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Illustrated History

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Andrew Feight practices "rephotography," recreating old photos to provide a visual record of change, as in this color photo of Bear Lake in Shawnee State Forest paired with one from 1936. Photo left courtesy The Ohio State University, Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center, Wooster, Ohio. Forestry Images Collection.



Mark Souther and Andrew Feight are using modern technology to build the historical record — and include the public in the process.

By Elizabeth Cooke

ANDREW FEIGHT '93 stands on an earthen dam overlooking Bear Lake, a small reservoir in southern Ohio's Shawnee State Forest. He contemplates the stone inlet below, debating how best to approach it through the tangle of scrub and tall grasses.

"Sometimes I think I need to bring a machete," he says.

He sports brown boots, khakis, a red felt vest and a baseball cap. A hefty camera hangs around his neck. In one hand he holds a clipboard, in the other an iPhone equipped to collect comprehensive geographic data. It's just a typical day in the life of an atypical historian.

Feight, a professor at Shawnee State University in Portsmouth, Ohio, has been exploring the history of the Scioto River Valley since he moved to the area in the early 2000s. He emphasizes the importance of going into the field to talk with people and to witness history firsthand. "You have to go to the historical sites to understand them," he says, because in doing so "you meet people who know more than you."

Feight also stresses the importance of preserving local history. "Part of my professional responsibility is to create a historical record," he says. He does this by recording interviews

with longtime residents and by documenting sites through his photographs. "All history is local," he pronounces, and like any good historian, he cites his source: former Congressman Tip O'Neill of Massachusetts, who famously made the same claim about politics.

Politics was on Feight's mind when he enrolled at Furman in 1989 from Sandy Springs, Ga. At first he thought he would major in political science and maybe go on to law school. Then he took a course with Lloyd Benson.

"I really do credit Lloyd with clueing me in to the possibilities of a career as a historian," says Feight, who soon changed his major to history. He was awarded a Furman Advantage Fellowship, and under the guidance of Benson spent a summer exploring the history of Greenville through its architecture. He created two tours of the city's architectural heritage that included photos and short descriptions of the featured buildings and explained how they fit into the broader history of the South and the nation.

With Benson's help, Feight uploaded his tours to a website. At the time, the Internet was a relatively new development: "It was just sort of a storage place for the driving instructions," says Benson. He and Feight could hardly

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imagine that in less than two decades people would be able to access this information from a device the size of their pockets.

Today Feight is building a series of historical tours about southern Ohio that cater to smart phones. To do it, he's following the model developed by another Furman graduate from the early '90s.

MARK SOUTHER '94 was raised with a deep awareness of the past. A native of Gainesville, Ga., where his family has lived for many generations, Souther grew up within a few miles of both sets of his grandparents. They taught him about their family and their hometown.

"I had a big dose of history growing up as a kid," says Souther. He and his parents and grandparents often visited old home sites and the family farm in the mountains, where he remembers digging up Cherokee Indian arrowheads and pottery. "Things like that definitely made the past come alive for me."

However, it wasn't until Souther arrived at Furman that he decided to pursue history professionally. At that point, his story begins to sound familiar. "Honestly, more than anything else, taking Lloyd Benson's classes really turned

me on to history," says Souther. "Western Civ — that's the class that made me decide to major in history."

Despite their similar backstories, Feight and Souther were only casual friends at Furman. After graduation, each took his own path toward becoming a historian.

Feight spent his first post-Furman summer at the Atlanta History Museum where he interned with Gordon Jones '84, whose father, Ed Jones, was a longtime Furman history professor. Feight assisted Gordon with research for a Civil War exhibit to be displayed during the 1996 Olympics. At the end of the summer, Feight went on to the University of Kentucky to pursue graduate work in history.

Souther also had a connection to the Jones family. As a senior at Furman he took three courses in Asian history, all taught by Ed Jones. "I still remember his slides from China," says Souther. "By that time, I was kind of a budding graduate student." He followed his academic inclinations, attending the University of Richmond for his master's and Tulane University for his Ph.D.

Feight and Souther first reconnected at a meeting of the American Historical Association



*Chief Thunderwater of Cleveland, a strong advocate for Native American causes.
Photo from Western Reserve Historical Society
Library Research Center.*

*Images of Cleveland's history
courtesy Michael Schwartz
Library, Special Collections,
Cleveland State University.*



From left: Vendor Rose Thomas sells her beets at the West Side Market, 1947; Cuyahoga River fire of 1952; aviatrix Blanche Noyes on her way to Santa Monica for Air Races, 1929.

in 2003, when they were newly minted academics on the job market. Both ended up in Ohio, Feight at Shawnee State in the south and Souther at Cleveland State in the north.

Over the years they built a collegial relationship but maintained separate professional tracks. Then Feight got wind of Cleveland Historical, a project that Souther was designing with his colleague, Mark Tebeau.

Cleveland Historical grew out of an initiative to revitalize Euclid Avenue, a once-glamorous street known as "Millionaire's Row" that had declined during the 20th century. In 2004 Cleveland Public Art, a nonprofit civic group, invited Tebeau and Souther, who co-direct the Center for Public History + Digital Humanities at Cleveland State, to develop a project commemorating the street's historic significance. It would be part of a larger urban renewal project led by the Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority. Tebeau and Souther soon developed a plan to incorporate local history into the streetscape through interactive touchscreen kiosks.

They worked on the project for three years, adding hundreds of photos and audio clips to 19 kiosks and highlighting more than 60 historical sites and figures. The kiosks were strategically positioned at bus stops along a new rapid transit corridor, allowing passengers to peruse the collection of stories and images while waiting for their buses.

