



# HAIpoints

WINTER 2011

HISTORY ASSOCIATES INCORPORATED

## HISTORY ASSOCIATES: CELEBRATING 30 YEARS IN HISTORY

# 30

*years in history*  
1981-2011

*To mark our anniversary we offer this brief history to share our story and celebrate a useful past.*

**By BRIAN W. MARTIN**

In April 1979, a crisis became an opportunity. While responding to the Three Mile Island nuclear accident, the Department of Energy (DOE) decided to document its role to plan for future emergencies. DOE tasked its historian, Richard Hewlett, to write a history. With limited time and staff, Hewlett turned to two history professors for help. Philip Cantelon was unemployed at the time and facing a dismal academic job market, and Robert Williams was teaching at Washington University in St. Louis. As their deadline loomed, Cantelon and Williams enlisted Rodney Carlisle, a visiting scholar at DOE, to type their manuscript on an early word processor.

While addressing this contemporary event and demonstrating the value of historical studies, the founders saw other opportunities to link professional historians with clients seeking to preserve, interpret, and use the past. In January 1981, this vision became History Associates Incorporated.



*President Jimmy Carter leaving Three Mile Island, 04/01/1979.*

(Courtesy National Archives and Records Administration)

### THE BUSINESS OF "DOING HISTORY"

Just what does a history company do? From the start, a commitment to identifying and filling client needs took History Associates beyond simply writing books. The radioactive legacy of nuclear testing prompted DOE to hire the firm to research, organize, and declassify nuclear fallout records. The relationship with DOE soon expanded to include oral histories, records management, and even policy studies—driving growth that landed History Associates on *Inc.* magazine's list of fastest growing companies for 1986.

Attorneys requiring historical evidence in lawsuits ranging from toxic torts to water rights disputes hired History Associates for its expertise in federal records. The Bank of New York and MCI engaged the company for history books, and History Associates' reputation for writing histories grew. After finding Texas Instruments' records in disarray, Cantelon sold management on a corporate archive.

Despite this variety of services, the loss of two large DOE contracts in 1992 threatened the company's future and spurred efforts to expand its clientele. From its base outside Washington, DC, History Associates had already extended its reach to Los Angeles. There, its Western Area Office grew out of a county archives survey. Large-scale archives projects with the National Library of Medicine and

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## INTERPRETATION, IMAGINATION, AND THE ART OF HISTORICAL WRITING

**By KENNETH D. DURR**

We are a society that distrusts historical writing. Preoccupation with the past is a weakness—rugged individualists look to the future. "Revisionism" invites contempt. The past is behind us and should stay put: how can there be a "new" interpretation? But we delight in a good story nonetheless. Whether in conversation or on the analyst's couch, when asked for an explanation, we usually proffer a story

with a point. As anniversaries approach, the most forward-looking corporations consider backward-looking histories.

This ambivalence stems from misunderstanding. History is not an inanimate inheritance that transcends time—it is a human creation that changes as we do. Unfortunately, histories intended for the general reader are often written by well-intentioned amateurs who miss this point.

For example, there are the venerable

chroniclers, admirably devoted to "capturing the history" which they assume to mean nailing down every obtainable fact and anecdote (shorn of context and in scrupulous order) as if everything was equally important. A telltale sign of this "history by the yard" approach is the concern that "there may not be enough history for a book."

Equally problematic is what might be

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**ON THE ROAD** History Associates was honored to have played a role in content and image research for the new National Museum of American Jewish History (NMAJH) in downtown Philadelphia. In January, we hosted a private tour of the museum for local clients and colleagues. In February, we were pleased to be a sponsor of the Council of American Jewish Museums annual conference, also held at the NMAJH. Our own James Lide participated in a Vendor Forum, where he answered questions about developing content for museum exhibits.

**JOIN US AT UPCOMING EVENTS** Members of our staff will be attending a number of upcoming conferences. If you'll be attending also, we would welcome the chance to meet you in person! Please e-mail Anne at [astrong@historyassociates.com](mailto:astrong@historyassociates.com) and let us know when you would be available to meet.

