







# Historical Text Archive


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## History of the HTA

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Things happen historically, not logically. To understand how the HTA was started, you have to understand my involvement with electronic mail. I got involved in computer telecommunications for history because my elder son studied in Marburg, Germany in 1988-1989, and I learned to use electronic mail so that we could communicate on a regular basis without cost. We used BITNET because that was the e-mail system open to me at Mississippi State University and to him at Phillips University. I also joined some discussion lists, including HISTORY@FINHUTC, which had been organized by a student in Finland, Joni Makivirta (pictured at left).





I didn't know that Joni was a student and I didn't care. I had found a way to communicate daily with others interested in history. Yes, there was silliness on the list. I worked around it or tried to get the list back on track when it deviated too much. The [discussions](#) varied. The [members](#) varied in circumstance; some were students; some were historians; and some from other professions. There was Jim Cocks, computer technician at the University of Louisville, Skip Knox at Boise State, Haines Brown of Central Connecticut State University, Charles Dell, at the University of Missouri at Kansas City, Michael McCarthy, an undergraduate at Marshall University, Christopher Currie of the Institute for Historical Research, and George Welling of the University of Groningen. There was an underlying current among the professors that the list could be more than it was. Mark Olsen of the University of Chicago eloquently expressed that [concern](#). I tried to address some of those concerns in a May, 1989 [message](#). That elicited specific calls for [reform](#). I thought about ways to make computer telecommunications more useful, but my commitments to publishing on the Latin American drug trade kept me too busy. It was Richard Jensen, then of the University of Illinois at Chicago, who made the difference. He had been trying in the first half of 1989 to get me to organize what we were calling [Clionet](#). As I said at the time, I was too busy to take the challenge. Eventually Jensen would create [H-NET](#).

In 1989, I also became concerned by the inability of historians to move large files by e-mail; or, at least, for some historians to do so. In response to some discussion on HISTORY@FINHUTC (I don't remember the exact nature of it), in December, 1989 I had sent a file on [French socialism](#) via e-mail. That caused some stir among some of the participants. I was criticized severely by some of them. Although I offered what I thought was an effective [defense](#) and I had [support](#) from others, the criticism was deserved. Some people had quotas on their accounts and my mailing burst them. Others were not interested in receiving what I had sent. The solution was to store the files where a person could get them when desired. So I learned about File Transfer Protocol. Late in 1990 I wrote an [article](#) for *Perspectives* of the American Historical Association. When it appeared early in 1991, professional historians came onto the 'Net in droves. I officially created an FTP site (RA) in February, 1991. I was able to get some [help](#). I also tried to get others to do the same thing because I realized that one site could not store everything. Lynn Nelson (pictured) volunteered, and was up and running by August, 1991. We began to divide the [load](#). And we were off and running. RA grew by leaps and bounds as I found new things to store there. Some were sent to me by others. Christopher Currie of the Victoria County History project of the University of London sent me an article on [medieval carpentry](#)[I refer you to his revised version which has photos, something not possible when we first did it.] and



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Art Ferrill sent me several articles on ancient military history, for example. I had to subdivide into directories. By September 1, 1991, the [filelist](#) on RA had grown considerably.

The effort to create other sites began in 1991 but accelerated after Thomas Zielke's important paper on "[History at Your Fingertips](#)" and my own paper on [anonymous FTP sites](#), both delivered at the Mid-America Conference in September, 1992 (Thomas was in Germany and I was in Mississippi. We chatted in the background while awaiting our turns), things progressed rapidly. One remembers Valentine Smith and his Soviet archives in Kansas City, Mike McCarthy and his Byrd site at Marshall University, George Welling (pictured with guitar) with Gheta



at Groningen in Holland, and others that Lynn mentions below. I spent a lot of time trying to get people to create FTP and/or gopher sites (I discovered gopher sites in 1991 and the WWW in Jerusalem in early 1992. RA grew as did the other sites, but I couldn't pay as much attention to history telecommunications as I wanted because I became an associate dean in August, 1991. I had to devote my energies to saving the University's humanities programs and a science program in the face of the efforts of a reactionary committee's efforts to make Mississippi State University into a trade school. Lynn Nelson had to be the pioneer in finding a way to hook them all together through HNSource.

