Dear Friends:

Something new for the Department of History at Swarthmore this year: after many years of having visiting faculty teaching the history of the modern Middle East, we received permission to recruit a permanent tenure-track faculty member in this field. After a search this year introduced us to a wide range of talented historians in the field, we successfully recruited Ahmad Shokr, a historian just finishing his doctorate at NYU who works on the history of cotton production in Egypt. Shokr will join us in the academic year 2017-2018 after taking a postdoctoral fellowship at Brandeis University in the coming year.

We also received authorization this year to search for a new historian of modern Europe. We have now advertised this position, which includes a preference for scholars working on environmental history or the history of science and technology, and we look forward to reading applications starting in September. By the fall of 2017-18, we will have four assistant professors in the department, which is a big change from five years ago, when most of the members of the department were full professors who had been at Swarthmore for a long time.

This spring, department faculty and students had a stimulating discussion of emeritus colleague Bob DuPlessis’ new book The Material Atlantic. Several of us also attended a terrific presentation on land tenure and federal law that came out of a student-led course on Native American history.

At our retreat this year, we discussed a recent article in the American Historical Association’s Perspectives on falling enrollments and declining numbers of majors in history programs around the U.S. and speculated on some of the reasons for the change. We would be interested in hearing from our past (and present!) majors about any insights they have into this nationwide shift. We also continue to think about the past and future of our Honors seminars and have found comments by a number of our alumni very useful in that conversation: keep them coming!

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We closed out the year with our Senior Reception, in the shade on Trotter Lawn on a very hot day, and by awarding our Paul H. Beik and Robert S. DuPlessis Prizes. This year, **Molly Petchenik ’16** took home the Beik with her honors thesis, “The Tale of a Tour: Solomon Mikhoels, Itzik Fefer, and the Soviet Encounter with American Jewry,” advised by **Bob Weinberg**. The Department commended Molly on her “elegant and precise prose” while providing a “persuasive analysis of an interesting moment in the international history of Judaism and Communism as well as US-Soviet relations.” **Rachel Berger**’s senior research paper, entitled “Portending Mass Incarceration: Race, Modernity, and Rehabilitation at Eastern State Penitentiary after World War II,” earned her the DuPlessis prize and was advised by **BuYun Chen**. Berger spent time sifting through Philadelphia’s Eastern State Penitentiary’s archives and “respect[ed] the limits of the information.”

**Diego Armus** spent much of the year teaching graduate seminars – in Argentina at Universidad Nacional de Rosario, Universidad Nacional de Tres de Febrero; in Brazil at Casa Oswaldo Cruz – FIOCRUZ; and in Italy at Università degli Studi di Roma, and writing. His second semester leave was supported with the 2015 César Milstein Award of the Ministry of Science, Culture and Technological Innovation in Argentina. In December 2015, he received an Honorary Degree from Universidad Nacional de Córdoba, one of the oldest universities in the Americas. While citing his contributions to the field of social history, including five books and over sixty articles published and especially as it applies to health and disease, they note his intellectual reach and influence worldwide. He’ll stay busy in 2016-2017 with five upcoming articles and his new memberships to editorial boards, including to the **Bulletin of the History of Medicine**.

**Farid Azfar** completed his leave year after successfully being re-appointed by traveling around Europe doing research, writing, presenting, and learning Spanish. He held a seminar for the Queen Mary Centre for Eighteenth Century Studies in October at the Queen Mary University of London. His talk was entitled “**Regions of the Ship: Asiento Capitalism and the Floating Island of Portobello**.”

**Stephe Bensc**h presented a faculty talk on his latest research in April.

**Tim Burke**’s Counterfactuals class was highlighted in a piece in **Aeon** about utilizing counterfactuals history as a valuable intellectual exercise. **Professor Burke** also traveled to the University of Miami to speak about the humanities and the Cold War in Africa.

**BuYun Chen** successfully earned reappointment this spring and was
Through February, we were interviewing for our tenure-track modern Middle East historian. So, the department stayed pretty low-key at the time. However, we’d like to especially thank the students who hosted the candidates for lunch: Emily Audet ’18, Maggie Christ ’17, John Gagnon ’17, Sarah Geselowitz ’16, Evan Grennon ’18, Joelle Hageboutros ’16, Murtaza Khomusi ’17, Molly Petchenik ’16, and Stephanie Wang ’17. Thanks, as well, to the faculty outside of the department who met with the candidates: Sa’ed Atshan ’06 (Peace and Conflict Studies), Alexandra Gueydan-Turek (Modern Languages), Tariq al-Jamil (Religion), Benjamin Smith (Arabic), Andrew Ward (Psychology), Carina Yervasi (Modern Languages), and to Sarah Elichko, our librarian.

On April 15, the Department invited students and scholars to discuss Professor Bob DuPlessis new book, The Material Atlantic. The author was on hand for a lively discussion.

On April 20, Professor Stephen Bensch delivered a faculty lecture on his latest research, entitled, “Recording Power: Manuscripts, Memory, and Lordship in a Mediterranean Baronage.”

On May 3, Sam Mori ’16 and Molly Petchenik ’16 presented their yearlong works of research to friends, students, and faculty. Sam studies the transformation of Little Tokyo over time, while Molly chronicled and analyzed the visit of Solomon Mikhoels and Itzik Fefer to the United States. Molly took home the Beik Prize for her thesis while Sam was awarded The Alice L. Crossley Prize in Asian studies for his work.

