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WKU History

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Dear History and Social Studies Grads:

The past year has been one of both sadness and joy for the History Department. We suffered through the losses of Richard Salisbury and Francis Thompson, but we also were joined by three new faculty members and were pleased by the establishment of the Richard Frockt Family Professorship in History.

One of our strategic planning goals for the past several years was to seek funding for an endowed chair in History. In April, we were thrilled to hear the announcement that Richard (Dick) Frockt, an alumnus of History from the class of 1967, along with wife Janet and son Ryan, had committed to fund the Richard Frockt Family Professorship in History. Their gift of $500,000 will be matched by the Commonwealth of Kentucky's Regional Excellence Trust Fund (better known as "Bucks for Brains"). In the next year or so, the History Department hopes to appoint someone to hold this distinguished chair.

Many graduates have written the Department about how much Rich Salisbury and Jim Thompson contributed to their education and influenced their lives. The History Department has created annual awards to students in Latin American History and in the History Contest in memory, respectively, of Drs. Salisbury and Thompson. These small monetary awards provide recognition of student achievement and also honor and remember the faculty members for whom they are named. We welcome your letters regarding these fine professors and what they meant to you individually, as well as any contributions you choose to make in their memory. Thank you so much for your continuing support of the History Department!

Best Wishes,

Richard Weigel, Department Head
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Lucas and Thacker Hold Down Their Forts

"Western's Odd Couple" is what many of our alums have called Marion Lucas and Jack Thacker. They were graduate classmates at the University of South Carolina. Thacker came to WKU in 1964, Lucas two years later. When asked what professors made the most lasting impression on them, students in our senior seminar invariably name these two. They represent two very different historical and political philosophies — you remember which wing each one defends, which fort each one mans — and so for almost 40 years they have made sure our students get both sides of every issue.

Lucas, whose fields are American South and Civil War, recommends three new books for you to read:

1) Ira Berlin's *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (1998) is important because it discusses the role slavery played in the northern economy and society as well as the Virginia Tidewater, the Atlantic states Low Country, and the Mississippi Delta;

2) David W. Blight's *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (2002) represents the best of the latest 'history and memory' studies of the Civil War & Reconstruction; and

3) T.J. Stiles' *Jesse James: Last Rebel of the Civil War* (2002), a wide-ranging account of the "life and times" of Jesse James, a solid history that reads like a novel.

Thacker, whose fields are Modern Germany and Military History, recommends these new books:

1) Anthony Bevoir's *The Fall of Berlin 1945*, written by a British officer, chronicles the military operations against Berlin from January through May of that year;

2) Nial Ferguson's *Empire: The Rise and Demise of the British World Order and the Lessons for Global Power* is an excellent overview of the role the British Empire played during the last two centuries, emphasizing its positive effects;

3) Michael Oren's *Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East* provides an excellent introduction to modern Middle East problems;

4) Pat Conroy's *My Losing Season*, is a great book on basketball, life at a military academy, and the passages of life, marred only by its contention that Clem Haskins played college basketball at Eastern Kentucky University."
Dr. Richard Salisbury, professor of Latin American history since 1976, died March 8, 2003, at his home in Bowling Green. A graduate of the University of Kansas, he was a recognized scholar and excellent teacher. In 1998 he was chosen a University Distinguished Professor. This letter from one of his former students, sent to us just after his death, well describes his character and the special place he had in WKU history.

Dear Dr. Weigel:

It was a crazy plan that might have failed miserably, but I always thought it would be great, when Richard Salisbury retired from WKU, somehow to track down former Boston Celtic great Jo Jo White. I would send White a plaintive letter explaining that a certain history professor always raved about the day, during a pickup game at the University of Kansas, when he blocked one of Jo Jo's layups; that our lanky professor relished that shining moment as the highest of his unsatisifed basketball career; that Salisbury would love to have an autographed ball as a momento.

I am sorry that will never happen. I was dumbfounded when I heard the news of Dr. Salisbury's death. Within moments of reading the e-mail about this horrible event, I scrambled to telephone Trace Kirkwood, a fellow WKU history student who has become one of my best friends. We shared a few moments of sorrow and emptiness about the loss that everyone connected with WKU certainly felt.

I can't count the number of times Trace and I have recalled stories about Dr. Salisbury, mimicking his most memorable phrases — "with a vengeance" and "Spanish blood coursing through his veins" — that he always delivered with descriptive hand gestures and dramatic flair; laughing about the Jo Jo White episode; boasting to one another about the scores we made on Salisbury tests; the 60 point essays (pick one of two) and the 40 point identifications (pick 8 of 10). Those tests are tucked away in my archives, within arm's reach as I write this.

Salisbury's self-deprecation was memorable, too, with his old-school glasses, his stuck-in-Sixties wardrobe, his flannel overshirt. He knew he was an easy target for us college hipsters, and so he would joke about his knowledge of MTV, stirrup pants, Bov Jovi, and the latest trends, explaining that he kept up through his children.

After so many years I guess those memories come back easier than the coursework of the knowledge I gleaned during the four occasions I was lucky enough to study with him. But there is no doubt that his enthusiasm for Latin American history helped fuel my own and carried me through to my master's degree and to the success I have known in my journalism career far beyond my time at WKU.

Besides the three classroom experiences I had with Dr. Salisbury, he was also gracious enough to take me on for an eleventh hour independent study during my last semester in graduate school. In a visit to his office I told him how much I appreciated his supervising my study of the Panama Canal issue, and he assured me he was happy to accommodate his best students.

