

## TEACHING HISTORY AT TWENTY-FIVE YEARS

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In history twenty-five years is a mere blink in time. In the journal world, twenty-five years can be an eternity. Every year fledgling journals and magazines rise and fall. Some make it to a second year, a few stay for a third, but many of them fade away quickly. Starting a new journal is scary--some might call it crazy, given the high odds favoring failure. All sorts of questions come to mind: Is there a place for us in the journal world? Can we offer anything new and different from our competition? Will there be enough good materials to fill our pages? Will readers find us? Will there be enough subscribers to generate enough money to pay the costs of copying, editing, printing, and mailing? Those of us who founded *Teaching History* in the mid 1970s asked all of these questions and more. Even knowing the challenges we faced, we decided to give our journal a go--and now in 2000 we are still at it, starting our twenty-fifth year.

*Teaching History* started at a caucus of historians at the Missouri Valley History Conference in Omaha in the spring of 1974. The intention was "to sound out grassroots sentiment ... on the possibility of publishing a newsletter-journal devoted to the teaching of history." Loren Pennington of Emporia State University, Philip Rulon of Northern Arizona University, and I--the founding triumvirate--stayed with the project through that year, measuring the work that a new journal would demand, and then at another meeting in Omaha in 1975 we decided to take the next steps.

In 1975-1976 we organized a management team and invited others to join us on a board of editors. One-by-one we built the membership of the editorial board until we had a total of eleven of us engaged in getting out the word and then getting out the journal. Pennington won agreement from Emporia State to house the journal and to provide publication, subscription, and mailing services; he also volunteered to become the publication director. Northern Arizona University and College of the Ozarks provided additional financial backing, which proved critical in the first couple of years when we distributed the journal without any subscription charges.

We walked a tight line in the first two or three years. But people found us--teaching historians began to send in manuscripts that I circulated among editorial readers. (Even now every manuscript gets at least four reviews.) Ron Butchart, then of SUNY at Cortland, began work as book review editor, contacting publishers and lining up reviewers. Slowly but steadily over several months, the first issue of *Teaching History* took shape, appearing in the spring of 1976 with a short introduction, an op-ed piece on the growing "crisis in the classroom," four essays, nine book reviews, and assorted notes.

We quickly began to get attention from professional organizations. The American Historical Association provided space in the *AHA Newsletter* for us to solicit

authors, reviewers, and subscribers. The Georgia Association of Historians praised *Teaching History* for opening "fresh sources for professional historians who seek to improve their 50-minute hours," and the Kentucky Association of Teachers of History told its members that "*Teaching History* should be of special interest because it offers something for teachers of history at all educational levels." We appreciated all of those kind words of encouragement and committed ourselves to keep spreading the news about good ideas for the classroom.

Over twenty-five years many things have changed for *Teaching History*, but we have stayed true to the original commitment "to tap the minds and imaginations of history educators" and to share ideas that have "proven successful in the classroom." Sometimes we have shifted that last idea around to discuss teaching methods that failed. But we always have offered good fare to our readers.

While our mission stayed constant, we have seen changes in personnel at *Teaching History*. We started our first with eleven men and women--some have moved on, some have retired, and a hardy few (five in all) have stayed with us since the beginning. Today we have twenty-one historians from secondary schools, colleges, universities, and other institutions working in management and on editorial and advisory boards. Many others serve on occasion as outside readers when we need an expert opinion. *Teaching History* could not survive, and certainly could not prosper, without them and the energy that they bring to the work of *Teaching History*.

As I look back on the past quarter century, I take great personal and professional pride in what *Teaching History* has been able to accomplish. We do make a difference for many teachers. Whenever a new issue appears, letters and e-mail notes begin to arrive at my desk with words such as "great issue [with] lots of usable information." At regional meetings and national conferences people ask for our advice or they stop us "just to talk about teaching." That is why we started *Teaching History* in the mid 1970s: We wanted "to talk about teaching."

No twenty-fifth anniversary message would be complete without a long list of thank yous. I almost hesitate to begin this kind of list for fear of missing someone. But a few people stand out for the breadth and depth of their contributions over many years.

Let me start with the four who have been with me in this work of *Teaching History* since the beginning--Philip Rulon of Northern Arizona (a founder and editorial board member); Ronald Butchart, now of the University of Georgia (our first book review editor and now editorial board member); Bullitt Lowry of the University of North Texas (long-time service on the editorial board with a short stint as book review editor); and Marsha Frey of Kansas State University (editorial board). They have watched us grow, and on many occasions they have provided me with wise counsel. I turned to them often, and they never failed me.

Perhaps the most demanding job with *Teaching History*, as I expect it is with most journals, is that of publication manager. *Teaching History* can count two of the

best in its lifetime: Loren Pennington (also a founder, now retired from teaching) and Samuel Dicks, both of Emporia State University. They tend to the business of *Teaching History*: subscriptions, records, preparing manuscripts for publication, reading and editing galley pages, printing and mailing the journal, and much more--they have done whatever needed to be done, and they have always provided me with the steadfast support and good advice that an editor needs. In the last two years, Sam took on added duties as overseer of the *Teaching History* website, getting it started and updating its links (<http://www.emporia.edu/socsci/journal/main.htm>). At their side have been many others at ESU--Liberal Arts deans from John Peterson, at the beginning, to Lendley Black, the current dean, who arranged financial support, Social Sciences secretary Jacqueline Fehr who resets the edited copy for proofing and publication, Emporia State Press staff, and others who never get listed in the credits, but help to keep us working in good order.

Standing along side me in the gathering and preparation of materials for *Teaching History* is my book review editor. Ronald Butchart charted the course for our first six years before handing off to William Muggleston, now of Floyd College in Georgia. Ron and Bill--and Bullitt Lowry for one year--have always kept the book review section under steady control. I never worried about having enough good reviews for an issue. But over these many years these three have done much more for the journal, for example giving me insightful reviews of manuscripts when I asked them to take on another task and being wonderful sources of advice and great sounding boards when we considered new ideas for the journal. On a personal note: In my travels I have often enjoyed the hospitality that Ron, Bill, and Bullitt and their spouses shared with me in their homes. They have helped make my work with *Teaching History* much easier and more memorable.

To the many other men and women who have served *Teaching History* on the Board of Editors and the Advisory Board, we say "thank you" for your good service to *Teaching History* and to the history profession. We express gratitude too, to the authors and reviewers who have contributed their work to *Teaching History*. All of our work would matter little if we did not have good materials for our readers. To our readers, subscribers, and supporters, we offer thanks for helping us grow to become a major player in history education.

We have come a long way in twenty-five years, but there always is more work to do. Over the next several years surely *Teaching History* will continue to evolve, but we pledge to stay faithful to our mission to talk about teaching and to provide good ideas for teachers to bring into their classrooms.