

List of Business and Economic History Research Projects and Abstracts,
2016-present

Dale E. Benson Summer Student-Faculty Research Program

Pacific Lutheran University

Faculty Coordinator, Michael Halvorson (History)

For additional information about these research projects and to contact the authors or faculty mentors, email halvormi@plu.edu.

Summer 2016

Matthew Macfarlane (History, Adviser Michael Halvorson)

“Innovation and Development in the Software Industry, 1977-1994: A New Chapter in American Business”

Abstract

This project illustrates the importance of technical innovation in the creation of PC software from 1977 to 1994, a time of sustained growth and change in the global software industry. In this era “before the Internet”, visionary start-ups such as MicroPro, Lotus 1-2-3, VisiCorp, and Microsoft created software for the first home personal computers. What becomes clear after an analysis of these companies and their primary products is that although they were competitors they were also working together to create an industry that was profitable, durable, and designed for financial success over the long term. Common caricatures of tinkerers in garages and big personalities locked in fierce competition are only partially accurate images of software pioneers. Instead, it was the drive to make better products for consumers that fueled the success of early software companies, especially those located in the supportive business communities of Massachusetts, Silicon Valley, and the Pacific Northwest. This project illustrates the importance of software companies being multi-dimensional in their long-term approach to product development, and it highlights the consumer-first model that many pioneers employed as they built early business software such as spreadsheets and word processors. This research was supported by a Benson Family Summer Research Fellowship.

Marc Vetter (Sociology and Global Studies, Adviser Peter Grosvenor)

“The Self-Determination Era: A Historical Overview of Federal Policy on American Indian Health Care from 1950-1976”

Abstract

For Native American activists, the 1970s are widely regarded as the ‘golden era’ of American Indian legislation. This decade saw the objective of Federal Indian policy shift from cultural assimilation towards self-determination for individual Native communities. This new episode in Federal-Indian relations decentralized the provision of Native American healthcare, allowing tribes to organize their own community health systems through contracts rather than relying on federal health structures. Nearly forty years later, self-determination has effectively reduced many healthcare access barriers for Native American communities. However, insufficient federal funding continues to be the most significant hurdle in achieving health parity between America's first peoples and the general U.S. population.

This project explores changing governmental attitudes towards Native American health care from the 1950s until the passage of the Indian Health Care Improvement Act (IHCA) and the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act (ISDEAA) in 1976. Furthermore, it documents the importance of several key political relationships which helped move federal policy away from assimilation and towards self-determination. Finally, this project includes a variety of interviews with physicians and administrators at the Puyallup Tribal Health Authority, an ambulatory care clinic opened and managed by the Puyallup Tribe of Indians under the ISDEAA. Using the perspectives gathered from these interviews, the project seeks to demonstrate how self-determination contracts, when fully funded by the federal government, can allow tribes to provide culturally competent and locally relevant care to members.

Summer 2017

Alex Lund (History, Adviser Rebekah Mergenthal)

“To salvage something of the Scobey line!': Grain Elevators and Community in Northeastern Montana, 1917-2017”

Abstract

The relationship between the Railroad and the communities it created has long been studied as an integral part of westward expansion and for its role in the global trade of agricultural goods. Likewise, when it comes to Rail abandonment, the economic factors of this relationship have been well studied to explain decline in Rail service. However, very little of this research addresses the social and economic impacts abandonment has on the communities that are left behind. Furthermore, the role of grain elevators and what happens to them after Rail abandonment is often overlooked, particularly those communities that maintain elevators without Rail service. This paper utilizes Scobey, Montana, as a case study to explore the social and economic relationships between an agricultural community and its grain elevator before and after Rail abandonment. Primarily through the use of local newspaper, the *Daniels County Leader*, and interviews with Scobey community members, this study addresses the business

relationship between grain elevators and the communities they serve, and the choices this farming community has been forced to make to remain viable. This paper gives voice to an under represented group in American agricultural history, the Rail abandoned community. By researching the economic and social impacts of Rail abandonment upon Scobey and the subsequent strategies independent farmers are forced to employ, economically feasible solutions can be developed that are respectful of local populations and addresses needs of the community and various agricultural businesses present.

Michael Diambri (History, Adviser Beth Kraig)

“It’s Not Just Business, It’s Not Just Booze:
Gay Bars and the Shaping of Seattle’s Queer Community in the 1970s”

Abstract

This research project examines the cultural history of Seattle’s gay and lesbian bars in the 1970s through the lens of business and leisure as factors shaping the development of the LGBT community. It also focuses on the role that gay bars and clubs had in shaping queer economic standing within the city, as well as the relationship bar patrons and owners had to sociopolitical activism. Three Seattle-area bars are highlighted as case studies—The Monastery, Shelly’s Leg, and The Silver Slipper. Collectively, they reveal the diversity and economic development of Seattle’s queer culture in the 1970s. The research suggests that activism and politics are fundamental pathways into understanding the experience of American LGBT communities. However, focusing solely on activism and politics often removes notions of personhood, sociality, and leisure from queer history, and these factors are important aspects of 20th century life. The story is enriched by considering the fundamental role that business and economics played in the construction of queer ideologies. Stories of business owners and their queer clientele give impressive views into the rich, burgeoning culture of queerness cultivated in Seattle and beyond in the 1970s.

Teresa Hackler (Economics, Adviser Karen Travis)

“Portland’s Forgotten History: An Analysis of Racism’s Impact on Black Health Outcomes from 1940-1960”

Abstract

Portland is often championed as a socially progressive “utopia” by mainstream media and widely circulated history textbooks alike. However, this research seeks to question the authenticity behind this stereotype of Multnomah County. This paper explores correlation between historical racism and present-day overrepresentation in negative health indicators for the black population of Multnomah County, Oregon. It attempts to fill gaps present in previous literature which fail to examine historical health outcomes of black residents. This research

analyzes death records gathered from the years 1940, 1950, and 1960; it uses statistics and economic theories to calculate whether black and white residents were dying of the same causes in equal numbers. Data personally gathered is examined in combination with the historical context of this same period. This work is part of a growing body of research that attempts to preserve the black history of Portland and seeks to explain from where current health and economic discrepancies stem.