

# HApoints

Fall 2006

HISTORY ASSOCIATES INCORPORATED

## A Shot of History

By Adrian Kinnane

*Rich men, trust not in wealth,  
Gold cannot buy you health;  
Physic himself must fade,  
All things to end are made;  
The plague full swift goes by:  
I am sick, I must die.  
Lord have mercy on us!*

Thomas Nashe (1567-1601)  
*Summer's Last Will and Testament*, 1600

Science, combined with enlightened public health practices, has freed most of us from diseases like measles, diphtheria, and polio. Still, our best minds and methods have not yet mastered some of the simplest and deadliest invasive viruses. While that struggle continues, a shot of history also can help reduce our vulnerability to pandemic disease.

Here are four history lessons. First, plagues are not just ancient but also modern threats. Viral mutation especially has, so far, largely outmaneuvered us. Second, people in all eras have reacted to plagues in similar ways. Third, the human species survives, but at a very high price. Lastly, survivors act like survivors, more relieved by their own, present good fortune than they are anxious for the future, especially the future of strangers.

When Thomas Nashe penned *Summer's Last Will and Testament*, the Black Death still shadowed Europe's memory. Between 1347 and 1351, bubonic plague had wiped out fully one-third of Europe's entire population. Over the next century, England alone endured thirty-one major epidemics. Additional outbreaks continued well into the seventeenth century. Shakespeare's plays were peppered with references to plague, including the dying Mercurio's famous



Demonstration at the Red Cross Emergency Ambulance Station in Washington, D.C., during the influenza pandemic of 1918. (Photograph courtesy of the Library of Congress)

line in *Romeo and Juliet*, "A plague o' both your houses."

Waves of pandemic invaders knocked medieval society to its knees. Living in close quarters, religious communities were especially hard hit, losing as many as 60 percent of their members.<sup>1</sup> Many blamed lepers, Jews, or witches for bringing down God's wrath. The damage was long-lasting. It took England's population until 1600—two and a half centuries—just to return to pre-Black Death levels.

Plague-stricken people search for explanations on many levels. When obvious answers elude them they look for scapegoats or enemies, or contemplate the mysteries of divine will. When a plague struck the city of Athens in 430 BCE during its long war with Sparta, older citizens recalled an oracle's prediction that during a future war "a death will come at the same time."<sup>2</sup> That death was now presumed to be the plague. Some concluded that their leader, Pericles, was at fault for having led them into the war. Still others believed Spartan allies had poisoned the water supply.

In 1918 a deadly flu swept through tens of thousands of close-quartered troops training in U.S. camps for combat in France. Scientists could not identify the

pathogen, so doctors could not effectively treat it. Indeed, many doctors and nurses died trying. Military leaders, anxious to move fresh troops to the European front, refused to quarantine possibly affected soldiers—a basic public health intervention—and chose instead to accept the flu's casualties while marching on. That decision further kindled a spreading wildfire. One example: by the time a train carrying 3,108 seemingly healthy men from Camp Grant in Illinois arrived in Georgia, 2,000 had become infected. Ten percent of them soon died.<sup>3</sup>

Another example: in Philadelphia, as in Athens two thousand years earlier, the sheer numbers of the sick and dying caused a breakdown in basic social institutions. There were no hospital beds, no provision for orphaned children, no way to dispose of the thousands of bodies that simply rotted where they lay. Public health officials, often appointed through political connections, not competence, were benumbed. In the fall of 1918 the daily death toll from influenza in Philadelphia approached 1,000 victims, exceeding the average weekly death toll from all other causes.<sup>4</sup>

Continued on page 2



# Digitization: Solution or Problem?

By Gabriele Carey

In recent years, digitization has taken on the role held by adhesive tape in the 1930s—it is perceived by many as the solution to records preservation. Just as with adhesive tape, however, greater familiarity with digitization has led us to realize that it creates new problems while solving old ones. For a number of years, History Associates has been helping its clients think through the process of digitization to ensure that records will be preserved successfully. Relevant factors include the longevity of digital media, the cost of digitizing records, and managing rights and access to digital images.

The preservation of digital records is a serious concern. Given the rapid technological transitions in electronic hardware and software, it is not safe to assume that records digitized today will be accessible five or ten years from now without data loss. Even a vigilant program of data migration does not currently solve this problem, since any change from the technology used to create the digital record will likely result in some change to the data. There are also concerns about protecting the digital data on various media. If the goal is to preserve a permanent record and retain all its original information, digitization is not yet an appropriate choice.