In retrospect, I was right on target about a number of issues: that colleges and universities would incorporate computer telecommunications into their fixed costs; that this would become a prime means of scholarly communications; and that large files would routinely be moved around. Today, files are routinely large; e-mail quotas virtually don't exist; and we have distributed resources as a routine matter. Who would have thought it ten years ago when I began fiddling with e-mail and trying to protect myself from colleagues who thought I was wasting my time? Even they use e-mail and the Web!

I've taken the liberty to quote from a letter that Lynn Nelson wrote about my role in computer telecommunications for historians and what we had accomplished before the Web.

"He was, of course, the builder and maintainer of RA, and was highly regarded if only for that accomplishment. RA was the first, and at the time the only, File Transfer Protocol (FTP) site for historians. His file of instructions on using FTP was widely distributed both here and abroad, and historians began to learn from it how to utilize the information that he was collecting there for their use.

Together with Thomas Zielke, of Oldenburg University (Germany), Don organized the effort by which members of HISTORY@FINHUTC established, in the space of two months, twenty new discussion lists for historians, each devoted to a specific topic. All twenty are still in operation, with a total membership well in excess of twenty thousand. He also encouraged and guided me in the construction of MALIN, a second FTP site for historians, and we began to work on means of integrating our two sites as a "seamless" whole.

Meanwhile, with Don's constant interest and involvement, and with the help of the LYNX development team here at the University of Kansas, I completed the project he and I had begun, that of developing a means of linking distant sites into effective wholes. Don had the pride of place and, in March of 1993, demonstrated the facility as the center-piece of a talk delivered to the members and staff of the Institute of Historical Research on the University of London. The facility was HNSOURCE, which, I am told, was the first

information server in the world. The Institute was anxious to construct a similar site, as was the National University of Australia. By July of that 1993, these sites were operative, and we set the links that united them, RA and MALIN, into a single network. By the end of the year, BYRD and GHETA, two new FTP sites, and CLASSICS, another information server, had joined, and GRENET, a French site was coming on-line. In November of 1992, Don had suggested that our ultimate goal should be the construction of a world-wide network connecting all the various electronic facilities of use to historians -- ftp, telnet, gopher, and others. In the midst of his other responsibilities, he had somehow found the time to set in motion the development of these new sites. By November of 1993, we had achieved Don's "ultimate" goal.

I apologize for the length of this discussion of Don's activities in the area of computer telecommunications, but the World-Wide Web has caught public attention to such a degree that many people do not realize that there was a good deal of work on the Internet before the Web existed. As a matter of fact, when CERN and NSCA announced that the Web was operational, they found that a well developed historian's network already existed and invited it to join the Web. HNSOURCE became History, the World-Wide Web Virtual Library's maintainer for the subject History, and spun off a series of specialized sites. The Australian server became COOMESQUEST, the WWW-VL maintainer for social science and the center of a massive complex of Australian servers. CLASSICS formed the platform on which the Perseus project was built, and RA, GHETA, and others became award-winning Web sites. (As an aside, Don has continued to develop RA in his "spare" time, and it is now regarded as the primary data base for African and Latin American materials.)

I suppose that someone will eventually write a history of the development of computer telecommunications as a medium and will be struck by the fact that historians seem to have led the way in many ways. If he is curious enough to look into the matter, he will discover the crucial importance of Don's leadership."

In 1998, I began to expand the Historical Text Archives beyond the Mississippi State University server. The HTA has never been an official part of the University. It simply gave me personal Web space just as it gives Web space to students, staff, and other faculty members. The support and supportive comments came from Computing Center (now Systems and Networks) personnel. The Department of History was hostile to what I was doing; I have received no support from that quarter and, as I retire in 2003, I see that only the junior faculty are smart enough to have an inkling of what this means. Academics don't accept change very well. They are frightened of new things.

