

# History News

Appalachian State University's History programs provide a combination of liberal education and practical training that serves the needs of students, employers, and state residents in many ways. History graduates become lawyers and managers, museum professionals and archivists, educational administrators and teachers. A significant number of public school history teachers in the state of North Carolina were educated at Appalachian. The Department of History offers an innovative off-campus master's degree program that helps to improve the quality of education in state high schools at the same time as it offers professional development to classroom teachers. Foreign travel opportunities led by faculty expand the horizons of students. All of these programs and opportunities are generated by the Department of History faculty, who have attracted major grants from the Guggenheim Foundation, the American Council of Learned Societies, and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Newsletter Committee:  
Michael Krenn (Chair)  
Jewel Parker  
Carrie Streeter



## this issue

What History Did for Me	p.1
Farewell Letter from the chair	p.2
Make a Gift	p.3
Coping with Ai/ChatGPT	p.5
Faculty/Emeriti/Student notes	p.7
Retirement message from Dr. Isaenko	p.9
In Memory: Dr. Rennie Brantz	p.11



## What History Did for Me:

Stories from Former Students  
**Joshua Brooks**

It took eight years of clean energy work before they finally (finally!) caught on, dear reader.

"Hey, Josh, what did you study to learn so much about integrative design?" A Stanford PhD student asked. "Oh, I studied history and education at Appalachian State University" I replied to this now stunned audience of Stanford University Masters and PhD engineering students.

[history.appstate.edu](http://history.appstate.edu)

A definition might help. Integrative Design is an engineering methodology that compels the architect, engineer, and builder to constantly assess what the intention of the design is. What service is provided? And further, what is the most efficient way to deliver a service with minimal strain and cost. For example, laying out supply pipes as if they are drains (no right angles!), reduces energy use and wear on the pumps, motors, etc. because the motors aren't fighting contrived, unnecessary, inconveniences like forcing water to turn on a dime. For two years, I co-designed and instructed an accredited engineering course, Factor 10 Engineering, with my mentor and former boss, Amory Lovins. The course tasked the class to assess and conceptually improve the global energy-intensive sectors: buildings, transportation, industrial process, and electricity generation.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3



## Farewell Letter from the Chair

February 2024

I've put off writing this letter long enough. Maybe a part of me didn't want to write it while another part of me quite literally dreamed of doing so during any number of detailed tasks that have dotted my calendar since 2014. I've been chair of this department for 10 years. And something I thought I'd never do as part of my academic career became a part of me, part of my fabric, part of my thoughts—conscious and unconscious—for an entire decade. To be clear, I consider it the highest honor of my academic career. Not the most enjoyable, mind you. No, we'd have to talk about some of the research ventures if we went down that road. But it has indeed been an honor to represent my colleagues. There is so much I've learned about the university and about academe that I would have blissfully finished my career having never known. Many of those things are forgettable now, or at least will be soon enough, and others can and will tackle and understand them hopefully much better than I have but they were part of the job, and I did them joyfully because my colleagues, my friends, asked that of me. But there are other things that I will carry with me for the rest of my career, as well as beyond academe.

First of all, I'm happy for the things we accomplished together—faculty, students, and alumni. I could cite some things I'm proud that we did together but, if you've been a part of this team for the past decade, you know all of that already—as well as the things we might have done better! Suffice it to say that the History Department is exceptionally strong with an amazingly talented team of teachers and researchers. History will decide on its own, as it always does, whether anything of merit was accomplished, so there's no need to turn this farewell letter into a meaningless autobiographical exercise. I wasn't President; only Department Chair—so I've aged but not that much, though a glance in the mirror might well suggest otherwise! And, yeah, the picture above is one of only two taken during my tenure—both of which came early on. Go figure! After all, it's always been my job to make the department look as “good as possible” even when there's very little with which to work!

