

History Department Newsletter

STUDENT EDITOR: **Sophia Martin '20** | FACULTY EDITOR: **Jan Bender Shetler**



Jessica Meyers (*right*) during one of the many interviews that she conducted during her three years in Beijing.

History Students Participate in Mennonite Conferences

BY **Jace Longenecker '20**

During the 2018 spring semester, two groups of Goshen College history students and faculty attended Mennonite history conferences held at Bethel College in North Newton, Kansas and Eastern Mennonite University (EMU) in Harrisonburg, Virginia. In addition, two seniors presented their thesis work at the Young Historians Symposium at Elizabethtown College in early June. The conferences provoked conversation about two important issues: Mennonite involvement in the Holocaust, and the past and future of Mennonite higher education.

Katie Yoder and Miguel Rodriguez, junior history majors, accompanied Dr. Jan Bender Shetler, professor of history to North Newton for the conference entitled “Mennonites and the Holocaust.” This was the first conference in North America ever to address the history of Mennonite complicity and participation in the violence of Nazi Germany in the 20th century.

The conference, although formatted academically, was a forum for

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From Goshen to Beijing, Stories of Interest Lead Jessica Meyers '03 all over the Globe

BY **Jenae Longenecker '19**

Jessica Meyers is a storyteller. Whether writing news pieces for the Goshen College Record, crafting her senior history thesis about Vietnamese American ethnic identity, or more recently writing articles for Politico and the Boston Globe, she dives into research, producing narratives which tell the world stories that have not been described before.

Meyers’s career began at Goshen and took her to Dallas, Berkeley, and even to Beijing. In fact, writing about China has become her niche area as a journalist.

During her three years in Beijing, Meyers strived not simply to echo existing narratives and stereotypes about China that exist in Western news, but to nuance the conversation by highlighting aspects of Chinese culture that Americans rarely

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get to encounter. Many Americans, for example, understand China to be a place where strict limitations inhibit the freedom and rights of Chinese people. Painting a more detailed and accurate picture, Meyers published a piece, “A Victim of its Own Industrial Success, China’s Hanger Capital is

Now Just Hanging On,” highlighting the parts of the Chinese economy that are more capitalistic and affluent.

As she thinks about the students in Goshen College history classrooms now, Meyers hopes that those students learn to “embrace the things that they’re scared of.” In her experience, the opportunities which create fear



Meyers (right) reporting in Beijing. During her time in Beijing, Meyers spoke to many different people and reported in both formal and informal settings.

Internships

Katie Yoder, Elkhart County Parks Department - research at the Bonneyville Mill Historical Site interviewing visitors to find out why they came and what their experience is at the park.

Kyle Stocksdales, Mennonite Church USA Archives — processing new collections of papers from individuals to learn about accessibility methods in the field of information preservation.

Morgan Yordy, Victim’s Assistance of Elkhart County in the Superior Court — advocating for victims in the justice system.

Jenae Longenecker, Indiana Legal Services — processing requests for legal aid in the areas of divorce, child custody, bankruptcy and a variety of other areas.

Rudi Mucaj, served as a research assistant to a professor in Apollonia, Albania on a project about popular interpretations of the city’s ancient history.

Nick Yoder, Crooked Creek Camp in Iowa — writing a history of the land that the camp is on going back to the earliest native peoples.

Senior Theses

Hannah Hostetter, “Ignoring a Genocide to Uphold United States Neutrality in World War I: Ambassador Henry Morgenthau and United States Policy in the Armenian Genocide, 1913-1916”

Jenae Longenecker, “Objection Overruled? Reformulating the Mennonite Witness Regarding Law”

Brodie Nofziger, “Engaging to Disengage: The Shenandoah Valley Mennonite Experience in the American Civil War”

Kyle A. Stocksdales, “Anabaptists in the Military: Stories of Conscripted Men from Indiana-Michigan”

Levi Yoder, “Faith Against Sexuality, Why Not Both? The History of the Brethren Mennonite Council for Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender Interests 1976-2014”

Nick Yoder, “Remembering Pain and Progress: Minority Ministries Council Reunion Oral Histories, 2017”

Morgan Yordy, “Power Within: Female Autonomy Examined through Oral Histories of the James Stuart Archive of Oral Recorded Evidence of the Zulu People, 1888-1920”

and anticipation are often the most rewarding and the most enlightening.