It makes no difference where the files are stored, of course. In 1998, I moved some material on Hungarian history to [www.fortunecity.com](http://www.fortunecity.com). In 1999, I moved much of the site to [www.geocities.com/djmabry/](http://www.geocities.com/djmabry/). By April, 2000, I had moved completely off the Mississippi State University server onto different servers in the world. This arrangement works reasonably well. In February, 2001, I had my own domain and server, [historicaltextarchive.com](http://historicaltextarchive.com), which promises to be much better for users and for me.

Ironically, as Director of the Institute for the Humanities at Mississippi State University, I was able to arrange a six-month internship for one of George Welling's graduate students; a side benefit has been that he has been helping me with the HTA. Just in time for my retirement from Mississippi State on June 30, 2003!

[Discussions](#)

Received: by UA1VM (Mailer R2.03B) id 2044; Fri, 19 May 89 19:14:25 CDT

Date: Fri, 19 May 89 09:40:00 EST

Reply-To: History

Sender: History

From: Martin Ryle

Subject: Re: RE: Death of the list?

To: don mabry

Prof. Mabry's question about whether France could have emerged as a modern state without herrevolution is provocative. The issue would seem to reside in our definition of "modern state," which I should think would require a shift from subject to citizen, from landed to liquid wealth, from realm to nation, and other such changes. That the revolution accompanied these shifts seems to be beyond dispute, and it is probably helpful to think of the shifts as the essence of the revolution. The particulars of political conflict, violence, war, and speculation were the result of the specific reactions of specific persons and groups to the radical changes that French society was undergoing.

Received: by UA1VM (Mailer R2.03B) id 2329; Fri, 19 May 89 21:29:38 CDT

Date: Fri, 19 May 89 13:29:49 EDT

Reply-To: History

Sender: History

From: R3KEZ@AKRONVM

To: don mabry

To: Bill Robie

Like any other discipline, there are those who specialize in a specific area which has particular interest. In the case of Women's History or Black History I believe that they have been neglected sufficiently to warrant a seperate study. The rest of the issue hinges, at least in my mind, on whether the isolation of such subjects is voluntary and if not, does the isolation encourage a strong and unnatural bias to emerge in the research?

There are also some other things which I must consider before saying more - namely, whether the development of a distinct branch of history, such as Publishing History or Railroad History, must naturally produce biases - any ideas?

Received: by UA1VM (Mailer R2.03B) id 2462; Fri, 19 May 89 21:53:08 CDT

Date: Fri, 19 May 89 14:23:32 EDT

Reply-To: History

Sender: History

From: R3KEZ@AKRONVM

To: don mabry

Doctor Mabry,

Your regards delivered to Grant, et al, though the department is rather dead during the intersession. I hope to be able to send you some info on Women in printing and publishing within the next few weeks. Most of the data was obtained from primary sources, but there were a few secondary sources which I will bring up as soon as I can locate my paper. My interest is in Italian Renaissance silversmithing techniques for polishing, deburring, etc.

Received: by UA1VM (Mailer R2.03B) id 2544; Fri, 19 May 89 22:44:51 CDT

Date: Fri, 19 May 89 16:07:00 EST

Reply-To: History

Sender: History

From: "ALEC PLOTKIN [OWNER-NOVA LAXHEADS]" <185422285@VUVAXCOM>

Subject: Help

To: don mabry

If anybody knows a good history of baseball could you please send me the name.  
Thanks

Alec Plotkin Mgr.

1: >Would Alec Plotkin contact me directly regarding his question about

2: >a history of baseball. The userid I received doesn't work.

3: >@eof

Received: by UA1VM (Mailer R2.03B) id 2714; Sat, 20 May 89 00:48:07 CDT

Date: Thu, 18 May 89 10:43:25 CST

Reply-To: History

Sender: History

Comments: Please Acknowledge Receipt

From: Z4648252

Subject: Texas woman in history

To: don mabry

I'm not actively working in women's history either, but Texas has rich folklore and myths. Trying to pull the truth out is not really that difficult.

