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A HISTORY OF THE MISSOURI CONFERENCE ON HISTORY, 1959-2016

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The Missouri Conference on History (MCOH) emerged in 1959 and has continued without missing a year, despite undergoing organizational changes over time. Many individuals have contributed to make it one of the most successful state conferences ever. This is a story worth telling, especially at time when many people are reconsidering the history of the Midwest and how to support the infrastructure necessary to promote the study of that history.²

My first encounter with the conference came in 1968 when my department head Robert Flinders at Southwest Missouri State College (presently Missouri State University) encouraged me to submit a paper proposal. I had recently received my Ph.D. from The Ohio State University after completing a dissertation on Harry M. Daugherty, President Warren Harding's attorney general. I selected a topic from the dissertation that I titled "Harry M. Daugherty and Warren Harding: A

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² I wish to thank professor emeritus William Foley of the University of Central Missouri, Louis Gerteis professor of history of the University of Missouri-St. Louis, distinguished Bullitt professor of history emeritus Richard Kirkendall of the University of Washington, and professor of history Worth Robert Miller of Missouri State University for reading a draft of this essay. I am indebted to the State Historical Society for sending me two boxes of conference material to supplement my twenty-eight conference programs.

Troubled Friendship,” presented in a single paper session that involved a chair and two commentators. The paper focused on Harding’s pre-presidency. Its thesis challenged the myth that Daugherty somehow had engineered Harding’s presidential nomination and election. In my twenties, I was green as one can imagine, but I still managed to avoid embarrassing myself. I remember the session being well attended, and that Richard Kirkendall of the University of Missouri asked a question that I wished I had answered better. He soon became a role model of what I wanted to be as a professional historian.

That April 25-26 conference, held at the Ramada Inn on the outskirts of Columbia and sponsored by the University of Missouri, was comprised of seven general sessions. It remains embedded in my memory because it was well-organized and well-attended by university professors and high school educators, the vast majority of whom came from Missouri. I also recall that presenters were exempted from paying registration and banquet fees.

The conference began on Thursday evening with former Missouri professor Lewis Spitz of Stanford University delivering the key address on “Luther’s Impact on Modern Views of Man.” It ended at Saturday’s noon banquet with Professor Russell Jones of Westminster College, who entertained us with “Some Americans in Paris, 1826-1848.” The meeting enabled me to develop friendships that have lasted a lifetime with many who taught at Missouri institutions. That sense of community continued to develop over time. Many presenters at that 1969 meeting eventually became top historians in their field. They include, among many others: Richard Kirkendall in recent American political history at Indiana University, Iowa State University, and finally the University of Washington; Allen Millett of the University of Missouri and The Ohio State University in military history; William Parrish of Westminster College and Mississippi State University in Civil War and Missouri history; David Thelen of the University of Missouri and Indiana University in American Progressivism; H. Roger Grant of the University of Akron and Clemson University in American railroad history; and Noble Cunningham of the University of Missouri in American early national history.³

For the previous ten conferences Richard Kirkendall’s recollections and the institutional records he provided are indispensable.⁴ When the conference began in 1959 Kirkendall was in his first

³ Along with Kirkendall, who became Executive Secretary of the Organization of American Historians (1973-1981), Thelen served as editor of the *Journal of American History* (1985-1999).

⁴ Kirkendall’s recollections are documented in Box 10, 14, 28, 33, Richard Kirkendall Papers, University of Washington Special Collections.

year at the University of Missouri history department after receiving his Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin. He soon would play an important role in the conference. The conference originators came from the department's senior members, including the chair David Pinkney as well as James Bugg and Charles Mullett. The department's eight members would take turns organizing the annual meeting in the immediate years that followed, usually as a committee of two or three. The initial motivation for the conference came from a conviction shared by the Missouri Council of Social Studies and the Missouri history department: "That all teachers of history in the state have a common interest not only in the problems of teaching but also in the substance of historical scholarship." They included secondary school teachers who were encouraged to attend with special sessions occasionally geared to their needs and interests. Besides also "showcasing" the MU history department, it aided it in developing "good working relations with historians on other campuses, including those who send us graduate students and employ products of our graduate program."