Secondly, I'm thankful for the opportunity to have interacted more directly with faculty and alumni—though my interaction with students, at least in the traditional classroom setting, has been less frequent. Many, perhaps even most, of us in this profession are introverts by nature. We find ourselves working alone, conducting the hunt and then writing and teaching about those things we have found and discovered—finding solace in the expertise of things we find important even if others do not. But becoming chair forced me out of my comfort zone and, more than a list of accomplishments, it's the bonds built along the way that will last. I've come to know, in a way that I never had before, that I actually like and appreciate all of my colleagues. Most discussions have been easy and fun; a few have been difficult but even that doesn't matter now. I walk away with friendships despite the disagreements and that is precious and, I suspect, will grow even more precious with time. Looking back now, I relish the fact that I've had extensive annual—and frequently even more—in depth conversations with my colleagues, worrying over their shortcomings, celebrating their successes and awards, delighting in their publications, planning their future victories. These are things we oftentimes do with a few of our close friends in the profession; I got to do it on an intensely personal level with literally every single one of my colleagues. Had I not been chair, I would have missed so much and, while I can take practically no credit for the accomplishments, I had a bench seat *on the court*, not just a spectator seat in the bleachers. The view was good, but the fellowship was even better!

Finally, I'm thankful that my wife Connie has finally had to admit that I did in fact *work for a living*—at least for awhile. Folks in academe are blessed to be able to teach and research the things we love, and we don't always keep a regular schedule like a lot of our friends do—whether in white-collar or blue-collar jobs. So, let's be honest, when we discuss “work” at family gatherings, many of our loved ones look confused, maybe even amused . . . For them, what we do seems . . . well . . . different . . . To be fair, Connie (like a lot of our alumni, a schoolteacher for most of her career) has always counted that one year I taught high school back in the 80s so now it's up to **11 full years**. After 45 years of marriage and counting, 11 sounds so much better than 1!

So, with this unusual but sincere collection of memories and random thoughts, I bid you adieu. It has been my pleasure to serve each and every one of you!

Sincerely,

James R. Goff, Jr.  
Professor & Chair Department of History

**Make a Gift!** Consider making History at Appalachian State part of your annual giving.

Funds of particular importance are the:

History Department General Foundation Fund

History Matters Student Scholarship Fund

I.G. Greer Memorial Distinguished Professor in History Endowment Fund

Centennial History Faculty Emeriti Fund

A Day to Remember Fund (Memorial Plaques available for gifts of \$250 or more)

You can give online at [givenow.appstate.edu/history](http://givenow.appstate.edu/history)

## CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

What, you may ask, does this have to do with my history studies?

History, as I see it, is the investigation of how humans manufactured processes to survive. It is the story of how we built systems, physical and procedural, to deliver a hope that tomorrow will be better for those who follow. But life is always hard. Studying history is both an empathetic investigation and a critical thinking exercise. It is our way to comprehend struggle and motivation. With context, it shows why some solutions fail, and why some attempts succeed. We see, ultimately, that the system that supports modern life, is an evolution of ideas – nothing is novel. And it is that perspective that helped me to understand the challenges of the clean energy transition.

For the last ten years, I've worked in the power industry. I've developed solar power and natural gas power plants. I've worked in state and federal policy – even drafting portions of N.C.'s Clean Energy Plan. As you can imagine, understanding the concept of law and especially U.S. constitutional history is a tremendous asset for such things.

Today, I help municipalities across the country incorporate fuel cells, solar energy, and energy storage into their portfolios. As is the way of things, the technology usually sorts itself out. It is the process, politics, and regulatory oversight that slow things down. But those things have a purpose. Sure, constant revision and updates are necessary, but the intention is to deliver what is best for the public good. And that is where I focus my efforts. Because of my studies, including the revelatory discussions and lessons from Dr. Krenn, Dr. Silver, Dr. Caldwell, Dr. Bly, and so

many others, I had an edge on the Stanford engineers. I understood that while the U.S. power grid may be the biggest machine in human history, the political, structural, procedural, and evolutionary system that created it is even larger, and far more complex. No individual design change can solve our challenges. We must first look to the intentions and motivations of the system and consider if our regulatory rule and business models still deliver a better life for those that follow.

If not, history tells me it is in our best interest to change it.

## Jenna McBrayer

When I was younger, I always knew I wanted to be a history teacher. I spent many years working towards that goal, most directly during my time at Appalachian State University. In May of 2014, I graduated with a Bachelor of Science in History, Social Studies Education. After applying to many different teaching jobs, I found my home at Green Hope High School teaching Social Studies. Over the last 10 years here, I have taught many courses that have had strong connections to what I learned in the classrooms of Belk Hall.