- **Steve Swizdak** will be presenting a Technical Roundtable entitled “Digging Deeper: Uncovering the Hidden Potential of Historical State and Local Records” at the American Bar Association’s 40th Annual Conference on Environmental Law, March 17-19 in Salt Lake City, UT.
- **Brian Martin** will be co-facilitating a workshop on “Entrepreneurship and the Practice of History” at the National Council on Public History annual meeting, April 6-9 in Pensacola, FL.
- **James Lide** will be attending the American Association of Museums Annual Meeting and MuseumExpo,™ May 22- 25 in Houston, TX.
- **Ken Durr** will be at our exhibit booth at the International Association of Business Communicators 2011 World Conference, June 12-15 in San Diego, CA.
- **Anita Weber** and **Gabriele Carey** will be at our exhibit booth at the Society of American Archivists 2011 Annual Meeting, August 22-27 in Chicago, IL.

## CELEBRATING 30 YEARS IN HISTORY

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IBM helped the company diversify. But it was historical research for attorneys, driven largely by retroactive liability provisions of the Superfund law, that proved to be the most surprising engine of growth.

By the end of the decade, legal and public relations concerns arising from disputes over World War II-era holocaust assets and allegations of the Nazis’ use of forced labor opened an international market for the company’s services.

### THE PAST GOES DIGITAL

At the turn of the century, the digital revolution was changing everything, including the business of history and archives. History Associates saw new prospects for presenting the past and challenges for its capture and preservation. In a pioneering twist, DuPont hired History Associates to provide content for a heritage website celebrating its 200th anniversary and then contracted for a separate book. History Associates’ expertise in selecting and synthesizing historical content led to collaboration with designers of multimedia exhibits for

institutions like the International Spy Museum and GlaxoSmithKline.

The company’s historians mastered digital research tools and document management systems to help attorneys sift through the expanding universe of electronic records. Partnering with IT professionals, History Associates helped clients address the challenges of scheduling electronic records, digitizing and describing archival collections for access via the Web, and preserving authentic digital records. In 2010, History Associates worked with the Civil War Trust to launch the first-ever “Battle App” that offered visitors to Gettysburg National Military Park a GPS-enabled, multi-

media, interpretive experience of Devil’s Den and Little Round Top.

### THE HISTORY CONTINUES

History Associates’ talented professionals adapted to changes in the market for and practice of history, fueling the company’s success. That same flexibility, coupled with the founders’ commitment to pass leadership and ownership to a new generation of professionals, guided a successful transition throughout the 2000s. Today History Associates continues to rely on what Hewlett called “the steady supply of intellectual curiosity, fresh ideas, and willingness to take up the challenge to create a new kind of historical enterprise” that has been its hallmark from the beginning.

*Brian Martin is President and COO of History Associates. He began his career as a historian with the company in 1984.*



*History Associates’ senior management team, pictured with the founders, remains focused on helping clients discover, preserve, and present the past.*

### HAIPOINTS GOES DIGITAL

If you would prefer to have *HAIpoints* delivered to your e-mail rather than your inbox, let us know! Just go to [www.historyassociates.com/haipointsnewsletter](http://www.historyassociates.com/haipointsnewsletter) and sign up today!



## STAFF HIGHLIGHTS: SARAH HAUG

Archivist Sarah Haug processes and describes archival collections at the Smithsonian Archives of American Art. One of the collections Sarah worked on, the Leo Castelli Gallery records, was made available to researchers in January and the finding aid is available on-line (<http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/leo-castelli-gallery-records-7351>). “The collection provides a glimpse into the evolving New York gallery scene and the works of some of the most prominent artists in modern American art throughout the last half of the 20th century,” Sarah wrote in the Archives of American Art blog.

Sarah does not have an art background (she earned her master’s degree in library science) but finds that she continually learns about art through her work and in her spare time. She likes making the connections between art movements, artists, and works of art and enjoys visiting the many contemporary art museums in DC.