Kirkendall would have an additional interest. The conference would provide an opportunity to strengthen his relationship with the Truman Library in Independence, Missouri, which had just opened its doors to researchers. He invited director Philip Brooks and archivist Philip Lagerquist to attend the inaugural conference. Kirkendall delivered the Friday evening address on "New Deal Research in the Roosevelt Library" in which he drew upon existing scholarship to reveal the potential opportunities that would now exist at the Truman Library. Brooks wrote that he was "much impressed" with Kirkendall's remarks. That contributed to a "close working relationship" between the two that led eventually to dissertations and books on the Truman era by Kirkendall's graduate students, along with his own scholarly publications beginning with *The Truman Period as a Research Field* in 1967. In 1973 Kirkendall also became a member of the Truman Library Institute board after he became executive secretary of the Organization of the American Historians. In future years the MCOH became the recipient of a number of sessions that were based on the scholarship emanating from the Truman Library.

In addition to Kirkendall's Friday evening keynote address, the conference convened Saturday morning for an eight o'clock business meeting and a ten o'clock session with Charles Mullett of MU discussing "Method and Substance in Historiography," followed by a panel discussion involving professors Lorenzo Greene of Lincoln University, Eleanor Huzar of Southeast Missouri State College (presently Southeast Missouri State University), Perry McCandless of Central Missouri State College (presently the University of Central Missouri), and Donald Nicholson of Southwest

Missouri State College. The Saturday morning program concluded with a noon banquet that featured George Carson of the American Historical Association who spoke about the "The Service Center for Teachers of History." All sessions were held at the University of Missouri Memorial Student Union with the Division of Continuing Education, in cooperation the Missouri Council of Social Studies, assisting the department.

The next conferences, almost always in April, would continue at the same site with the same organizational structure along with the Friday evening and Saturday morning meeting schedules. In April 1960 the Friday evening session featured noted western historian Walter Prescott Webb of the University of Texas (no topic listed) followed by the Saturday luncheon speaker William Cartwright of Duke University who focused on "The Significance of History in the Training of the Social Studies Teacher." The April 1961 conference program included sessions on Tudor England, American urban history, and politics and history, minus sessions on teaching, probably causing the Missouri Council for Social Studies to withdraw from sponsorship.

The Friday evening banquet speaker featured leading Franklin Roosevelt scholar Frank Freidel of Harvard University, invited by conference chairman Kirkendall. Freidel came despite a modest remuneration of \$250 that included travel expenses. In addition the 1962 conference provides the first list of pre-registrants, which numbered seventy-five, all from Missouri, ten of whom came from the University of Missouri and five from Missouri high schools. The vast majority of the rest came from Missouri universities and colleges.

By 1968, the MU department had grown enormously, adding productive scholars that appreciably strengthened the graduate program. They included David Thelen, Walter Scholes, Noble Cunningham, John Rothney, Allen Millett, Charles Nauert, and John Rainbolt. By then the MCOH had moved off campus to the Tiger Motor Hotel in downtown Columbia while adding three additional sessions to the Saturday morning program. Christopher Lasch of Northwestern University, the author of the much acclaimed *The New Radicalism in America, 1889-1963: The Intellectual as a Social Type*, delivered the luncheon address.

Further changes occurred beginning in the early seventies. For the first time the MCOH moved from Columbia to the University of Missouri-St. Louis and was held downtown at the Sheraton-Jefferson Hotel with Arthur Shaffer and Lyle Dorsett as coordinators. The program expanded to eleven sessions with noted historians Page Smith of the University of California at Santa Cruz and Allen Davis of Temple University presenting the major addresses, "Real History versus Academic

History” and “The Spiderweb Conspiracy: The Radical Right in the 1920s,” respectively. The vast majority of the other participants continued to represent Missouri institutions.