That was a tremendous honor coming from Richard Salisbury — one of my best professors.

Todd Turner [BA '98, MA '90]
Murphy, NC
Francis Thompson 1930–2003

Not unexpectedly but just as sadly, we lost another great man of our Department this summer. Francis Hamilton (Jim) Thompson died on August 5, 2003, after a long illness. He came to WKU in 1970 and within two years won the University Award for Teaching. During his last years as a fulltime instructor and even into his time of optional retirement he filled classrooms to the brim. At his funeral his three daughters eulogized this unique man. Here are excerpts:

[Delia] For over 30 years at Western, he delivered his students a lively historical narrative that literally awakened some, inspired many, and engaged all. With his legs often contorted under him while propped on a desk and armed with a wooden pointer, he tweaked the conscience of generations of students living in a sometimes troubled world. As any good teacher would, he enjoyed challenging the assumptions of those young minds, particularly if they were Republicans. His courses, whether freshman surveys or graduate seminars, were tough and stimulating. His Korea and Vietnam course managed to fill every time it was offered, even at the dreaded hour of 8 a.m.

Dad loved his job. He loved the camaraderie he had with his friends and colleagues in Cherry Hall. He loved and cared for his students and they loved him, as witnessed by the numbers who claimed him as their mentor, stayed in touch, and sat by his bedside while he lay dying. His enthusiasm for his work inspired me to follow in his footsteps, to become an historian. You see, he always recommended following your heart, not your pocketbook, when it came to your life’s work and not to be afraid to change directions in your life when the time seemed right.

[Jo] There has never been, nor will there ever be, a more optimistic fisherman than my father. I am certain some have been more successful but none more optimistic. The boyish enthusiasm with which he anticipated each outing was infectious. Preparations invariably included lots of discussion about whether to use minnows or worms (it didn’t matter to me because I never baited my own hook), and what time we would need to leave. Then in the wee hours of the morning we would hear his gentle voice — “Wake up, girls, it’s 4:30, time to go. The fish bite best before the sun comes up.” And if they didn’t — “Well, there’s always next time.”

He brought the same brand of enthusiasm to every holiday, especially Christmas: “What’s Santa gonna bring you?” and “I think I see a sleigh in the sky.” I will never forget our first Christmas in Bowling Green. We awoke to one or two inches of fresh snow (feeble by my northwest Ohio standards of today but a near-blizzard by any Texan’s standards). And no one was happier than Daddy. His Christmas wish had come true. He made a believer out of me.

There are many things we cannot know about the hereafter, but there are two things I know for certain... where Daddy is now, there is always snow on Christmas, and the fish are always biting.

[Amy] My father could fix anything. He fixed things you didn’t even know were broken. Last fall, when he was staying with us, I walked in the back door after work to find a couple of our kitchen chairs upended, a complicated set of clamps and weights applied to various joints. They’re still holding. He built whole rooms, refinished antiques, and concocted potions to heal our pets. If you had a splinter, a sprained ankle, or a car in the ditch — he was your man.

You were safe if he was there, you could relax — his arm along the back of the front seat, his phone call to check on the baby’s fever, the look under your hood before you drove off. There is a snapshot of Daddy holding me as an infant, bent protectively over me, raptly studying me. I hope... I believe I can remember that feeling of being cradled in his arms. I think I can hold it close, rejoice that I still have the tower of strength that is my mother, cradle my own children and go into the future.

At the end of his funeral service, a brass band played “When the Saints Go Marching In.” We know Jim will be “in that number.”
New Faces In a New Millenium

Over the past 15 months six new teachers have joined the History Department. So that you will recognize them when you visit us, we give you a group photograph.

ARRIVED IN 2002:

Richard Keyser, from Virginia, is a graduate of Johns-Hopkins and will teach and do his research in Medieval Studies.

Andrew McMichael, from California, is a graduate of Vanderbilt and works in Colonial and Revolutionary America, particularly in Borderlands between the European Empires.

Eric Reed, from Pennsylvania, is a graduate of Syracuse and specializes in Twentieth Century Europe, particularly France.

ARRIVING IN 2003:

John Dizgun, from Quebec, Canada, is a graduate of Rutgers and teaches in the field of Latin American Studies.

Anthony Harkins, from New Mexico, is a graduate of Wisconsin and will work in Modern American Cultural History.

Marjorie (Beth) Plummer, from New York, is a graduate of the University of Virginia and specializes in Early Modern Europe, particularly Renaissance and Reformation.

Bussey Heads For Colder Climes

Charles Bussey entered the optional retirement program this year, following 33 years of successful teaching in our Department, and he left immediately for a year in Norway as a Fulbright Senior Lecturer. Ten years ago he had a Fulbright in Denmark. Of the many and varied classes he taught at WKU, he says, he most enjoyed American Studies because he could team teach with his good friend Joe Boggs and later with Ted Hovet. He liked teaching U. S. Since 1945 because it gave him a chance to bring the various social justice movements alive to new generations of students. He even enjoyed good old Western Civ because it was such a challenge.

Before leaving for Scandinavia, Charles expressed optimism about the young scholars entering the Department, how they invigorate the old place and bring new methods and ideas with them. He also recommended that all of his former students read Lawrence W. Levine's 1996 volume, *The Opening of the American Mind*, because “It is accessible to the general reader and explains clearly how universities have changed in response to the general culture. It is, to quote one reviewer, 'an excellent starting point for debunking some of the new catechisms of the anti-intellectual intellectuals.'"