For example, the "mother" of Texas is considered to be Janes Long.

The following is the circumstance:

A dentist named Dr. James Long arrived in Texas in 1819 during June.

He and his force of 200 men occupied the present day city of Nacogdoches (where I am typing this!!!) and the Stone Fort, which is a 'tourist trap' today. He declared Texas to be independent from Spain, or more specifically, New Spain (Mexico).

He left the area to pick up supplies and brought his wife, Jane Long and her black servant girl, Kian. This was during the year 1820. They arrived with a large armed force and set up a fort on the coast at Port Bolivar. By this time, New Spain authorities were becoming alarmed, sent a force to La Bahia where Long and his men journeyed (he left Jane and Kian at Bolivar) and captured them. Dr. Long was executed.

Wife Jane and Kian decided to remain at Port Bolivar, surviving on fish and what other seafoods they could obtain, and using a cannon to keep curious Karankawa Indians from coming near them(1). When she learned of Long's fate, Jane Long rode horseback to Mexico in an effort to have her husband's murderers punished (2).

For Texans, Jane Long is considered the Mother of Texas, but to be more exact Kian should be considered the Black Mother of Texas. Kian remained loyal to Jane throughout the duration and declined any offer of freedom. It is unfortunate that Kian is rarely mentioned.

Note that the references come from: All Hail the Mighty State: TEXAS.

by Archie P. McDonald. Pages 47-49.

1: From your note, one must assume that Texas in this context means Texas the independent nation. Otherwise, one would have to look for a

4: >chicana or an Amerind as the "mother."

5: >Isn't the historian's proper viewpoint that there is no "mother" or

6: >"father" in such instances? That parentage is an inappropriate

7: >paradigm?

8: >@eof

Received: by UA1VM (Mailer R2.03B) id 2743; Sat, 20 May 89 05:26:03 CDT

Date: Thu, 18 May 89 14:09:00 EDT

Reply-To: History

Sender: History

From: J\_CERNY@UNHH

Subject: Following up on Mark Olsen.

To: don mabry

I just want to follow up on Mark Olsen's remarks. While interested in

history, I'm not in any way a historian by training or profession. I



subscribe to HISTORY out of general curiosity and as our BITNET  
Infoprep to keep up my awareness of things others on campus might want  
to know about.

Toward that end, the other day I finally detected enough interest in  
BITNET in our History Department that I arranged a custom session to  
tell them about BITNET and show hands-on them how to access it, salting  
the examples with some recent items from HISTORY and HUMANIST.

These people all use computers, but they use PCs, not our large  
systems. Some use Macintoshes and some DOS PCs So there are several  
thresholds (barriers) they encounter before they can really begin to  
make BITNET use a regular part of their professional activity.

They have to use a terminal emulator to get to our large system (node  
UNHH, named "Hilbert"). They have to learn a little bit about VAX/VMS  
MAIL. They do not have to learn a VAX/VMS editor, but the whole  
process becomes much, much easier if they can. None of these is a big  
deal, but for a historian who is already very busy, they can  
cumulatively serve to keep BITNET at arm's length.

I suspect we are representative in this situation, not unique.

Jim Cerny

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^\_/\_/

/ |

/ |

James W. Cerny / |

MicroVAX Support Manager and / | D=University of NH,

Newsletter Publisher / | Durham campus.

University Computing / | K=Keene State College

Hamilton Smith Hall / | M=University of NH,

University of New Hampshire / P | Manchester campus.

Durham, NH 03824 | P=Plymouth State College

/ |

(603)-862-3058 / |\_\_

BITNET: J\_CERNY@UNHH | K D |

UUCP: ... uunet!unh!jwc M \_|

\\_\_\_\_\_ /

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Received: by UA1VM (Mailer

R2.03B) id 2795; Sat, 20 May 89 05:32:37 CDT

Date: Fri, 19 May 89 20:11:00 EST

Reply-To: History

Sender: History

From: Martin Ryle

Subject: Re: Relevancy....(or lack thereof)

To: don mabry

Re Donald Mabry's comments about historians doing ourselves in. Whenever one of my

colleagues calls upon the example of Munich to justify intransigence

toward the Soviet Union, I feel obliged to charge the benighted soul with

incompetence. If history does not teach us to get the facts straight, judge

each circumstance in its own context, and avoid simplistic application of

"lessons" learned from the past, then history teaches nothing worthwhile.

