Report from the Chair

The untimely death of our colleague and friend, Ken Cmiel, has left us freshly aware of the fragility of our lives. His memorial service was flooded by family, friends, students and colleagues from all over the country; the expansive room at the Levitt Center was so packed that the president of the university sat on the floor.

On the left-hand corner of my desk in the office of the Department’s Chair is a plastic monkey sitting on a metal coil. When you hit the monkey it bounces around: boing! Ken bequeathed it to me as an epitome of the administrative life: days and days of boredom, punctuated “boing!” by apparent crisis, running around in all directions, and, finally, return to (only apparent) stability. Smacking the monkey has comforted me through many frustrations.

Writing and teaching are enterprises that often draw strength from each other. But the administrative craft taps the same intellectual energies as does scholarly creativity. It is the rare genius who manages to keep both enterprises alive simultaneously. I have known only three such people in my lifetime and Ken is one.

The box of tissues on the table in my office is virtually unused; by the time colleagues brought their problems to me they had already brought them to Ken, who, though he was no longer Chair, quietly helped them figure things out. When I became Chair I called him twice a day; then once a day, then maybe once a week, but I never outgrew my dependence on the centering that came from our monthly late-afternoon schmooze over a glass of wine in Restaurant 126 where the talk was about ideas, and writers, and how to push at institutional constraints. And I don’t think I ever will.

A tribute to Ken written by Colin Gordon and other colleagues, is on page 5 of this newsletter.

At the beginning of the new year, in January 2006, Stow Persons died. He was 92 years old. Stow had brought his fine powers of analysis to bear on the University itself as an object of intellectual history. “Do you know why most university histories are so boring?” he once asked me. “Because the only office that keeps its archives well is the President’s office.” He had served as president of the Faculty Senate in the strenuous years of 1969-1970. In writing the university’s history, Stow consulted records throughout the university, and did not flinch from analysis. He never did publish, however, his shrewd chapter on the Department itself, although some of us saw it if we promised not to xerox it. By his good judgment, creativity and dry wit, Stow was a major force in making the Department what it is today. He was a remarkable teacher. Two years ago, Stow’s former student James O. Conner and his wife Zoe initiated the Stow Persons Undergraduate Prize; a number of his former students joined them in contributions that endowed the prize. The Prize sustains an annual award for the best senior honors thesis (especially appropriate, since Stow himself had won a similar prize when an undergraduate at Yale). This year it also supports a summer research grant for an undergraduate who is preparing a senior honors thesis. Stow had the pleasure of reading the first senior thesis to win the prize, by Jo Butterfield, who is now a graduate student in the Department.

A tribute to Stow, written by Hamilton Cravens, (PhD 1969), Stow’s student and editor of the festschrift in his honor, Ideas in America’s Culture (Iowa State University Press, 1982), appears on pages 5-6.

We were deeply saddened by the death in December 2004 of Professor Emeritus of History and Religion Jonathan Goldstein. He was 75. Jonathan was best known as the translator and editor of the books Maccabees I and Maccabees II in the Anchor edition of the Bible, published by Doubleday in 1976 and 1983. But “editor” only barely describes his accomplishment. His fresh translation of a long and difficult text is accompanied by extensive, eloquent, often shrewd and skeptical footnotes that convey to the reader Jonathan’s own voice as well as that of the apocryphal authors. Reviewers praised it as “an original work of exact scholarship,” and admired his “formidable” learning. In
his most recent book, *Peoples of an Almighty God: Competing Religions in the American World* (Doubleday, 2002), Jonathan offers the fruits of this learning in a voice accessible to a lay audience.

An obituary written by Professor Constance Berman and the eulogy delivered at his funeral by Professor David Schoenbaum appear on pages 7–8.

Our circle of friends and colleagues is greatly diminished by these losses.

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Every ten years or so, each department in the University of Iowa engages in an extended review, assessing its accomplishments over the last decade, its plans for the future, and what it will need to accomplish its goals. Our review took place in 2004–05, beginning with a Self-Study by the Department, continuing with a visit by a committee of “external examiners”—scholars from other departments in the university and from history departments in other universities invited by the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (ours came from the University of Illinois and Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey)—who, after a series of interviews with faculty, graduate and undergraduate students, prepared a report that included recommendations for the future.

While the process of review was underway, the Department—for the first time in our history—engaged in a series of retreats with the purpose of developing a Strategic Plan. The retreats absorbed a substantial amount of time and intellectual energy; out of them came a sensitively developed hiring plan for the next seven years or so, identifying a number of faculty lines that we wish to add—most in transnational fields. The strategic plan assisted us this year in responding to an invitation from the College of Liberal Arts to help develop a program in Latino Studies, and we expect it to be useful as we shape the Department in the future.

