spent my career at NIH, I am very much aware of the exceedingly strong advocacy groups supporting biomedical research.

Thinking about longer-term goals, I would like to see SHFG work toward investing in a Sustaining Membership seat on the National Coalition for History (NCH) policy board, an expensive undertaking but one with potentially important pay-offs for the initiation of new federal history offices and the preservation of existing ones. I would also like to see Society members, in partnership with the NCH, the AHA, and the OAH make another attempt to get legislation through Congress or an Executive Order mandating historical offices in every agency. SHFG should also continue to make partnerships for mutual benefit with subject-area societies. For example, the History of Science Society recently specified in its long-term plan that partnering with SHFG was a priority goal within its own advocacy efforts. My bottom line here is my belief that if historians are going to re-enter the public sphere in a significant way, we must learn to press our case more strongly. The most heartening aspect of a new advocacy for history is that much of it is coming from the most recently minted historians themselves. They have taken to Twitter and other online forums to communicate, support, and pass along work opportunities to each other more quickly than traditional media will permit.

Finally, we need to support digital archives with our donations. The Wayback Machine, which serves as the Internet's archive, provides a means to archive the web pages we cite in publications so they will still be available when future readers search for them. It is thus especially deserving of support.<sup>21</sup> We must do this because much of the web will disappear if we don't. You may recall that Google hoped to become the new library at Alexandria, hosting all the world's knowledge. Copyright lawsuits over Google Books demonstrated that this goal might be unachievable, and just this year, Google's Board of Directors decided to abandon this effort as a corporate goal. Immediately this meme appeared on the Internet: "Never Trust a Corporation to Do a Library's Job." It reminded us that no matter how good their intentions, corporations are business enterprises subject to change as their profitability requires, and that libraries and archives will be the only reliable repositories because preserving knowledge and making it available to the public is the sole reason they exist.

We must link our efforts with our umbrella historical societies, and, fortunately, the American Historical Association is currently headed by Dr. Vicki Ruiz, an

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<sup>21</sup> Internet Archive Wayback Machine, <http://archive.org/web/>; see also Anna Neima, "Footnotes: Missing a Link?" *History Today* blog, March 10, 2015, <http://www.historytoday.com/anna-neima/footnotes-missing-link> about a new service, currently used principally by lawyers, Perma.cc, <https://perma.cc/>.

academic historian with experience in public history who clearly “gets it” about work outside academia. I have quoted many AHA presidents in this talk, and I would like to close with Dr. Ruiz’s message of support to the members of SHFG:

On behalf of the leadership, professional staff, and over 14,000 members of the American Historical Association, I write to send our warmest greetings to our colleagues in the Society for History in the Federal Government. As historians, we are all “activists for the archives” and we salute the efforts of all of you in the service of history in the federal government. At my university, like those across the country, the emphasis has turned to big science and big data, with in some quarters the unfortunate consequence of devaluing the humanities and social sciences—including history. I am reminded of the poster: “Scientists can create a Tyrannosaurus Rex, but historians can tell you why that might not be such a good idea.”

Those who consider history only in the past tense fail to recognize the importance of historical context and meanings to our present and to our future. I don’t have to tell members of this audience that we do so at our peril. You stand on at the frontlines of historical knowledge, preservation, and archival advocacy, and we are all grateful to you for that work. I bring to your attention a panel on Saturday afternoon chaired by Emily Swafford, programs manager for the American Historical Association entitled “On Being a Historian *for* versus a Historian *of*: The Relationship between Historians and their Agencies.” This roundtable will address current challenges and provide a space for dialogue and collaboration.

As a university-based historian who has participated in over seventy public history projects over the course of my career, I deeply appreciate the practitioners, as well as the practice of history, in the public sphere. But I do not speak only for myself. Career diversity for graduate students and the National History Center are vital AHA initiatives and we welcome more robust partnerships with the Society for History in the Federal Government. We wish you a productive and rewarding conference.<sup>22</sup>

I join Dr. Ruiz in wishing us all a rewarding annual meeting, and I thank you once again for the opportunity to present this Trask Lecture.

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<sup>22</sup> Vicki Ruiz to Victoria Harden, email, April 13, 2015.