Martin Ryle

Professor of History

University of Richmond, VA

Ryle@urvax.urich.edu

Received: by UA1VM (Mailer R2.03B) id 3666; Sat, 20 May 89 19:37:36 CDT

Date: Sat, 20 May 89 20:23:21 EST

Reply-To: History

Sender: History



From: Morris Fried

To: don mabry

In-Reply-To: Message of Wed,

17 May 89 05:16:44 CDT from

Prof. Olsen's comments are accurate and to the point. His message points the way to a more

appropriate use of this medium; until now, except for one or two others, only Professor Mabry's

comments and suggestions have been stimulating to a sociologist with a serious interest in and

commitment to history, and historical thought. A combination of technical advice and theoretical suggestions would be marvelous. Let's not bury the list yet, please.

And now that I've only just heard about the Humanist list, can someone tell me how to subscribe

to that?

Received: by UA1VM (Mailer R2.03B) id 3606; Sat, 20 May 89 17:44:52 CDT

Date: Sat, 20 May 89 18:33:00 EDT

Reply-To: History

Sender: History

From: "Peter D. Junger"

Subject: Royal progresses

To: don mabry

A colleague of mine would like to find a short description

of English 'Royal progresses.' I believe that he is particularly

interested in the economic consequences of having a medieval court

drop in for dinner.

Thank you.

Peter Junger--CWRU Law School--Cleveland,

OH--JUNGER@CWRU--JUNGER@CWRU.CWRU.EDU

Received: by UA1VM (Mailer R2.03B) id 3798; Sat, 20 May 89 23:06:17 CDT

Date: Sat, 20 May 89 23:49:43 LCL

Reply-To: History

Sender: History

From: Karen Vogeley

Subject: Merely a personal interest

To: don mabry

Would anyone be able to recommend a good biography of Margaret, Countess of Salisbury? She had an interesting life, which was ended by Henry VIII.

Thanks.

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[HISTORY@FINHUTC MEMBERS BEFORE 1991](#)

\*

\* History

\*

\* Review= Public Subscription= Open Send= Public

\* Notify= No Reply-to= List,Respect Files= Yes

\* Ack= No FormCheck= No X-Tags= Comment

\* Notebook= Yes,G,Separate,Public

\* Validate= Store only

\* Mail-via= Dist2

\* LoopCheck= NoToCount

\* Errors-To = Owner

\*

\* Owner= MAKIVIRT@FINJYU (Joni Makivirta)

\*

\* The meaning of this list is to discuss about history as a science,

\* computers and historians, cultural development, cultural differences,

\* and philosophy. HISTORY wants to be a discussion forum for historians

\* and bring history closer to other sciences.

\*

R3KEZ@AKRONVM Karl E. Ziellenbach  
arpalists+HISTORY@ANDREW.CMU.EDU Andrew Message System  
A4422DAE@AWIUNI11 KONRAD NEUWIRTH  
A7171GAA@AWIUNI11 Thomas Wiltner  
Z00WYR01@AWIUNI11 Rudolf WYTEK  
NETNEWS@BLEKUL11 netnews usenet  
VILSON@BRFAPESP VILSON SARTO  
TV9751@BROCK1P TOM VERSO  
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GLTKUHN@CALSTATE Larry Kuhn  
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113355@DOLUNI1 Thomas Zielke  
170186@DOLUNI1 thorsten mack  
HIROBIE@ECUVM1 WILLIAM ROBIE  
MAKIVIRT@FINJYU joni makivirta  
TOSINE@FINJYU STUDENT MAGAZINE IN JYVASKYLA. SEND STORIE  
HIST-MK@FINOU martin kusch  
HIS-JK@FINTUVM Jaakko Kankaanp{ {