An even more significant change occurred the following year in 1972 when Southwest Missouri State College hosted the conference. I had asked Dick Kirkendall at the St. Louis meeting if we could do so. He graciously agreed and even suggested that he would be happy to present a paper if needed. At the time the only other conference I had coordinated was a Phi Alpha Theta regional conference in 1970. With plenty of help from the department, we decided to host the Friday night program along the banks of the scenic Finley River in Ozarks, Missouri, with University President Duane Meyer chairing the well-attended gathering featuring Professor Robert Divine of the University of Texas who spoke on “The Nuclear Arms Race.” Nine sessions followed on Saturday at the student union, including one on the United States of the 1940s in which Timothy Donovan of the University of Arkansas and Kirkendall presented, followed by comments from Theodore Wilson of the University of Kansas and Robert Divine. Professor Andreas Dorpalen of The Ohio State University provided the luncheon address, “A New German History: Some Thoughts on the East German Approach.” The program overall included topics ranging from Asian, English, Missouri, feminist, and U.S. history, along with innovative teaching techniques. Missouri historians continued to dominate the program. The well-attended conference required a registration fee at \$2.00 as did the previous ones.

Columbia hosted the fifteenth MCOH in 1973 with Professor Duane Wolf acting as coordinator. One of the memorable moments, still much recalled, came after Marvin Cain’s overly lengthy Saturday luncheon address, “A Cautious Look at the ‘New’ Political History by an ‘Old’ Methodologist: The Problems of Studying the Rise of Early American Political Parties,” caused several attendees to scamper home after forty-five minutes. Neal Primm went up to Marvin afterward to say tongue-in-cheek that his was the best two-paper address that he had ever heard at any history conference.⁵

The sharing of the meeting with regional institutions continued the following year when Central Missouri State University hosted at their conference center with Professors Arthur McClure and Guy Griggs sharing the responsibilities. The fifteen-session program represented continued growth with five and six sessions running concurrently Saturday morning at the 8:45 and 10:30

⁵ This often told story first came from Lawrence Christensen of the University of Missouri-Rolla and confirmed by his colleague Larry Gragg.

time frames. Considerable diversity existed, including papers devoted to Missouri, early and recent America, Latin America, and public school teaching. Senator Gale McGee of Wyoming, who had a Ph.D. in history from the University of Chicago, presented the Friday evening address (subject unlisted) and Charles Mullett of MU entertained the Saturday luncheon attendees with "Have You Any Work For A Plumber?; Political Satire Three Centuries Ago."

The conference returned to Columbia Ramada Inn in 1975 with thirteen sessions comprising the program. Three were devoted to Missouri, and the rest focused on the United States, France, Spain, England, Germany, and teaching. Excluding Friday evening, every participant came from Missouri universities, perhaps reflecting MU's continued belief that the conference existed primarily for Missouri institutions. The Friday banquet speaker Professor Charles Larkin of the University of Chicago spoke on "Church and State and Nation in Modern Ireland," while Saturday luncheon speaker Professor William Cuthbertson of William Jewell College focused on "The Colonial Agents and British Administrators, 1755-1775." The registration fee of \$15 included the meals and meeting materials.

The 1978 conference moved to Maryville, the home of Northwest Missouri State University. Held at the J.W. Jones Student Union, the Friday evening session featured the distinguished African American scholar John Hope Franklin of the University of Chicago, who titled his remarks the "Historians' Dilemmas." Nine sessions continued on Saturday with the conference ending around 11:00 a.m. Most of the participants came from Missouri institutions. The registration fee was \$3.00. While no organized banquet or luncheon existed, a book exhibit did, a staple at virtually all of the MCOHs.