We have much to be proud of. The external review committee noted that we are the most distinguished history department of our size in the country. When they described us as “a cohesive group of outstanding scholars, committed to high standards of scholarship and teaching,” which “operates more harmoniously than others with which the reviewers are familiar,” they state precisely our own goals for ourselves and pay us the compliments we most treasure. Our graduate students, too, offered a shrewd evaluation of the strengths of our program and of their recommendations for improvements. We have already made some significant changes in our graduate curriculum and have established the new role of Associate Chair, in which Colin Gordon served this year.

As we continue this work, we welcome comments from alumni. What elements of your experience here do you treasure and want us to keep and, perhaps, expand? What elements of our program should we change? Your recommendations will be helpful; send them directly to Colin Gordon (colin-gordon@uiowa.edu), who succeeds me as Chair.

We hope you’ll keep up with the developments in the Department by way of our web page, freshly designed by Susan Lawrence—www.uiowa.edu/history. And we love to hear from you; write directly to any of us or to mary-strotman@uiowa.edu, who treasures your notes and news.

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We are delighted to welcome Assistant Professor Jennifer Sessions, who joined us in August 2005. She earned her PhD at the University of Pennsylvania in 2005; her dissertation is titled “Making Colonial France: Culture, National Identity and the Colonization of Algeria, 1830–1851.”

This fall we welcome Assistant Professor Omar Valerio-Jiménez, who taught at California State University Long Beach after earning his PhD at UCLA. He is writing “River of Hope: Identity and Nation Along the Rio Grande, 1749–1890.” And we welcome Assistant Professor Catherine Komaris, PhD UCLA 2000, who also taught at California State Long Beach; her book-in-progress is “Collapse of the Colonial Order: Labor and Love in Guatemala, 1760–1837.”

Four colleagues have been promoted to the rank of tenured associate professor since I last wrote: Michel Gobat, Kevin Mumford, H. Glenn Penny, and Johanna Schoen.

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In March 2005, we discovered—to our great chagrin—that this History Department was oblivious to our own history. Only after she had completed her 40th year in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences did we learn (by accident) how long Mary Strotman has sustained the Department. We made up for it by celebrating her 41st anniversary in April 2006, with music, friends, and warm appreciation. Many of the readers of this newsletter have contributed to the establishment of the Mary Strotman Graduate Student Award in her honor. (See pages 14–15 for a report and photographs.)

When Professor Emeritus Charles Hale and his wife Lennie moved from Iowa City to Seattle in the fall of 2005, we joined with their colleagues in the Latin American Studies Program in hosting a festive (but wistful) party. This spring we and LASP happily welcomed them back for a two-day conference, “Liberalism and its Legacies” held in Charles Hale’s honor. Michel Gobat’s account of that conference appears on page 18 of this newsletter.
When the distinguished medievalist Giles Constable celebrated his 50th year in the profession last fall, he gave us an unexpected gift which gave us great pleasure: he visited the department where had begun his career, before moving to Harvard and then the Institute for Advanced Study. He offered two lectures to packed rooms, but for me the most memorable part of his visit was the lunch during which he reminisced about life in Schaeffer Hall in the mid-1950s, when the university and the state proudly resisted pressures to demand loyalty oaths, and when he found time despite the pressures of teaching to win the state fencing championship in épée.

In February 2005, we celebrated the publication of Professor Dwight Bozeman’s magisterial book, The Precisianist Strain: Disciplinary Religion and Antinomian Backlash in Puritanism to 1638 (University of North Carolina Press, 2004) by hosting a symposium. The symposium was chaired by Mark Peterson. Professor Francis Bremer of Emory University and Professor Michael Winship of the University of Georgia, best known for their contributions to the study of transatlantic Puritanism, commented on Dwight’s accomplishments and met with graduate students and faculty. We intend to make symposia like this an occasional practice. (See pages 16-17 for Dwight’s remarks about the event.)

In April 2006, the Department joined with the Center for Human Rights to host a remarkable international conference on “Sexual Violence in Combat Zones,” chaired by Lisa Heineman, and dedicated to the memory of Ken Cmiel, who had been the co-chair of the conference and, in his role as Director of UICHR, a key collaborator. Sixteen papers by scholars from England and the U.S. were presented; a book is planned.

Our Triennial Book Party in April 2005 honored our collective scholarly accomplishment; some two dozen books published by faculty and alumni over the course of the last three years were on display. I am glad that we have now firmly established this celebration (our third) as a regular event in the cycle of Department activity. Alumni books continue to stream in; we welcome them with pride, display them for several weeks on the front desk in the Department office, and add them to the rapidly growing collection of alumni books in our department library. Every three years we bring them out to celebrate together. We hope you’ll send yours.