## INTERPRETATION, IMAGINATION, AND THE ART OF HISTORICAL WRITING

(Continued from page 1)

called the “colorful ramble through the past.” Some practitioners assume that readers are not interested in the challenges faced by real people and their institutions, and how both change over time. Others, lacking either research material or inspiration—or both—employ the sources closest at hand, whether they are appropriate or not. Anecdotal digressions at great length, long biographical sketches for even the paltriest players, and passages that never get to the point are hallmarks of this approach.

General readers know the differences between chronicles, rambles, and historical writing even if they cannot explain them. A good historian begins with chronology, crafts biographies, and delights in anecdote, but subordinates them all to a purpose. The best historians are known for exhaustive library, archival, and oral history research, but perhaps their toughest task is deciding what to leave out.

Least understood about the practice of historical writing is how creative a process it is. It takes understanding, empathy, and especially imagination to put the flesh of causality, contingency, and human motivation on the dry bones of fact, and only the scholar who has mastered his material can do it. Historians do not “cut and paste” with their hands—they synthesize with their minds.

In the end, writers of histories must decide what it all means—they must develop an interpretation. Friedrich Nietzsche identified three basic approaches. A monumental interpretation holds up individual events—and individuals themselves—for attention and admiration. The antiquarian highlights curiosities that, if nothing else, underscore just how different the past was. Academics and journalists earn tenure and sell books with the critical accounts familiar to modern readers. The best interpretations will blend these approaches, because our past, after all, is no less complex than our present.

“The past is not dead,” wrote William Faulkner, “it’s not even past.” We all carry an individual and collective memory, its meaning changing as we do, on the journey along the thin edge of existence between yesterday and tomorrow. Whether we carry our history with grace or with a grudge depends on interpretation and imagination.

*Executive Vice President Kenneth D. Durr oversees a wide range of projects for*

*History Associates including books, on-line histories, and oral history projects. Books include *The First 40: A History of DAI*; *Life of the Party: Kenneth F. Simpson and the Survival of the Republicans in 1930s New York*; *A Company With A Mission: Rodman Rockefeller and the International Basic Economy Corporation, 1947-1980*; and *Milestones in the Company that Helped Build America, a history of International Harvester.**

## THE BEST CLIENTS IN HISTORY

### CIVIL WAR TRUST

continued work on historical content for the next in the series of Civil War “Battle Apps” for iPhone.

### THE NATIONAL WWII MUSEUM

continued work on content development for several new exhibit pavilions planned for the museum.

### INSTITUTE OF NUCLEAR POWER OPERATIONS

completed an oral history project and began work on researching and writing the history of the independent nuclear safety organization.

### NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

began work to arrange and catalog museum archives at several park sites located across the United States.

### UNITED EDUCATORS

conducting videotaped oral history interviews in preparation for production of history video.

### LITIGATION RESEARCH

continued to research and analyze documents in federal, state, and local records repositories in California, Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, Maryland, and Washington, DC.



For thirty years, clients have turned to History Associates to tell their stories, preserve and manage their records, and answer their historical questions.

**Histories**  
Books, websites, and oral history projects

**Exhibits**  
Multimedia content development, image and artifact research, and scriptwriting

**Interpretive Planning**  
Planning, research, writing, and mapping for any historic site

**Historical Research**  
Research and analysis for litigation, regulatory compliance, and public relations

**Archival Services**  
Appraisal, organization, description, and management of historical materials

**Records Management**  
Records inventories, surveys, files management, and retention schedules

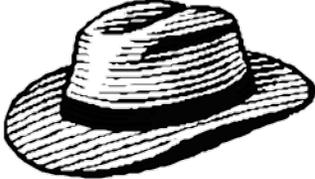
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# TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Celebrating at 30: Can you guess these entities that are also turning 30 in 2011?

A	B	C
		
<p>Launched in 1981, it changed the music industry.</p>	<p>This movie inspired a new generation of archaeologists.</p>	<p>This company provided a new way of accessing business information.</p>

Congratulations to Mona Heath of American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, who was the winner of the Summer 2010 Test Your Knowledge quiz! She correctly answered the following: A) George Washington, B) Andrew Jackson, and C) Richard Nixon.

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