The following year the University of Missouri-Rolla hosted at the University Center. That effort witnessed an important expansion in which seventeen sessions emerged beginning on early Friday afternoon. A wide variety of choices were offered including sessions on Missouri, military, and diplomatic history, as well as U. S. political, urban, and social history. While most historians came from Missouri institutions, several did not. A major feature of the program represented the presence of the eminent historian Henry Steele Commager, for years associated with Columbia University. Like most of the keynote speakers, his honorarium and expenses were paid by the Missouri Committee for the Humanities and the host institution. The \$5.00 registration and the \$6.00 banquet fees helped defray other expenses.

Continued growth occurred in 1980 at the twenty-second MCOH held at Southeast Missouri State University in Cape Girardeau. The conference officially began at the University Center at 8:00 a.m. on Friday and ended after 3:00 p.m. on Saturday. Thirty-five sessions were featured. In addition, attendees were invited to an address on Thursday evening at the Academic Hall by Carl Bernstein, co-author of *All the President's Men*, which many of us attended. David Pinkney, president of the American Historical Association, delivered the Friday luncheon address on "The State of the Historical Profession," followed by Otis Graham of the University of California-Santa Barbara, at the Friday evening banquet, on the "Relevance and Irrelevance of History." David F. Trask, historian of the Department of State, spoke at the Saturday luncheon on "The Role of Historical Information in the Decision Making Process." The finals of the annual Missouri History Day state contest also occurred on Saturday, which included a number of historians participating as judges. Future conferences would subsequently include History Day finals as part of their programs.

While the 1981 conference returned to the University of Missouri where it was held at the Hearnes Building, the next one, sponsored by Central Missouri State University, existed apart from the local municipality for the first time. Instead, the twenty-fourth meeting, held at the historic Elms Hotel in Excelsior Springs Missouri, became the conference site.

The theme centered on "The History Around Us." The location illustrated that very point. Excelsior Springs was the site of the mineral spa where the great and near great once visited, including Franklin Roosevelt and John D. Rockefeller. The Elms Hotel, always popular to the famous and infamous, was a favorite of Harry Truman, who secretly stayed there on election night of 1948. The conference consequently used the Truman and the spa connections as points of reference relating to the conference theme. John Scarborough of the University of Kentucky's Friday luncheon address discussed "Spas and Healing throughout the Ages," while Richard Kirkendall titled his Friday evening talk, "In the Spotlight: Truman and Missouri during the White House Years." Additionally, Kirkendall commented at another Truman session on the "Harry Truman Presidential Library: A Twenty-Five Year Perspective" that featured Richard S. Brownlee of the State Historical Society of Missouri as chair and a panel that included Eugene F. Schmidlein of Stephens College, Benedict K. Zobrist, director of the Truman Library, and myself. The program contained twenty other sessions on a wide range of topics from Jacksonian America, World War I in Europe and Asia, British History, American Diplomatic History, the History of Education, as well as several sessions on Missouri history. The program represented the collective effort of the

entire history department of Central Missouri State University. Out of the some eighty-eight participants, fifty-nine came from Missouri institutions.

Hence a major shift had transpired since 1972, which included the moving away from the University of Missouri to regional universities even apart from the host institutional site itself. As a result, more participants became involved, leading to more diverse programs and greater participation and attendance. It also provided a wonderful opportunity for attendees to see the campuses of other state institutions and the communities in which they resided. I personally became much more familiar with my adopted state, exposing me, for example, to the historic State Capitol in Jefferson City; the beautiful campus of Truman State University, noted for its architectural integrity; and Cape Girardeau, nestling on the banks of the Mississippi. It also enabled me to make new friends, sometimes working with them on projects unrelated to conference activities. William Foley reminds us of “the sharing and discussion of research and writing projects with colleagues in informal settings” at conferences that lasted into the wee morning hours.