KALLIOKO@FINUHA Matti Kalliokoski  
PONTINEN@FINUHA SEPPO PONTINEN  
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LIBRSPE@GWUVM Matthew Gilmore  
UW641C@GWUVM Bob Tolchin  
CHAYWARD@HAMPVMS CYNTHIA M, HAYWARD @ HAMPSHIRE COLLEGE  
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RCIVJAN@HDETUD1 Jan Snoek  
AIBM002@ICINECA Alex Martelli  
C312-004@IRLEARN jim duffy  
C312-016@IRLEARN Eddie O'Loughlin.  
DOHERTYC@IRLEARN Charles Doherty  
HICKC89@IRLEARN Vivien Hick  
MORRSC89@IRLEARN Deirdre Morrissey  
STCS8013@IRUCCVAX Humphrey Sorensen  
STOTTNER@JCUVAX "What? Me Worry?"  
STOTTNER@JCVAXA "Joe Stottner"  
mbb@JESSICA.STANFORD.EDU Malcolm Brown  
ACS\_JAME@JMUUVAX1 JAMES W. WILSON  
FAC\_MGAL@JMUUVAX1 MICHAEL J. GALGANO  
BI8030@JPNKISCI Kentarou Gotou  
BI8035@JPNKISCI shite kazu  
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FKAFKA@KSUVM Gregory T. Davis  
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STAFFORD@LIUVAX M. STAFFORD  
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LOU@VAX.OXFORD.AC.UK Lou Burnard  
ECOMMAG@VAXA.HW.AC.UK Mark Gray  
P.Adman@VME.CC.HULL.AC.UK peter adman  
E.Mawdsley@VME.GLASGOW.AC.UK Evan Mawdsley  
L.M.Richmond@VME.GLASGOW.AC.UK LESLEY RICHMOND  
N.J.Morgan@VME.GLASGOW.AC.UK Nicholas Morgan  
edt@VTCOSY.CNS.VT.EDU Ed Tuthill  
BLNKNSHP@VTVM1 L. A. Blankenship  
ERDT@VUVAXCOM "TERRENCE ERDT"  
18542228@VUVAXCOM ALEC PLOTKIN  
HOFFMAN\_E@WABASH "Eric Hoffman"  
JKASIOWN@WAYNE1 Jerry Kasiowniak  
SEN%SIMON%WUGATE%WUGATE@WUGATE.WUSTL K. C. Sen  
UN023077@WVNVAXA BRUCE MACISAAC  
ELINZE@YALEVM Naama Zahavi-Ely  
MKELLER@YALEVM michael keller  
BRIANW@YORKVM2 "Brian Whittaker"

\*

\* Total number of "concealed" subscribers: 1

\* Total number of users subscribed to the list: 136 (non-"concealed" only)

\* Total number of local node users on the list: 0 (non-"concealed" only)

\*

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[Use of History](#)

Received: by UA1VM (Mailer R2.03B) id 6979; Thu, 18 May 89 12:37:06 CDT

Date: Wed, 17 May 89 05:16:44 CDT

Reply-To: History



Sender: History

From: Mark Olsen

To: don mabry

The HISTORY list has produced an amazing amount of garbage that, speaking bluntly, is not only pointless but embarrassing to historians. The numerous attempts to stimulate conversation by making inflammatory comments about national characteristics or posing hypothetical and unanswerable questions are certainly not indicative of the caliber of thought that one typically encounters in historical research. The problem is that the list was started without focus and without a defined consistency. A comparison to the very successful HUMANIST list might be helpful.