Beginning in January 2015, I spent my first 6 years teaching both the first and second half of American history to my students. Teaching these courses made me extremely appreciative of the lessons learned from various professors that helped to guide my lectures and activities. Dr. Tim Silver's engaging lectures on the first half of American history helped me to better understand the early troubles of establishing a nation. Dr. Wade's class enlightened me on the true human struggles



faced during the Great Depression. In two different courses, Dr. Myra Pennell taught me how to pace out a course and how to adapt to unforeseen circumstances all teachers encounter frequently. The skills and content learned have served and continue to serve me in my teaching career. Most recently, I developed a course entitled “Lessons of Vietnam/Recent International Relations.” In the fall of 2022, I was asked to “re-pilot” this course as it had been years since it was taught at my school. The sole reason I wanted to take on this challenge was because of my time spent in Dr. Krenn’s Vietnam War class. Until taking that class, I knew embarrassingly little about this controversial time in American history. He not only opened my eyes to the reality of what this war was--violent and seemingly never-ending--but to the social, economic, and political impacts it had here at home. Novels we read like *The Things They Carried* are still on my classroom bookshelf and are resources I use in class. In just my first semester of it, I quickly realized just how unaware most students are of this war. It is something many history textbooks skim over (or ignore all together) and high school teachers have very little time to cover. Had it not been for Dr. Krenn’s class, I never would have had the opportunity to teach such an important and engaging class, one that has quickly become my favorite. ) I am so thankful I choose App State to study history so many years ago. The lessons I learned there continue to serve me in teaching, and in life.

### **Robert William Rennie**



4

As the first member of my family to attend graduate school, I needed an institution that would open doors. I needed guidance on how to perform at a higher level. I needed

experience in teaching, research, and writing. My time at Appalachian State University provided all of these opportunities and more. I grew as a student, I was challenged as a scholar, and I completed my studies as a better version of myself. Without the experiences that the Department of History at Appalachian State University afforded me, I would not be where I am now - serving as a tenure-track Assistant Professor of History and International Studies at Indiana University Southeast.

I enrolled in the History Master’s Program in the Fall of 2009. I still remember moving into my apartment just outside of Boone. I was surrounded by lush green countryside, rolling mountains, and bright blue skies. I also remember my first days on campus - learning the myriad paths that led to Anne Belk Hall - all while admiring the beautiful red brick and green roofs of my new surroundings. I completed my undergraduate degree three years earlier, at The University of North Georgia. Appalachian State felt like a natural next step from the regional campus I attended previously. My time spent away from school working soon washed away, and I felt right at home in the program. That’s not to say I wasn’t challenged. In fact, one of my strongest memories of my first semester was adapting to Dr. Bortz’s Historical Methods course. I was challenged each week, not only by the density of the readings, but also by the debates in the classroom. During the rest of the week, I served as a Teaching Assistant to Dr. Tony Bly, where I learned the ins and outs of effective teaching. Dr. Bly also provided me with my first research opportunity. Along with my colleague, Dr. Jamie Goodall, I transcribed 18 th Century slave ads as part of Dr. Bly’s also provided me with my first research opportunity. Along with my colleague, Dr. Jamie Goodall, I transcribed 18 th Century slave ads as part of Dr. Bly’s book, *Escaping Bondage: A Documentary History of Runaway Slaves in Eighteenth-Century New England, 1700–1789*.

I was lucky to work with great mentors during my two years in the program. Dr. Rennie Brantz served as my MA Thesis Committee Chair and taught me the deep historiography of Modern Europe. Dr. Jari Eloranta exposed

**CONTINUED ON PAGE 5**

## CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

me to economic history, and fundamentally changed how I saw the German industrialist I wound up writing about. Dr. Michael Behrent gave me a crash course in European intellectual history. As a result, my research represented the best of not just one, but three perspectives in my field.

Above all, my time in the History Master's Program afforded me opportunities I would have never otherwise had access to. Without my time in Boone, I would have never been accepted to The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, where I worked with the brilliant German Historians, Dr. Denise Phillips, Dr. Monica Black, Dr. Vejas Liulevicius, Dr. Maria Stehle, and Dr. Dan Magilow. My time in Boone, enjoying those lush summers, and yes, surviving two brutal winters, gave me the experience, credentials, and abilities to achieve my goals in higher education. Since then, I've worked every day to try to pay it forward to the next generation of students I work with in the Southern Indiana and Louisville area.

## Coping with AI/ChatGPT

by Jewel Parker

We will all face it eventually—the dreaded moment when a student submits AI generated work as their own. Launched in November of 2022, ChatGPT became a new reality for classroom technology. How we choose to deal with it can make a lot of difference in our students' success. Do we teach students to avoid ChatGPT, or do we allow them to implement it in our classrooms and assignments?