Trudy Peterson, whose profile appears on pages 9-10 of this newsletter, was the keynote speaker at the book party, offering a witty appreciation of the role that books have played in her life. In September 2005, she returned to campus to receive the College’s Distinguished Alumni Award. In the years since her retirement from the National Archives, Trudy has invented an exciting and courageous new career, traveling the world to consult on the human consequences of building—or destroying—archives. As I write, in late May 2006, she has just returned to the U.S. from a trip to Guatemala, where she assisted colleagues who are saving the historic police archives, the largest known collection of secret government documents in Latin America, discovered last year, and containing information about “disappearances” and the government’s counterinsurgency campaigns. They are being protected, restored and organized by Guatemala’s Human Rights Ombudsman’s Office. The judge who authorized this effort has been threatened, archivists have been intimidated, and suspicious fires have been set.

Last year, along with her visit to the book party, Trudy lectured on the theme “To Toss or to Keep: Dilemmas of an Archivist.” In March 2006, she returned to Iowa City for the first of an annual series of short courses—an Archives Master Class—which she offers as her gift to the department. Among her goals is the development of a generation of historians who will have a subtle understanding of how archives are built, maintained, preserved and protected; who will be sophisticated colleagues of archivists, and who can work effectively on the boundaries where the practices of archivists and the practices of historians overlap. And she is starting with us here at Iowa.

We reserved a seminar room for the enterprise but quickly had to move it to a room that holds 50. It was a mesmerizing set of classes that conveyed the concepts archivists use as they think about records, peppered with accounts of Trudy’s own experiences—setting up archives in Lithuania, organizing the archives of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees in Geneva. We look forward to her Master Class next spring.

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In two years of serious challenges to the financial health of the university, we are especially proud of the energy and intelligence which Katherine Tachau has brought to the role of Faculty Senate President and, now, as a member of the Search Committee that seeks a new University President. (David Skorton left us for the presidency of Cornell Uni-
versity.) We are also very pleased that Shira Robinson has begun conversations with colleagues in other departments toward the shaping of a program in Middle Eastern Studies.

We made the first annual Henry Horwitz Award for Original Graduate Instruction to Megan Threlkeld, for her impressive Issues course, a competition measured by the syllabus and by her statement about the experience of teaching the course. In this way we make public the best teaching practices of our graduate instructors.

Our alumni continue to do important work. Mary Kelley (PhD, 1974) now serves as Chair of the Department of History of the University of Michigan; Jeff Ostler (PhD, 1990) chairs the Department of History at the University of Oregon. Charles Hawley (PhD, 1999) is in the State Department, now serving as Vice Consul at the U.S. Consulate General in Ho Chi Minh City. For reports from other alumni, turn to the Alumni notes, which begin on page 29. They represent the notes you sent last summer, and we fear that some are outdated. But we put them in print now, and resolve that next year’s Newsletter will actually appear a year from now, with the updates we’ll ask you to file this winter.

For me this year has been an invigorating one, as I settle in to the role of president of the American Historical Association, and begin writing my presidential address. The health of federal agencies that support historical scholarship came into question this spring, as we discovered a program to reclassify previously reclassified documents at the National Archives, worked to increase funding for the National Endowment for the Humanities and to save the National Historical Records and Publications Commission (zeroed out in the President’s budget), and challenged a contract made with Showtime on Demand by the Smithsonian Institution. (I wrote about these matters in a column for the Chronicle of Higher Education in May; you can find a link to it on the Department’s website: http://www.uiowa.edu/~history/.) Join us for the AHA annual meeting in Atlanta, January 4-7, 2007. A major session will be held in Ken’s memory: “Citizens, Refugees and the Right to Have Rights: Remembering Ken Cmiel.” The session was organized by Shira Robinson; it is scheduled for Saturday afternoon, January 6 at the Carter Center. And we will have a fine Iowa party in the evening. We’ll look forward to seeing you there.

I now turn over the Chair’s office to Colin Gordon. I am grateful for all I have learned in the last three years, and grateful to our colleagues, students, and staff for all they have taught me (and for their patience as I have slowly learned it). I emerge with a greater appreciation of the complexities of a university, and of the power of the collective work that has sustained the Department of History over the years. In the course of developing our strategic plan, we turned to a founding document in the establishment of the Department’s own traditions: William O. Aydelotte’s “Letter to My Successor: The Duties of a Department Chairman” of 1959. Professor Aydelotte speaks emphatically about “running the department democratically” and insists that the department as a whole “work through all decisions of major importance.” An informed democracy produces better results: “It is surprising how often bringing several minds to bear on a problem will gradually point the way to a solution...extended discussion will frequently produce some way of getting around the matter, a solution which no one would have thought of at the outset but which gives the substance of the thing desired.” It is the openness of informed discussion and mutual respect that is key to the Department’s tradition, and which we have continued, with your help, to sustain.