Meyers also testifies that students should not hesitate to dive into their research, no matter how little expertise they start out with. Research is how you learn, she encourages. Meyers offers a word of sympathy to those who feel nervous about their role in the academic world, indicating that she experiences “imposter syndrome” even in her work as an international journalist, where the pressure to get all the details down right is part of her daily motivation. “When do you not go to sleep with that knot in your stomach that maybe you got something wrong?” she muses. After all, what might be one line of a story to Meyers could be the narrative of someone else’s life. Meyers always double-checks her facts with the goal of accurately conveying the intended remarks of those she interviews.

Meyers recalls a story she once wrote about an African-American community facing tensions with police. It was challenging, she says, to navigate this often-told story in a new community. In some ways, Meyers works as a professional outsider, learning to tell others’ stories. “Sometimes you can’t just parachute in and write,” she advises. “You need

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conversation about the emotionally-charged topics that come with reconciling these pieces of Mennonite history.

German Mennonite Joachim Wieler shared the story of his struggle to reconcile the images of his father's faith with the reality of his military service in the Wehrmacht, the army of the Third Reich. Wieler discovered the reality of his father's support for the Fuhrer and celebration of the Nazi cause through a box of letters that outlined these positions.

Another speaker, Doris Bergen, described Mennonites as "neighbors, killers, enablers, and witnesses" in the Holocaust.

Yoder reflected on her experience at the event, saying, "Mennonites, of whatever ethnic or religious variety, are struggling to come to terms with what this means for understanding their past and envisioning their future."

Shetler noted the way in which this conference complemented classroom learning for the students involved. "The Bethel conference was a sobering combination of academic learning and personal memory. It showed the important connections between these two genres that are not always evident in the classroom. This is when the relevance of history in coming to terms with things that many would like to forget becomes so obvious."

The second conference, held at EMU, was focused on a lighter topic. The conference was aimed at a discussion of the shared histories of the five Mennonite higher learning institutions of the United States: Goshen, Eastern Mennonite, Bethel, Hesston, and Bluffton. The weekend event featured historians like GC board member Susan Fisher Miller, author of "Culture for Service," the history of Goshen College, as well as the authors of centennial histories of the other schools.



History Students who attended conferences.
(From left): Jenae Longenecker, Elijah Lora and Katie Yoder

From Goshen College, history professors, John Roth and Philipp Gollner, were in attendance, along with senior history major Jenae Longenecker and sophomore Elijah Lora, as well as former GC president, Vic Stoltzfus.

The conference's aim was to draw a "usable past" from the history of Mennonite colleges. The five colleges were originally founded to offer education to young Mennonites while protecting them from the corrupting influences of the broader world. More than a century later, however, Goshen College and its sister schools are not populated primarily by Mennonite students but by learners from a diverse range of religious backgrounds. Goshen and the other schools have new goals, like helping students learn to be global citizens.

"It was fascinating to hear scholars wrestle with the challenge of serving diverse student bodies while retaining the Mennonite identities these schools were founded on," said Longenecker. "I think we see that very conversation playing out at Goshen today."

Three sessions took place on Saturday, March 24. In the first, historians presented on the purposes and distinctives of each of the Mennonite colleges. The second session was devoted to the challenges the Mennonite colleges have faced, including financial and enrollment-related challenges as well as competition between the schools. The final session was an opportunity for brainstorming about the future of Mennonite higher education, informed by present enrollment statistics.

Longenecker commented on the impressive role of faculty throughout the history of Mennonite colleges: "The colleges have survived periods financial instability by taking mandatory donations out of faculty salaries or even, in one case, paying them in chickens."