In 1980 the conference also created a constitution that included a committee structure, varying from five to eight members, to deal with conference-related activities. That committee, meeting at the conference, decided which institutions would host subsequent meetings subject to their willingness to do so. Often possible sites had already submitted invitations. Conference coordinators (now called presidents) automatically became presidents of the steering committee as well. The secretary-treasurer, initially at the University of Missouri, handled the paperwork and the finances obtained from a small portion of the registration fees provided by host institutions. I recommended at the 1981 meeting that committees of three provide annually a best article and a best book award by a Missouri-based historian irrespective of subject matter. The winners were to be announced at the Saturday luncheon session. To this day, the awards continue to be given.⁶

In 1983 Northeast Missouri State (presently Truman State University) hosted the April conference at the student union with no president mentioned in the program. It adopted the History Day theme of “Turning Points in History.” Several of the twenty-two sessions were related to that subject, including sessions on black and Missouri history, and Truman’s pre-presidential career. Myron Marty of the National Endowment for the Humanities discussed “History as One of the Humanities” at the Friday luncheon, and John W. Ward, president of the American Council of

⁶ Summary of Business Meeting, Friday, April 10, 1991. Beginning in 1979 into the late 1990s, minutes and other correspondence exist relating to the MCOH. See Box 1, State Historical Society of Missouri, Columbia, Missouri.

the Humanities, spoke about "The Importance of the Humanities" at the evening dinner. The conference offered a diverse program that featured two sessions celebrating the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Missouri Conference, as well as the fortieth anniversary of the Western Manuscript Collection. For the first time, the program announced the best article and the best book award. Charles Nauert of the University of Missouri chaired the former and Neal Primm of the University of Missouri-St. Louis chaired the latter committee.

The April 1984 twenty-sixth MCOH, appropriately held at the University of Missouri-Kansas City and the Truman Presidential Library with James Falls as president, celebrated the Harry Truman birthday Centennial. Truman scholar and veteran Washington correspondent for the *New York Herald Tribune* Robert Donovan delivered the Thursday and Friday evening addresses: "Truman's Foreign Policy: Asia" and "The Truman Presidency: An Assessment." Thomas Paterson of the University of Connecticut followed Friday evening with "Truman's Foreign Policy in Europe." At the Friday luncheon Susan Hartman of the University of Missouri-St. Louis informed us about "Women's Family Roles in the World War Era." In all, the conference sponsored eighteen sessions to include four on Missouri History, two student Phi Alpha sessions, and one on the National Archives and the Roman Provinces.

For the first time, Missouri Southern State College (presently Missouri Southern State University) in Joplin sponsored the thirtieth MCOH in 1988. All of the eighteen sessions were held in Matthews Hall except for the Friday luncheon, which took place at the Billingsly Student Center and the Friday banquet at the Twin Hills Country Club. Virginia Laas of the Social Sciences Department served as president of the conference that featured three keynote speakers. The opening plenary address Friday morning featured Gilbert Fite, Richard B. Russell Professor Emeritus, University of Georgia, who edified us with "History from the Grass Roots: State and Local History over the Last Half Century." Dudley Cornish, professor emeritus at Pittsburg State University (Kansas) provided the Friday luncheon address, "And Gladly Teach," followed that evening by George Tindall, Kenan Professor of History at the University of North Carolina with "What Happened to Regionalism?" The conference devoted three sessions to women and eight sessions to Missouri history.

In 1989, the University of Missouri held the thirty-first MCOH at the Holiday Inn, Lake of the Ozarks, with Lance Williams presiding over the ten-session meeting, followed by Southwest Missouri State University in 1990 coordinated by Robert Flanders, director of the Center for

Ozarks Studies. Michael Kammen, Newton C. Farr Professor and chair at Cornell University, informed us with “The Problem of Tradition and the Role of Memory in American Culture” at the luncheon. Grady McWhiney, Lyndon Baines Johnson Professor at Texas Christian University, focused on “Jefferson Davis and His Generals” that evening, followed by Carol Kammen of Cornell University’s Saturday’s luncheon address, “The Meaning of Local History to the Profession and to the Public.” In his report Flanders indicated that, of the 106 who registered, fifty were academics, 16 of whom were from the host institution, along with 33 non-academics, and 24 student or Saturday only attendees.⁷