In Gratitude

Gifts to the Department, always important, have taken on heightened significance in the face of the severe budget cuts that the university continues to experience. We turn to our History Department Gift Funds to support an increasing range of basic and indispensable activities for faculty, graduate and undergraduate student research and professional travel, for events like the symposia and book party described elsewhere in this issue, and for events that bring faculty, staff and students together in celebration of various accomplishments.

Our Department has been blessed by the generous contributions of our graduates and long-time friends. It is a special pleasure to report that Allan Kuehne’s gift in honor of Alan B. Spitzer has initiated the Alan B. Spitzer Prize Fund, which has given its first award. Contributions to sustain this fund are most welcome.

Even more than in the past, we rely on you for the support that makes possible the vigor of the Department. We especially welcome unrestricted gifts to the History Department Gift Fund as well as gifts that are designated for a particular fund or purpose. You can use the form at the back of this Newsletter, mailing your contribution directly to the University of Iowa Foundation, LeVitt Center, Iowa City IA 52242, or go to the “Support Us” link on the Department’s website: http://www.uiowa.edu/~history/
IN MEMORY

The Department mourns the loss of our colleague and friend Ken Cmiel. Ken is survived by his wife Anne Duggan, and their children Willa, Cordelia, and Noah. Ken collapsed from the effects of an inoperable brain tumor on Thursday, February 2, 2006. He could not be revived and died peacefully Saturday morning. We have lost a friend whose generosity and love has enriched all our lives. We will miss him beyond measure.

Ken was a brilliant scholar whose capacious interests ranged from pop music to global human rights. His first book, Democratic Eloquence: The Fight Over Popular Speech in Nineteenth Century America, explored battles over refining and confining the English language in education, politics, philosophy, and the popular press. A “learned, imaginative, and very important work of cultural history,” as one review noted, “the most sophisticated and most revealing exploration yet into the complex and tangled relations of ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture in the United States.” His second book, A Home of Another Kind: One Chicago Orphanage and the Tangle of Child Welfare was a “militantly minimalist” shot across the bow of the scholarship on the welfare state; an incisive

and heartbreaking examination of social policy as it played out in one institution. More recently, Ken had turned to the global idea of human rights—an intellectually and geographically expansive project that, though now tragically unfinished, has nevertheless made an important impact.

Ken was, without pretense, and in the fullest sense of each word, a scholar and a citizen. His leadership of the University of Iowa Center for Human Rights underscored his determination to understand the world around him, and to change it for better. As a friend and colleague, he was a man of unbridled generosity and extraordinary humility. Behind his Cheshire-cat grin lay both a boundless enthusiasm for the human elements of academic life, and a deep cynicism for the “chore of professional posturing.” In a candid reflection on his profession, Ken captured his own intellectual journey, and offers the rest of us a roadmap for carrying on:

“Teach classes that are meaningful to you and that engage that portion of your students that are reachable. Ignore, in other words, the very idea of professional wisdom. Only write what you want to write. Once you have job security (which I know is a huge barrier) don’t write if you don’t want to. Write for media directed at non-historians, whether that be the local newspaper or fancy national magazines. Write for other academic disciplines. Explore other media than the printed word. Ignoring what the profession rewards might very well be a mark of sanity at the close of the twentieth century.”

—Colin Gordon and other History colleagues, University of Iowa

Stow Persons, Carver Professor of History Emeritus, died at his home on January 6, 2006 in Iowa City. Stow came to the University of Iowa from Princeton University in 1950, and retired from the University in 1981. He won his BA and PhD degrees from Yale University; he worked with the estimable Ralph Henry Gabriel, whose The Course of American Democratic Thought (1940) was a leading interpretive synthesis of American intellectual history in the middle decades of the twentieth century along with Merle Curti’s pioneering The Growth of American Thought (1936); both volumes superseded Vernon L. Parrington’s Main Currents of American Thought (1925, 1927) because of their far broader—and deeper—grasp of intellectual history and of their sophisticated grounding in historical circumstances. Gabriel and Curti created a model for the new field of American intellectual history, of the broad discussion of large issues in American life, which American intellectual historians, alas and alack, too seldom pursue today. Stow was consistently interested in those large ideas that illuminated what Americans thought about the society in which they lived and the groups or classes with which they interacted.