On May 6 and 7, 2016, Professor BuYun Chen hosted a reading workshop entitled “WOMEN AT WORK: Reconstructing Nügong through Text and Image.” You can read more about it on page 5.

Also on May 6, the students of Indigenous Communities and the Lands They Belong To, a student-run course overseen by Professor Bruce Dorsey and largely organized by Daniel Orr ’16, presented their work to an engaged audience. The course produced a website documenting the allotment of tribal lands in the United States, which we hope to share with you soon.

Of course, in May, we hosted honors examiners for our honors students. For the first time, the Inn at Swarthmore was available for some of them, and we had a foray into Fishtown for dinner. The visiting examiners were Julie Berebitsky (Sewanee), Stephen Bittner (Sonoma State), Ed Cohn ’99 (Grinnell), Janice Reiff (UCLA), Jessica Roney ’00 (Temple), Carl Wennerlind (Barnard), and Rebecca Winer (Villanova). All of our students achieved honors this year.●

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available to [her] with an ambitious series of engagements with race, class, bureaucracy, mental health, and the penal system” in the latter half of the 20th Century.

Students whose names you may see in these pages next year, or even the following year, have been awarded summer research grants in preparation for their research-paper writing: Carlo Bruno ’17 (Bob Weinberg), Yili “Eric” Yao ’17 (Marjorie Murphy), James Wallace-Lee ’17 (Bruce Dorsey), John Gagnon ’17 (Marjorie Murphy), Stephanie Wang ’17 (Diego Armus), and Matthew Chaffinch ’18 (Marjorie Murphy).
Since we were approved for a tenure-track position in modern Europe, we will be working on reading and sifting through the applications for that position in the fall.

Sometime in the beginning of the semester, we will host new students and our current majors and minors for a social gathering. In the past, this has been the chocolates party, which we’re reevaluating.

On November 10, 2016, Maya Peterson ’02 will join us for the biannual Paul H. Beik Lecture in modern European history. Be on the lookout for details on our webpage and Facebook page.

Steven Epstein ’74 just finished his book, The Talents of Jacopo da Varagine: A Genoese Mind in Medieval Europe, published by Cornell University Press this year. He wrote in to respond to our request for alumni honors experiences, which will be documented in an upcoming newsletter.

Miriam Rich ’11 had an article published in the journal Gender & History recently that was based on her honors thesis, “The Curse of the Civilised Woman: Race, Gender and the Pain of Childbirth in Nineteenth-Century American Medicine.” Bruce Dorsey advised the thesis.

American Studies’ 13th Annual Underground Railroad and Black History Conference in February. Many of the articles have appeared in The Philadelphia Lawyer.

Timothy Stewart-Winter ’01 wrote an article for Slate about political activism of queer folks in Chicago and the impact movements such as Chicago’s had on gay rights throughout our nation.

Robin Ridington ’62 published “Dane-zaa Oral History: Why It’s Not Hearsay” in BC Studies in 2014. Robin notes that the article “is relevant to issues that have come up in recent Canadian court cases regarding aboriginal claims.”


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On May 6 and 7, 2016, Professor BuYun Chen hosted a reading workshop on women’s work in late imperial China. The workshop was attended by eleven scholars from various institutions, including Jacob Eyferth (University of Chicago), Siyen Fei (University of Pennsylvania), Dorothy Ko (Barnard College), Yuhang Li (University of Wisconsin, Madison), Andrew Liu (Villanova University), Lihong Liu (National Gallery of Art), Weijin Lu (University of California, San Diego), Christine Moll-Murata (Ruhr-Universität Bochum), Dagmar Schäfer (Max Planck Institute for the History of Science), Angela Sheng (McMaster University), and Rachel Silberstein (Rhode Island School of Design).

This event was funded by the Henry Luce Foundation/ACLS Program in China Studies through their Collaborative Reading Workshop Grant.

“WOMEN AT WORK: Reconstructing Nügong through Text and Image”
BuYun Chen

In recent decades, scholars have argued that the classic axiom about the gendered division of labor in Chinese society – namely, “men till, women weave” – was more ideological than descriptive. The majority of this scholarship has embedded women’s work in late imperial China within larger questions concerned with the long-term trajectory of economic growth in China. By contrast, this collaborative reading workshop examines the everyday practices of nügong – translated variously as “women’s work,” or “womanly work,” – through an interdisciplinary approach to the texts on the production of textiles in Ming-Qing China (1550-1750). In this workshop, we reconstruct the material conditions of women’s textile work by identifying how, where, and with what women worked. The workshop will bring together social and cultural historians, historians of technology, and art historians to participate in cross-disciplinary close readings of the images and texts, which depicted how women spun and wove cloth. Our goal is to clarify the historical relationship between gender and labor by engaging with the underlying conditions of knowledge and skill formation."•

As always, you can find more information on our department website:

http://www.swarthmore.edu/academics/history.xml

You can “Like” us on Facebook for more regular updates about the Department:

https://www.facebook.com/swathistory

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As always, we hope all of you are thriving—and that you continue to find it productive to think about history and to use history.

Timothy J. Burke
Professor of History and Chair
How was your honors experience?

We’re looking forward to writing an article on honors for our next newsletter. Why don’t you tell us about your experience?

Anything else you’d like to tell us? Did you do an internship when you were a student? Do you need interns? Were you recently published? We want to hear from you! You can share your story via the newsletter or simply tell us about it via email so that we can post the internship to our website. Email the department: history@swarthmore.edu.

Thank you!