During the fall semester, Dr. Kristen Deathridge, Associate Professor and Public History faculty, and Dr. Allison Fredette, Assistant Professor and History Education Program faculty, organized the first departmental pedagogy talk on AI and ChatGPT. As a collective group, faculty sat around the lounge room table and discussed the pros and cons of AI use in the classroom.

Both Allison and Kristen emphasize to their



(Pictured from left to right: Allison Fredette, Kristen Baldwin Deathridge, and Andrea Burns)

students the importance of doing history by their own critical thinking rather than utilizing AI. Kristen worked with additional scholars like Allison to craft a syllabus statement in which she explains that writing, document analysis, and forming arguments are important skills for historians to practice themselves as they train in the historian's craft.

Coincidentally, the first pedagogy talk coincided with the publication of an American Historical Association Perspectives piece entitled, "[Students Critique a Chat GPT Essay: A Classroom Experiment](#)." The author, Jonathan S. Jones, asked ChatGPT to generate an essay on notable abolitionist Frederick Douglass. Then, he pasted the essay into a Google Doc where students revised the essay and identified factual errors. Jones found the experiment successful because students were able to fact-check the essay using knowledge they had learned from class lectures and readings. The assignment not only demonstrated the shortcomings of AI but served as an opportunity for Jones to explain his rubric to the class. Graded, the ChatGPT generated essay on Frederick Douglass scored a "D" according to Jones's expectations for writing an essay on a historical figure.

The history faculty discussed this essay at the AI pedagogy talk. Allison told everyone that she once asked ChatGPT who Dr. Judkin Browning, Professor of History, was, and the system replied that he was a Civil War soldier rather than a historian of the Civil

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6

## CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

War. Indeed, ChatGPT has come a long way since its release in 2022. It now recognizes Judkin as “an American historian and academic known for his expertise in Civil War history.” With time, ChatGPT will learn new information from exposure to new data on the internet, but it still has the capacity to make mistakes.

AI also pushes the boundaries of copyright infringement. While its Terms of Use state that AI generated content belongs to the user, it cannot be disputed that AI draws upon copyrighted material for its training. Thus, one useful way to teach history students about the limits of ChatGPT is through citation. In addition to teaching the Chicago Manual of Style, instructors already emphasize giving credit where credit is due. The problem with using information generated by ChatGPT is that one cannot determine where that information came from, and therefore, it cannot be considered a credible contributor to the scholarly conversation.

What does one do if after including an “I agree not to use AI” clause in the syllabus, you suspect that students have submitted AI-generated work anyway? A quick Google search yields many different AI detection websites. Some of these are perhaps more accurate than others with some limiting the number of times you can check text for AI-generation in a single day.

While useful, the limitations of the checkers are that they too make mistakes. In recent months, Turnitin plagiarism detection software has also erroneously marked student used resources like Grammarly to eliminate spelling and grammar mistakes in their writing. Even so, Professor of History Dr. Michael Krenn has discovered that the site also provides a “generative AI” program. The more students are willing to pay for their Grammarly subscription, the more access they will have to text generated by AI prompts. Instructors who are aware of these drawbacks might alternatively choose to incorporate AI into their teaching of writing by showing students how to use AI appropriately as opposed to banning its use altogether. For example, ChatGPT can draft an outline for an essay and recognize grammar mistakes such as passive voice.

How instructors choose to deal with AI in the classroom should reflect their teaching and learning goals for the course. However, given that AI is now a reality we must all face, it may be beneficial to incorporate it rather than work against it. ASU’s Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning for Student Success, located in Anne Belk Hall 218, aids instructors with this technology. Most recently, CETLSS Instructional Design Specialist Bryan Doppel, who also happens to be a 2013 App History alum with a Bachelor degree in History, Social Studies Education and a minor concentration in Judaic, Holocaust, and Peace Studies shared these [slides](#) and [recording](#) of a presentation that he and Director of Transformative Teaching and Learning Lindsay Masland recently gave regarding AI use in the classroom. They encourage instructors to reach out should they need assistance or inspiration!

## Faculty/Emeriti/Student Notes

### Faculty:

**Kristen Baldwin Deathridge** contributed a chapter to the forthcoming (ebook available now; paperback in May) [Teaching Public History](#), edited by Julia Brock and Evan Faulkenbury from UNC Press. The chapter is titled “Do Public Historians Need Grades? Ungrading During a Pandemic,” and the essays in the book cover many aspects of university teaching.