The thirty-fifth MCOH again shifted to the University of Missouri-Kansas City in 1993, held at the Holiday Inn Crown Plaza with the opening session on Thursday evening taking place at the Truman Presidential Library in Independence, Missouri. Library director Benedict Zobrist chaired the “Harry S Truman and the Old, New World Order: The View from the 1990s” session that included Robert H. Ferrell of Indiana University, Alonzo Hamby of Ohio University, and Donald McCoy of the University of Kansas as discussants. The Western Historical Manuscript Collection sponsored the reception that followed the session. The program listed sixteen other sessions, the majority of which were on non-Missouri topics, including “Getting Facts from Fiction: Using Feature Films to Teach History,” “Issues in the History of Medicine,” “The Modern Presidency—Teaching History As An Interdisciplinary Subject,” and “Postmodern Culture in America.” The program ended on 12:15 p.m. Saturday with no luncheon banquet listed in the program.

Following the thirty-sixth MCOH held in St. Louis from March 24-26, 1994, at the Regal Riverfront Hotel, the Missouri State Archives, for the first time, sponsored the 1995 MCOH at the Capitol Plaza Hotel in Jefferson City with Lincoln University, the State Historical Society, and William Woods University acting as co-sponsors. University Professor of History at Brown University Gordon Wood delivered the Friday keynote address, which he titled “The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin.” The luncheon address on Saturday featured David Thomas Konig of Washington University in St. Louis who informed us about “Discovering the Legal Mind of Thomas Jefferson.”

⁷ See Flanders’s post-conference report of May 15, 1990 to the steering committee. It is part of the documentation of that body, including minutes of that body from 1979 through the 1990s. Box 1, State Historical Society of Missouri.

The 1995 program contained a number of novel features. At the State Capitol nearby, local news director and author Bob Priddy entertained conferees with “Only the Rivers Are Peaceful: The Missouri Mural of Thomas Hart Benton” at the State Capitol mural location. The program also listed continental breakfasts sponsored by the State Historical Society of Missouri and William Woods University. For the first time, the program featured ads from various publishers listing their new offerings.

The thirty-eighth conference at Northeast Missouri State University, presided by Roy Domenico and Jerrold Hirsch, and the thirty-ninth by Louis Gerteis of the University of Missouri-St. Louis, were similar in number of sessions (13 and 15) along with keynote speakers focusing on provocative topics: the former by James Fisher of St. Louis University, “That Free Men May Live: Dr. Tom Dooley from Middle America to Laos and Back,” and the latter by Indiana University Henry Glassie, “Bringing Time to Earth: The Practice and Purpose of History.”

The State Historical Society of Missouri hosted the fortieth MCOH at the Ramada Inn in Columbia in 1998. The conference listed seventeen sessions from Thursday evening to Saturday noon. Although the program listed two plenary sessions, the program offered no keynote speakers. The Nature of Biography plenary session chaired by William Foley of Central Missouri State University was especially important, for it became indirectly the launching pad for the successful Missouri biography series, sponsored by the University of Missouri Press, with Foley as editor. At a subsequent meeting to discuss possible Missouri figures deserving a biography, I remember suggesting St. Louis Cardinals hall of famer Stan Musial, who at the time was still living. Several months later I received a phone call from Foley who persuaded me to write the biography. Although reluctant to do so because I was not a sports historian, I am glad I did. Why that aforementioned biography session, which I organized, turned into a plenary one is related to the unwillingness of Robert Ferrell of Indiana University to participate because of the prospects of a small audience, which he too often experienced at other comparable conferences. So, I convinced conference president Jim Goodrich to give us the whole 10:30 slot. Of course, the session drew a huge audience as a result.