Dr. Phillip Gollner, a history professor in his second year at Goshen, said that: "For students as well as for me, as a new member of the Goshen College family, it was refreshing to learn how peculiar the visions of 'Mennonite' higher education really are in our current context. How diverse its history has been. And I think we all left challenged by what futures may lie ahead."

This conference, initiated and hosted by EMU in celebration of its centennial this year, comes at a time when Mennonite colleges serve historically low numbers of Mennonite students. Beginning last summer, the Mennonite colleges started to collaborate in their recruitment efforts at the bi-annual Mennonite Convention.

Dr. John Roth also found the conversation stimulating, reflecting that "Mennonite colleges and universities, like all institutions of higher learning, are facing lots of challenges right now. The gathering in Harrisonburg was a reminder that thoughtful conversations about the future of the liberal arts in a Christian context are more important now than ever. It was wonderful to engage with colleagues from other schools, and especially gratifying that our students could also participate vigorously in the conversation." 🌿


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to try to be part of the community.” Guided by her desire to tell the story carefully and accurately, Meyers worked to gain the trust of people on both sides of the conversation.

Meyers recently moved back to the Washington, D.C. area with her husband, a Bloomberg journalist. She anticipates continuing to write about the role of China on the world stage. Having lived and worked in both Washington and Beijing, Meyers is well-positioned to analyze US-China relations. 

Roth Receives Ecumenism Award



John Roth, Professor of History at Goshen College, received the Washington Theological Consortium Ecumenism Annual at a service at the Virginia Theological Seminary on Tuesday, February 13, 2018. Roth, who also serves as the Mennonite Historical Library Director, *Mennonite Quarterly Review* Editor and as the director of the Institute for the Study of Global Anabaptism, received the award alongside his colleague, Dr. Timothy Wengert, professor emeritus at United Lutheran Seminary in Philadelphia. The two were recognized for their work that led to the 2010 service of reconciliation between the Lutheran World Federation and the Mennonite World Conference. 

Recent History Alumni Activities

Melissa MacGregor '09 Graduated this spring with a Master of Science in Business Analytics from the University of Notre Dame. She is currently a NASA Datanaut — where she collaborates with the Chief Information Office on NASA's open data initiative. Prior to grad school, Melissa was senior analyst at Yahoo in California. Come summer, she'll be back in the Golden State at Mozilla's XR Studio, focusing on the implications of machine learning and virtual reality research. Melissa is a member of First Mennonite Church of San Francisco.

Jackson Beck '13 is completing a dual degree program at the University of Georgia which combines a law degree and a master's in historic preservation. This May he graduated from the law school and will be receiving his juris doctorate. He is currently working on completing his thesis for the master's program.

David Rumsey '10 has been working in the Food and Nutrition department at the University of Michigan hospital, and taking classes part-time. His plan in Harrisburg is to take classes full time, aiming to go back to school for Physical Therapy.

Rachel Jantzi '14 is beginning her third season working as a Wilderness Ranger at Mount Rainier National Park in Washington state.

Laura Rheinheimer '05 graduated from the University of Denver in December of 2015 with a law degree and a Master in Social Work. She moved to Guatemala soon after graduation to be with her husband, who is Guatemalan and runs Hogar de Niños Fátima, a children's home, in Guatemala City. She now works part time at the children's home and part time as a virtual employee for an immigration law firm in Denver, Colorado.

Send your updates to jans@goshen.edu

Scholarship Recipients



The 2017-2018 Willard and Verna Smith U.S. History Scholarship has been awarded to **Rudi Mucaj**, Albania.



Jace Longenecker, South Bend, Indiana, is the recipient of the Oswin and David Gerber Scholarship in Mennonite Studies for 2017-2018.

The generosity of the Smith and Gerber families has been very helpful to many Goshen College students. The History Department welcomes donations to the Smith and Gerber scholarship endowments. To donate, contact finaid@goshen.edu.

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