**Michael Behrent’s** monograph *Becoming Foucault: The Poitiers Years* was published by the University of Pennsylvania Press.

**Jeff Bortz** and his colleague Marcos Aguilera recently published a piece in the Mexico City newspaper *El Universal*, entitled, “Old and New Maya Train, Growth, yes, Development, no.”

**Tony Carey** delivered a refereed presentation, “The DungeonMaster: Anthony F. “Tony” DeBlase and the Making of American BDSM Culture,” at the Community-Academic Consortium for Research on Alternative Sexualities (CARAS).

**Allison Fredette’s** new edited collection, *Heartsick and Astonished: Divorce in*



Civil- War Era West Virginia (Athens: University of Georgia Press) appeared in May as part of the New Perspectives on the Civil War Era series. She was also recognized at the College of Arts and Sciences Awards as one of the newest members of the Academy of Outstanding Teachers.

**Amy Hudnall** was named as the recipient of the Excellence in Academic Advising Faculty Advising Award for 2023.

**Anatoly Isaenko** served as a discussant for a session on “Russia/USSR” (“Surveillance and Political Development Evidence from the Secret Police Files of the Russian Empire”) at the 9 th World Congress of Cliometrics.

**Michael L. Krenn’s** essay, “Hearts, Minds, and Skulls: The International Debate on the Nature of Humanity in the Mid-Nineteenth Century,” was published in Sonke Kunkel, Jessica Gienow-Hecht, and Sebastian Jobs, eds., *Visions of Humanity: Historical Cultural Practices since 1850* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2023):51-76.

**Jewel Parker** presented a paper entitled “Some of These Midwives Are Very Knowing in Several Medicines that Carolina Affords’: Native Women, Health Care, and Botanical Remedies in the US South up to 1860” at the Annual Meeting of the Society for Historians of the Early American Republic.

**Elizabeth Perego’s** book *Humor and Power in Algeria, 1920 to 2021* was published by Indiana University Press.

**Raja Rahim** received the exciting news from the James Weldon Johnson Institute for the Study of Race and Difference that she has been selected as a JWJI Post-Doctoral Fellow, a one-year, residential appointment at Emory University for the 2023-2024 academic year. Her article (co-written with Rita Liberti), “Roots of Resistance: The Origins of the Black Women in Sport Foundation and the Politics of Race and Gender” was published in *Women in Sport and Physical Activity Journal* 31:2 (2023): 55-62

**Bruce Stewart** received the good news that his Spring 2023 proposal “North Carolina

during Reconstruction: A New History” had been funded by the University Research Council for a research grant in the amount of \$4954. He was also recently chosen to be the department’s new Graduate Director starting July 2023.

**Carrie Streeter** was an invited speaker at “Accumulation: A Conference on Dance History,” organized by Columbia University’s History Department. Her paper, “Graceful Politics: Staging Citizenship in the New South,” explored the cultural significance of Reconstruction-Era elocution and dance programs at Black colleges in Atlanta, Georgia.

**Mary Valante** published “Games and Gamification in Online History Classes,” in *Teaching and Learning History Online: A Guide for College Instructors*, ed. Stephen Stein and Maureen MacLeod (Routledge, 2023).

### Emeriti Notes:

**Bettie Bond** is featured in the September 2023 *Our State* magazine (“The Go-Getter,” Volume 91, #4, pp.58-60). The article focuses on the many, many contributions Bettie has made to local history-related events and initiatives—including the Digital Watauga Project, the Junaluska Project, and the restoration of the downtown Appalachian Theater. Bettie is currently serving as president of the Watauga County Historical Society.

**Dorothea Martin-Hoffman** presented her paper “China’s Balancing Act in Response to the War in Ukraine” at the 2023 annual meeting of the North Carolina Association of Historians.

**Peter Petschauer** continues to stay busy in retirement, publishing three articles: “A Musical Journey from Bach and Strauss to Mahler and Orff,” *Clio’s Psyche*, forthcoming; “The Unique Breakthroughs to Love in Marriage; Overcoming a Village’s deep-seated Transgenerational Trauma,” *Clio’s Psyche*, 29, 2 (2023); “For the Love of Art,” *Clio’s Psyche*, 29, 1 (Fall, 2022): 59-66.