The 2001 conference, sponsored by the University of Missouri–Rolla, was held at the Scenic Inn at Grand Claize at Osage Beach with Patrick Huber acting as coordinator. Herman Hattaway, a longtime noted Civil War historian, delivered the Friday evening address, funded by the Missouri State Archives. He spoke on “A Look Back at Four Decades of Writing and Teaching the Civil

War.” The following evening Gilbert Fite entertained us with “Challenging But Rewording Adventure’: Writing the Richard B. Russell Biography.” The Saturday luncheon talk, funded by the State Historical Society of Missouri, was delivered by Joel Vance, author of *Down Home Missouri: When Girls were Scary and Basketball was King*. He informed us on “The Three 1950s Religions in Keytesville High School.” Fifteen sessions comprised this March 8-10 program.

The National Archives and Records Administration hosted in 2002, then Southeast Missouri State University in 2003 and the Missouri State Archives in the following year. The latter meeting included a “Celebration of Achievement” to honor Dr. James Goodrich’s four decades of service to Missouri History. Lynn Wolf Gentzier of the State Historical Society of Missouri chaired the session in which Lawrence Christensen of the University of Missouri-Rolla, William Foley of Central Missouri State, and Gary Kremer of William Woods University spoke.

The forty-seventh MCOH moved to Northeast Missouri State University in 2005 and, for the first time, to State Fair Community College in Sedalia, Missouri, the following year. Of the sixteen sessions presented at the latter site, eleven focused on Missouri. The luncheon address featured H. Roger Grant, Centennial Professor at Clemson University, whose address centered on “Railroads and the Trans-Missouri West.”

The 2007 MCOH was held in St. Louis, sponsored by the University of Missouri–St. Louis history department, the State Historical Society of Missouri, the St. Louis University history department, and the St. Louis Mercantile Library. Louis Gerteis of the University of Missouri–St. Louis acted as coordinator. That forty-ninth meeting was especially special to me. Even though I had participated in a number of conference sessions, I had never given a keynote address until I spoke at the Friday luncheon on “Stan Musial and the Significance of Sports Biography.” This occurred in the same year that my *Musial: From Stash to Stan the Man* came out in paperback. The diverse program listed no other keynote address in the sixteen sessions that spanned Thursday morning through Friday afternoon featuring mostly Missouri historians. The Depression Politics session remains full of nostalgia for long time attendees like myself because two key conference organizers and close friends, Lawrence “Chris” Christensen and J. Christopher “Chris” Schnell, are no longer with us.

The April 2-4, 2008, conference at the Courtyard by Marriott in Columbia marked its fiftieth anniversary. Appropriately, it occurred on the same April dates of the inaugural meeting and in the same city. Organized by the seven member steering committee and chaired by Gary Kremer

of the State Historical Society of Missouri, it also involved sixteen sponsors. For the first time the conference began on a Wednesday evening to include a reception, followed with a lecture by Sir Ian Kershaw, Professor of Modern History at the University of Sheffield and a renowned Hitler biographer. He titled his address, "How and Why the Nazis Held out until the Bitter End." Included among the twenty-four sessions was the "Reminiscences of Early Missouri Conferences on History" as part of the luncheon program by three designated honorary presidents of the 2008 conference: Richard Kirkendall of the University of Washington, Perry McCandless of the University of Central Missouri, and William Parrish, of Mississippi State University. The first two were on the inaugural program while Parrish was an attendee. Kirkendall also presented the Thursday evening keynote address, "Faith and Foreign Policy: An Exploration into the Mind of Harry Truman," which represented Kirkendall's culmination of study devoted to our thirty-third president.

"Remembering Lewis Atherton: Inspiring Teacher and Eminent Scholar" constituted a plenary session on Thursday afternoon. The late Atherton not only participated in the first MCOH, he served in the MU history department for thirty-seven years, supervised fifty Ph.D. dissertations, and published four books and over thirty articles on western, southern, and Missouri history. Gary Kremer moderated the session that included Lawrence Christensen of Missouri University of Science and Technology, William Foley and Perry McCandless of the University of Central Missouri, William Parrish of Mississippi State University, J. Neal Primm of the University of Missouri-St. Louis, and Richard Sellers, a Santa Fe, New Mexico public historian. In many ways, Atherton will be remembered as the heart and soul of the University of Missouri history department. The 2008 conference recorded 139 registrants.