I was at the meeting where HUMANIST was formed. It was clear that the main focus was computer applications in the very broadly defined discipline called "humanities". The binding ethic allows individuals from very diverse backgrounds to communicate sensibly about topics of importance. Not only are there broad discussions of "purpose" and opinion, but a VERY important exchange of technical information, ranging from the availability of data to programming problems. HUMANIST also boasts an impressive array of individuals willing to share technical knowledge and provide advice on other research and teaching matters. What attracts scholars and teachers to HUMANIST is the clear definition of what is being discussed and the application of the information exchanged to their work. I have learned -- as a French revolutionary historian and review editor for *\_Computers and the Humanities\_* -- a lot from HUMANIST that applies to my work; frequently this information comes from people whose direct research interests are very far removed from mine. A clearer definition of what HISTORY is would help stimulate useful exchanges.

As an historian, I have been particularly depressed about the failure of historians to develop networks to exchange information. It is not that historians are not doing good work with computers. Indeed, looking at the journals *\_Social Science History\_* or *\_Journal of Interdisciplinary History\_*, or *\_Historical Methods\_* would suggest that historians have more than "humanists" to talk about regarding computer applications in history. Part of the problem is institutional in that there is no one place where computer applications in history can be discussed.

Further, there is no "repository" of machine-readable datasets, with the exception of Michigan's consortium. Another major problem is the limitation of "computer applications" in history to SPSS or SAS stats applications. Database design should be a CENTRAL concern to historians of all kinds. Full text systems and applications should be of interest to intellectual historians. The failure of historians to grasp computers in a fashion that goes beyond statistical methods is suggested by the fact that there has not been a single instruction level text on *\_Computers and History\_* since Shorter's in the early 70s. Indeed, the only general survey is the recent conference proceedings from England, which stressed the diversity, but not points of contact, of historical research and teaching. My disappointment, as an historian, is also found in that there are VERY few working historians on HUMANIST and very few who are found at more general computing conferences.

I would like to propose that the HISTORY list consider focusing its discussion more clearly on a limited number of topics. My vote would be to parallel, in some ways, HUMANIST's concentration on computer applications in humanities research and teaching. HISTORY could serve as a clearing house for technical information and advice on a broad number of issues. If it grows in the same way as HUMANIST, HISTORY could become a very valuable source for exchange of information concerning exiting data sets, ongoing research projects, historical software, and so on. This would not "prohibit" more general discussions, but would focus the comments and add some needed direction to the list.

Thanks for letting me vent my spleen.

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[In re History](#)

May 25, 1989

IN RE HISTORY

Our colleagues from Chicago and Princeton not only complained about the nature of some messages on HISTORY but made some important suggestions about how the list could be improved. Fundamentally, of course, they raised the issue of the \*function\* of HISTORY.

I strongly agree that sending flames in the hopes of provoking messages on the list is inappropriate and counterproductive. Name calling, in whatever form, is almost always counterproductive, even when it does prompt one to respond to the name caller.

Discussing historical events, however, is something different. Through such discussions one can gain a different (and perhaps better) understanding of those events. The issue of revolution is a case in point. The French Revolution is being celebrated with much hoopla this year but often without pointing out its ramifications. Since almost all of us are children of the French Revolution, we tend to view it uncritically. That is, we often look at political events as turning points while ignoring the economic changes taking place. Changes in the means of production in the 18th century certainly produced social and political change.

The information provided about Canadian history was very valuable, especially to those of us who know little Canadian history. That information came as a result of a question on the French Revolution.

In my opinion, one important function of HISTORY is to enable historians and those interested in history to have such discussions.

Should HISTORY become another HUMANIST? The latter is an excellent source of information on a variety of hardware and software issues, although not all of those discussed are useful to historians. Nevertheless, historians can subscribe to HUMANIST and learn; there is no real need to duplicate HUMANIST.

What we could use, as Olsen points out, are discussions of computer application problems of utility to historians. One can hope that Olsen or someone else will help us on this. Richard Jensen uses HISTORY and could contribute much in this regard.

HISTORY, however, should not be just for quantitative or social science historians.

Three important elements need to be added to HISTORY to give it the broadest possible utility.

- (1) A directory of historians with their e-mail addresses and research fields.
- (2) A directory of archivists with their e-mail addresses.
- (3) A directory of archival collections accessible via e-mail.

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