### Student Notes:

**Maegan Hoch** (BS, 2022) accepted a position as an Associate Writer as part of the Instruc-

tional Design team with the company NewGlobe. NewGlobe, founded in 2007, works to transform public education systems through public and private partnerships that deliver standardized education programs to combat learning poverty.

**Jeremy Land** (BS, History ED 2008; MA, History 2010) published *Colonial Ports, Global Trade, and the Roots of the American Revolution, 1700 – 1776* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishing, 2023).

**Smith McNeill** is teaching 8th Grade Social Studies in his hometown over at West Wilkes Middle School.

**Juan Pablo Neri** was selected as a member of ASU's Bell Ringers Society at the 2023 Founders Day Celebration. He is a senior from Raleigh majoring in History and is the university's 57th student body president and a Chancellor's Scholar. He also serves as the student fundraising coordinator for App Builds a Home and works as a substitute teacher.

**Nina Olivardia** (BS History Social Studies Education, 2019) is currently teaching high school economics honors and AP microeconomics at a high school in St. Pete, FL, where she was just named the emerging teacher of the year.

**Jonathan Tyler** (MA, August 2022) was selected as the recipient of the Graduate Student Outstanding Thesis Award for 2022-23 in the Arts/Humanities category. The thesis ("Dixie Entrenched: The Transformational Nature of the First World War on the South") was directed by Judkin Browning with committee members Karl Campbell and Allison Fredette.

**Nathan Widener** (M.A., 2014) will be coming up for tenure at Pellissippi Community College in Tennessee. He remembers our department fondly and is very grateful for the education he received here at Appalachian.

**Brad Wilson** (B.A., 1975), Brad Wilson, who has served as CEO of Blue Cross/Blue Shield of North Carolina and General Counsel for former Governor Jim Hunt, has now taken on a job certainly befitting a gradu-

uate of the Department of History! It has been announced that Mr. Wilson will serve as the Interim Director of the North Carolina Museum of History. The Museum, which was completed in 1992, serves as a collector and interpreter of artifacts and materials related to the history of North Carolina.

## Retirement Message from Dr. Anatoly Isaenko



Tragic events of the early 1990s provoked by the collapse of the Soviet Union confronted me in my position as Professor and Chair of the Department of Ancient and Medieval History of North-Ossetian State University at Vladikavkaz--the capital of North Ossetia-Alania Republic, and had a tremendous impact on my personal life and professional career as well as on the life of my family. By that time, I had already spent many years on comparative studies of the original materials including archival and other primary sources from the areas of regressive ethnic conflicts. This work and personal participation in participation in the modern democratic movements, as well as a dramatic experience of survival in the ethnically torn region of the Caucasus, forced me to put before myself a sort of a super task: I wanted to understand why the people who once treated themselves like brothers, amidst an all-sided societal crisis of a super ethnic national construction of the



USSR, easily and readily turned themselves into ethnocentric beasts and began killing each other in the most brutal and inhumane manner. All this is still continuing in Ukraine.

In 1993, North-Ossetian State University and Appalachian State University had signed the agreement about the exchange of students and professors, in which I took an active part. In the Spring semester of 1995, I became the Exchange Professor in the History Department of ASU. In fact, this was my first visit to the U.S., and also the first time I introduced my course on the History of Ethnic Conflicts at an American university. With Dr. Peter Petschauer (whom I had already met in the Caucasus when he was a member of the delegation from ASU that helped to facilitate the above mentioned exchange agreement between our Universities) I published a thorough and objective analysis of ethnic conflicts in the post-Soviet space in a top-notch American journal. In fact, this publication became the first among similar efforts undertaken by very few other scholars in the English language historiography at that time. Then, in 1996, I won a Fulbright Senior Research Fellowship at Duke University. But when I returned to the Caucasus, local mobsters began a systematic campaign against me and my family for scientific and public criticism of dominating ethnocentric nationalism--a driving ideology of the violent ethnic conflicts. The perilous situation in the Caucasus when the Chechen War threatened the very existence of my community forced me to seek employment at ASU. Peter and other colleagues immediately came to the rescue, like proverbial 'friends in need are friends indeed.' Since then, with the unstinting help of Peter and other colleagues at ASU, I have very successfully adapted to the U.S. and to teaching in an American university. I began working as an Adjunct and then secured a full-time position in the field of World Civilizations/Ethnic Conflict that was well suited to my professional training at the premier school of global history studies at Moscow State University.