The fifty-first MCOH in 2009 returned to Springfield and was hosted by Missouri State University at the University Plaza with Stephen McIntyre as president. The eight-member Steering Committee continued to exist with Gary Kremer of the State Historical Society as Secretary/Treasurer, an indication of the important role that Kremer and the state historical society would play in succeeding conferences. The 2009 meeting was important to me because it probably represented my last MOCH after some thirty appearances since 1969. Too many of my long time colleagues no longer attended either because of retirement, death, or for other unknown reasons.

Despite the active involvement of the steering committee and the continued rotation to different parts of the state, including Kansas City in 2011, Cape Girardeau in 2014, Chesterfield in

2015, Columbia in 2016, and Springfield projected for 2017, the conference has nevertheless undergone several changes. This includes the financial support of the State Historical Society and the Missouri State Archives, which has been significant. Registration fees have steadily increased for faculty and staff to \$45 for preregistration, \$55 for late registration, and \$35 for students. Thirdly, the conference is now held in March. While the fifty-sixth MCOH in 2014 became a Tuesday-Wednesday affair, the others continued to feature Thursday-Friday dates. The number of sessions have substantially increased to as many as thirty-two in 2014 and thirty-one in 2016. Whether this expansion is beneficial depends on whether the additional sessions are supported by sufficient audiences and whether the quality of the presentations warrants that expansion. At the same time, the conference focus has also narrowed considerably. The 2014 meeting, for example, featured fourteen sessions out of thirty-two that were Missouri subject related. There were only two sessions on non-US history in 2014 and three in 2016. More significantly, the number and percentage of student sessions have increased substantially. For example, the 2014 meeting featured twenty student sessions with only five clearly identified as faculty or staff among the thirty-two sessions, while the 2016 conference contained twenty-two student sessions out of the thirty-one.⁷ In some cases, students and faculty or staff presented at the same session. In most cases faculty or staff only chaired and commented. Tenure-track faculty have been almost non-existent in the concurring sessions except as chairs or discussants.⁸ That major scholars such as Robert Waite, John Hope Franklin, Michael Kammen, Robert Divine, Gordon Wood, or Christopher Lash are no longer featured as keynote speakers might have been one of a number of reasons that few faculty are now attending.⁹

There are overriding benefits for many of the aforementioned changes, however. They include the opportunities of graduate students to present at a professional meeting in which they are required to respond to the critique of professional historians and to speak to a public audience after having revised their original work. That experience can prepare them to be better teachers and

⁸ A program committee of six, including Gary Kremer, reviewed all proposals, which required an abstract and a vitae. See Box 69, State Historical Society of Missouri.

⁹ The recent absence of faculty as presenters or even as attendees is not unique to the MCOH. That has also weakened the Mid-America Conference which Missouri State University once shared with the University of Kansas, Oklahoma State University, and the University of Arkansas on a rotating basis. Possible reasons for this, shared by past coordinators, include an aging faculty, a changing culture in which newer faculty saw less worth in participating in regional or state conferences, a greater reliance on student-based sessions, and a more selfish culture causing faculty to focus on personal professional goals. See James Giglio, "History of the Mid-America Conference on History," *Studies in Midwestern History*, December 2015.

scholars, and it also partly meets one of the original objectives of the conference, to develop “personal contacts between historians . . . in other schools of Missouri.” I have been especially impressed with some of the intriguing, innovative, relevant, and useful sessions in recent programs. They include: Using Missouri Court Records; African-American Music in Jim Crow Missouri; The Meaning of Ferguson, Missouri; Exploring St. Louis’s LGBT Past; and Indian Moving Eastward: Returning Native Americans to the Antebellum Center.

For better or worse, the Missouri Conference on History has continued for fifty-seven years to provide a useful service to the study of history to anyone connected with the profession whether they are professors, graduate students, or public historians in or outside of Missouri.