A second issue associated with digitization projects is their expense. The process of digitization involves numerous tasks, including selecting appropriate records for scanning, acquiring necessary hardware and software, determining standards for scanning and metadata (information that must be captured about each digital image), and conducting the scanning and metadata entry. Many organizations believe that the above tasks alone account for all the costs associated with digitization. But maintaining digitized documents will cost at least as much as digitization itself. Carefully selecting which documents to digitize will help minimize the digitization



HAI Archivist Michele Tourney scans images and captures information about them directly into a database.

project costs while ensuring that the appropriate documents are made easily accessible to staff and approved researchers.

A third issue is that of controlling access to and use of digitized images and how those images will be used. If an organization's digital content is large and has monetary value (e.g., images used in an advertising campaign or newsworthy images suitable for publication), a Digital Asset Management (DAM) system might

be helpful. Such systems enable organizations to manage their image content by effectively organizing such content, controlling who will have access, keeping track of different versions of the same document, and protecting assets from unauthorized use. Since many DAM systems are available, organizations should consider carefully which one meets their needs.

Beyond the issues arising from digitizing hard copy records are pressing questions

pertaining to the archival presentation of all forms of digital records. Among the initiatives answering these questions is the pioneering Electronic Records Archive, which the National Archives and Records Administration has commissioned a team led by Lockheed Martin to design and implement. HAI is proud to be a part of this team with its critical mission to preserve and make available the digital assets of our national experience—but that is another story.

## A Shot of History

*Continued from page 1*

Over the next two years the virus, which we now know was a mutant avian flu virus that had acquired the capacity for human-to-human transmission, leaped from the United States to Europe, and then from port to port around the globe, claiming at least 50 million victims. A comparable loss in today's world population would total 143 million.

People look for meaning in the face of apparently random death. "As for the gods," noted Thucydides about the Athenians, "it seemed to be the same thing

whether one worshiped them or not, when one saw the good and the bad dying indiscriminately."<sup>5</sup> We also look for meaning while pursuing solutions in our laboratories. But history prods us to do more, to ask what we are doing to prepare for the next, inevitable plague. After several recent scares (AIDS, anthrax, SARS, mad cow disease, bioterrorism, and a new avian flu), more people than ever are looking to history to inform and strengthen our response.

<sup>1</sup> William Chester Jordan, *Europe in the High Middle Ages* (New York: Viking, 2001), 297.

<sup>2</sup> Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, translated by Rex Warner (New York: Penguin Books, 1972), 156.

<sup>3</sup> John M. Barry, *The Great Flu Influenza: The Epic Story of the Deadliest Plague in History* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005), 216-17.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 220.

<sup>5</sup> Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, 155.



# History Takes to the Web

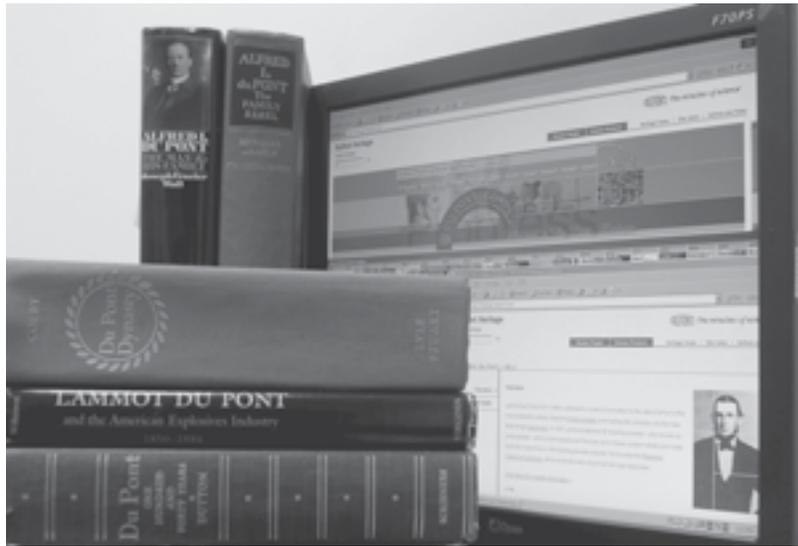
By Kenneth Durr

“Historians begin by looking backward,” wrote Friedrich Nietzsche, who concluded wryly that “they often end by thinking backward.” More than fifteen years after the advent of the Web, some historians still fear entrapment in its strange-seeming threads, while others—to be sure—are using the Internet in creative ways to enrich historical research and teaching.

Corporate America, however, has unambiguously and eagerly embraced the new technology. Today, nearly every corporate website features a history component. Some of these—having already undergone two or three generations of improvement—are more complex, yet far more compelling than the academic endeavors.