I enjoyed and benefited from working together with Peter and other American colleagues on several projects dealing with various ranges of ethnic expressions that have been published in journals here in the United States. For the rest of my life, I will be grateful to Peter Petschauer as my constant partner and coauthor of many articles that helped me in formulating key aspects of an original theoretical model of the regularities of post-Soviet violent ethnic conflicts. In the course of almost thirty years at ASU I have managed to produce sixty publications, including two books, book chapters, journal articles, book reviews, and interviews for the Associated Press, Voice of America, Spectrum, and other resources. I presented fifty papers at regional and international conferences. Based on this research I also introduced 28 different courses to the History Department of ASU. Most popular are Ethnic Conflict: East versus West, History of Terrorism, and History of the Soviet Union. I directed seven Graduate and Honors Theses. I became an Honorary Member and Member of ten professional and international societies, and served as a consultant on Regional Advanced Courses at the United States Army JFK Special Warfare Center and School at Fort Bragg, NC, and other national agencies. I am especially proud of receiving a UNC Board of Governors Excellence in Teaching Award and being elected to the Academy of Outstanding Teachers at ASU.



The picture above was taken on January 20, 1995, during my first lecture as an Exchange Professor at the ASU Department of History.

It helps me to demonstrate the cultural shock and stereotypes that existed at this time on both sides of the ocean. A typical professor in Russia used to dress like me in this picture. While lecturing I noticed that many students were exchanging smiles and laughed when looking at me. After the lecture I asked a student who looked older than others why they laughed. He told me that I looked like a KGB guy. OK, I said to myself, next time I need to look like an American. At this point I need to explain that in the 1960-70s, young men in the Soviet Caucasus were very big fans of popular Hollywood movies about cowboys with John Wayne and others like Steve McQueen, Eli Wallach, and Yul Brenner. I remember when I was a teenager, we fought in the streets for tickets to see "The Magnificent Seven." I saw it several dozen times and knew by heart all the dialogue and even the manner of walking of these brave cowboys. A lot of young men dreamed to have jeans and risked their freedom by illegally trading with foreigners to get such clothing. The next day I went to Watsonata store on King Street and bought a cowboy outfit, including the belt with a big buckle, high boots, a shirt with in-laid leather, and a cowboy hat, and went to my lecture trying to walk like those guys in the saloons of my favorite movies. But when I entered the auditorium, my students almost fell off their chairs seized, by a Homeric laughter. What a disappointment! It took a lot of effort on my part to begin the lecture.

After it I asked the same student why they laughed again. He said: "Now you look like a redneck."

With time and the help of my dear students, friends, and good colleagues I managed to overcome the cultural shock. I was happy to become a typical American professor, but I still remember this first course of mine, as well as all the names of my first American students, who gradually became so good to me and so tolerant.

Yours, Anatoly Isaenko

## **IN MEMORY: DR. RENNIE BRANTZ In Memoriam—Rennie Brantz (1942-2023)**

Rennie Brantz, unquestionably one of the most influential and beloved faculty in the history of Appalachian State University, passed away on October 9, 2023. He joined the History Department in 1973 as a Professor of German History and retired forty-two years later in 2015. During his tenure, among his many achievements was founding and directing the Freshman Seminar program and co-founding the Center for Judaic, Holocaust, and Peace Studies. For seventeen years, he also led summer study abroad programs in Europe.

His spirit of civic mindedness also extended into the broader community. After serving ten years as a member of Boone Town Council, he was elected Boone's Mayor in 2015. During his eight years in that office, he helped create the Historic Preservation Commission, a move which among other things, helped save the city's downtown post office.

The History Department extends condolences to his wife, Lana, and son, Douglas, and all those who grieve his passing. By sharing the following messages from some of his students and colleagues, we join many others in honoring the memory of this kind and mighty scholar.

.....  
"Few professors would have detected that I had any potential during my first couple of years at App State. Rennie was one of them, and in addition to supporting me in a million ways over the years, he inspired me to become a historian and to dedicate myself to genocide/human-rights education. I direct a Center at UNC Charlotte that is modeled on the Center that Rennie established at ASU. My little story—of being discovered, inspired, and supported for years and years by Dr. Brantz—can be multiplied by sever-

al thousand. Rennie was a beautiful soul and a wonderful human being whose legacy and influence will live on for generations, through those he educated and influenced.”