Tebeau and Souther enlisted their students to help them research Euclid Avenue and conduct

oral histories with local residents. The students, in turn, had a chance to see their work displayed in public.

By all measures, the project was a success. But Souther and Tebeau began to envision something bigger.

"We started thinking that only a small number of people would ever see [the kiosks]," says Souther. They sought a means "to engage a broader community . . . to really empower the public to tell the region's history." They decided to merge their collection of local history stories with a rapidly growing form of communication — mobile phones.

"At that point apps were not really that widely used," Souther says. "The iPhone was not all that old. We really were charting a new kind of mobile app."

Souther and Tebeau introduced the Cleveland Historical app and its accompanying website, clevelandhistorical.org, in 2010. The website averages 5,000 unique visitors per month and the app, which is free, has been downloaded more than 11,000 times. The app contains information on more than 400 local sites and figures.

The app offers several advantages over the Euclid Avenue kiosks. It includes far more content, covering a much broader swath of the city. Some of the sites now feature mini-documentaries composed of historical footage and expert commentary. Partnerships with schools, neighborhood associations and other community groups have allowed more people

to share their histories through the app. Finally, and most importantly, you don't have to stop reading the stories when you get on your bus.

SPokane Historical. Explore Kentucky History. New Orleans Historical. Explore Baltimore Heritage. These are just a handful of the apps that now run on Curatescape, the mobile app platform developed by Souther, Tebeau, and several partners to "curate the landscape." Each app is slightly different, but they all have a common feel thanks to the carefully planned design of Curatescape.

As soon as he heard about Cleveland Historical, Feight was hooked on the idea. He licensed a copy of Curatescape and named his app Scioto Historical after the river valley he now calls home.

"[This project] really emphasizes the image," says Feight, who snaps photos everywhere he goes. He often takes along historical photos and practices the art of "rephotography" — recreating the exact angle of an old photo with a new camera to provide a visual record of change. At Bear Lake, the small reservoir where he wished for a machete, Feight scrambled down to the lake bank and up through the trees, trying to recreate photos taken in the 1930s just after the reservoir was built by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC).

"Really what you're doing is illustrating a story," says Feight, who organizes his stories into historical tours. "What's most important



May Day protests for civil rights and labor reform, 1930; Frank Yankovic Band, 1962.

about a tour is that it have a narrative. The first step is figuring out what the narrative is.”

Scioto Historical was scheduled to go public this spring with tours on a variety of subjects, including the pioneer days in southern Ohio, local ties to abolitionism and the Underground Railroad, Morgan’s Raid, and the work of the CCC in Shawnee State Forest. Future plans include a tour about the Adena and Hopewell earthworks and a tour to celebrate the bicentennial of the city of Portsmouth.

“A tour is like a chapter in a book,” says Feight. “It’s not like an encyclopedia.” The point, he explains, is not to be comprehensive but “thoughtfully selective. If you find a significant story, then you’ve got a location.” And once you have a location, you can find images or, if necessary, create new images.

In addition to including his own photos on the app, Feight commissioned six oil paintings by Herb Roe, a Portsmouth native who contributed to nearly half a mile of historical murals on the city’s floodwalls. “It’s a new golden age for illustrated history,” says Feight.

SOUTHER AND FEIGHT have faced a common bias in the academic world against history projects that involve the general public. Both agree there’s a need to strike a careful balance between allowing broad participation in the process of documenting history and guarding against inaccuracies.

“Yes, we edit,” says Souther. “Yes, we check facts, up to a point.” But not so obsessively that stories are locked up forever in dusty archives.

“Let the public create content,” he urges. “One of the biggest impediments to doing public history in universities is the fear of giving up some control. That’s one of the things we’ve done the best, I think — giving up some control, taking some risks.”

Feight notes that some historians believe oral histories contain distortions because of the limits of human memory. “That’s true,” he concedes. “But I really believe you can say the same of all the sources. The key is to be skeptical of all sources. . . . Differing stories interest me. It’s OK to have different accounts.”

Perhaps it’s not surprising that Souther and Feight, two products of a liberal arts education, are quick to embrace a bit of uncertainty in exchange for a broader picture of the world.

“We find that for many people there is a Truth with a capital T. History is about facts and dates and it’s not open to interpretation,” says Souther. “We take the view that history is all about the interpretation. We’re not giving someone a Truth.” [F]

See clevelandhistorical.org and sciotohistorical.org. The author, a 2008 graduate, lives in Madison, Wis., where she works as a technical writer for Epic, a healthcare software company.

DIGITAL CONNECTIONS

FURMAN STUDENTS and faculty are increasingly involved in collaborative projects in which they use digital tools to share their findings with the wider world. A few examples:

HISTORYENGINE.ORG: In collaboration with the University of Richmond, students research a topic, then write a short article that is published on the History Engine website. The project allows students to take ownership of a small piece of history. Says history professor Lloyd Benson, “Furman students are able to bring to light documents that might not otherwise catch the attention of scholars. They can become the expert on a single document.”

KATRINAMEM.ORG: Diane Boyd and Mike Winiski of Furman’s Center for Teaching and Learning worked with Drew Woten ’12 to create a site featuring an interactive map of Hurricane Katrina commemorations in New Orleans. The project grew out of Boyd’s May Experience course in New Orleans, where Woten and his classmates worked alongside local residents to rebuild areas devastated by the storm.

FOLIO.FURMAN.EDU: Through the Furman Folio project, classics faculty and students work to preserve ancient history by sharing high-quality digital images of rare texts, accompanied by contextual information to offer a fuller understanding of the featured works. Says Christopher Blackwell, Louis G. Forgiore University Professor of Classics, “This is a project entirely in keeping with the best traditions of the discipline.”

Turn the page to learn how another Furman program is expanding its reach by going mobile.