The best “web exhibits” are built with at least one eye on entertainment, with a wide array of visuals to complement featured text. Most first-class corporate websites—those by General Electric, Weyerhaeuser, and Chevron to name a few—feature a timeline with “flash” animated graphics providing an interactive chronological gateway to the content. But web histories are more than digital picture books that include a finite set of material. Dynamic web pages draw from huge databases: constantly changing images keep the pages fresh, and the avid user can wander via subject or keyword search. And images are just a start. As user bandwidth expands, companies like General Motors are peppering their sites with historical audio and video clips that are just a click away.

And in the end, it all comes down to the “click.” The ability to follow a new investigative path instantaneously and effortlessly distinguishes web



DuPont history—the traditional and the technological. The casual and more tech-savvy researcher may choose to browse DuPont’s heritage website. More detail is still available, all be it with greater effort, in the tomes of old.

exhibits from books, museum exhibits, and films. These serve up stories in set pieces that discourage serendipitous investigation and allow the audience to interact with the story.

True, corporations are unlikely to invest in historical sites out of altruism or didactic inclination. Concrete rewards include cutting administrative costs by providing press kits and fielding queries from the public once handled by staff. Less tangible rewards

are equally valuable. It is no accident that many of the most advanced historical websites belong to companies such as Coca-Cola and Budweiser that are heavily invested in their brand.

When another household name, DuPont, approached its 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2002, it asked HAI for a historical website to serve as a press resource, assist in public relations, and strengthen its many brands.

Historians produced scores of “on-line encyclopedia” entries and scanned hundreds of

images and documents. All are accessible at [www.heritage.dupont.com](http://www.heritage.dupont.com), where the user is greeted by a gateway and, of course, a flash animated timeline. HAI historians, aware that it is in their clients’ interest to be thinking ahead even as they look backward, are now as comfortable with external browsers and metatags as they are with page proofs and footnotes—and scanning the technological horizon for even newer digital tools.

## New History of the Home Front

HAI has performed extensive research over the years into many aspects of World War II, from mobilization through D-Day and the final Allied victories in Europe and the Far East. Now HAI historian Will Armstrong has written *Baltimore in World War II*, a photographic history of the Baltimore, Maryland, metropolitan area from 1939-1945. Published by Arcadia, Armstrong’s history uses



Sergeant Franklin Williams, home on leave from army duty, with his best girl Ellen Hardin, splitting a soda. They met at Douglas High School, Baltimore, Maryland, May 1942.

period photographs from a variety of archival sources to present rare

glimpses of wartime life in the city and its environs.



## HAI Around the World

### **Litigation Research Division:**

continuing research in federal, state, and local records and document analysis for law firms and corporations in Alabama, California, Colorado, Illinois, Kansas, Missouri, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Washington.

### **National D-Day Museum:**

developing content and collecting images for the overall design of the museum as well as writing the scripts and collecting images for smaller exhibits such as the C-47 Aircraft exhibit.

### **Bethel Woods Visitors Center:**

developing content, writing the script, and collecting imagery for Woodstock exhibit.

### **Second Story Liberty Memorial Museum:**

wrote narration for animated maps of various World War I battlefields for inclusion in the museum.

### **Independence National Historical Park, Pennsylvania:**

completed arrangement and description of the park's architectural records.

### **Petersburg National Battlefield, Virginia:**

completed arrangement and description of four collections of park records.

### **Gettysburg National Battlefield Museum Foundation:**

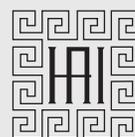
collecting images and conducting quality control for the National Park Service Visitor's Center at Gettysburg National Military Park.

### **Civil War Preservation Trust:**

creating interpretive plan for First Day at Chancellorsville Battlefield.

### **Fairfax Memorial Park:**

wrote an illustrated fifty-year anniversary history book entitled *Families First*.



## **History Associates Incorporated**

History Associates Incorporated is one of the oldest and largest historical services firms in the United States. Now in its twenty-fifth year, HAI provides:

### **Historical research and writing**

- historical studies and illustrated commemoratives
- oral histories
- museum services
- web-based histories and exhibits

### **Archival and records management services**

- databases and digital archives exhibits
- inventories and disposition schedules
- appraisal, selection, and processing for archival programs
- archival storage

### **Historical research for litigation**

- document collection
- site and subject studies
- expert testimony

### **International historical and archival services**

- preservation and utilization of historical assets worldwide
- multimedia documentary projects
- expertise in multilingual historical research

HAI serves business and industry, government agencies, the professions, and nonprofit associations.

Copyright © 2006 • HAI

History Associates Incorporated  
300 North Stonestreet Avenue  
Rockville, Maryland 20850  
Phone: (301) 279-9697 Website: www.historyassociates.com  
Fax: (301) 279-9224 E-Mail: hai@historyassociates.com