Dr. John Cox  
Director, UNC Charlotte Holocaust-Studies Center  
Appalachian State University Class of ‘86

.....

“Rennie Brantz was really one of the pioneers of Holocaust education at the college level, or maybe any other level. In the late 1970s and 1980s, very few faculty across the United States were teaching full-semester Holocaust classes.”

Dr. Christopher Browning  
Frank Porter Graham Professor of History  
UNC Chapel Hill

.....

“What a kind, gentle soul—May his memor be a blessing. B’vracha.”

Dr. Miriam Klein Kassenoff  
Director, Holocaust Teacher Education Institute, School of Education  
University of Miami, Coral Gables, Florida

.....

“Our offices were very close to each other, and in my early years at ASU, I stopped by many times asking for advice. Every time, as a benevolent advisor, Rennie gave me unstinting help to better accommodate me to the system of teaching at sm American university, as I was amidst transition and cultural shock as a former foreign scholar. In the Caucasus people say: “A great reward of eternal Light is awaiting for a man who shared the warmth of his soul at least once with those who needed it in this life.” And as a great teacher and a good senior colleague Rennie did this for me on countless occasions. We’ll keep Rennie in our grateful memory and prayers.”

Dr. Anatoly Isaenko  
Professor of History  
Appalachian State University

.....

“Rennie was one of the most supportive colleagues I had the pleasure of knowing. He was a real gentleman, as well. He always had a warm smile and encouragement to offer others.”

Dr. Sheila Phipps  
Professor of History

.....

“Early on in my career, Chairman George Antone suggested that I sit in on some of Rennie’s classes as I thought about ways to improve my own teaching and so I did. I was struck by the passion Rennie brought to the classroom and also by the way that students responded to him. That began a friendship during which Rennie and I would often work with each other to fulfill our peer review program in the department. His graciousness, kindness, and genuineness are aspects of our relationship that I will forever cherish.”

Dr. James Goff  
Professor of History

.....

“When Dr. Rennie Brantz joined the History department in the early 70s, I was delighted. Although I was assigned to teach Russian history, my other interest remained German history. . .

What a pleasure somewhat later to teach with him on occasion, particularly in Freshman Seminar and the Holocaust history course. In the classroom, this introverted man became a firebrand. His interest in the subject, his careful preparation, his flawless delivery, and his almost boundless enthusiasm, all these made him a perfect professor. Two stories tell how Rennie created settings in which others could thrive. One is that he asked a student to get in touch with me because her mother had discovered her grandfather’s letters and cards from the early days of the Warsaw Ghetto in her attic. Apparently, no one could read their German, especially the parts in script. I translated them and they supplement what we understand about this horrible ghetto.

The other unique connection for which I have



to thank Rennie is the introduction to Kathy Kacer, a well-known Canadian children's book author who regularly presents in the Annual Martin and Doris Rosen Symposium for individuals—mostly teachers—eager to better understand the Holocaust and similar atrocities. Kacer asked me to translate letters that her mother's first husband sent to her from the Majdanek concentration camp. (He worked in one of the offices.) These are cautious, yet deeply caring letters the young man wrote to his new bride outside the ghetto. Again, thanks to Rennie, a connection was made which allows us another unique insight into one of the most horrific death camps in Europe. Professor Brantz was not a traditional scholar as faculty members have often interpreted that role. But he was as well prepared as anyone to teach in his chosen field. He and Dr. Boyd taught the Holocaust course for years, and she and I still speak about how well Rennie was informed about concentration camp. (He worked in one of the offices.) These are cautious, yet deeply caring letters the young man wrote to his new bride outside the ghetto. Again, thanks to Rennie, a connection was made which allows us another unique insight into one of the most horrific death camps in Europe. Professor Brantz

was not a traditional scholar as faculty members have often interpreted that role. But he was as well prepared as anyone to teach in his chosen field. He and Dr. Boyd taught the Holocaust course for years, and she and I still speak about how well Rennie was informed about every aspect of the topic and the context of it in European history. What astonishes me as well is his ability not to be overwhelmed by the topic and his warning to me not to become too deeply involved: "It will not ever leave you alone." I did not listen. Over time Rennie became a close friend, and I admire him for his exceptional abilities as a teacher/scholar and educational innovator. In the end though, the German and Yiddish word Mensch fits him best; he was above all a decent and honorable human being.

Peter W. Petschauer  
Professor Emeritus, History  
Appalachian State University

