

2017 Professional Development Grant Report

1st International Congress on Local History:
Concept, practices and challenges in contemporaneity

Aaron McArthur, Ph. D.

Department of History and Political Science

October 2017

B. Restatement of Creative Work / Professional Enhancement Activity

In September 2017, I attended the 1st International Congress on Local History: Concept, practices and challenges in contemporaneity in Cascais (Lisbon), Portugal. The site showing the announcement of the conference, and its program is:

<https://congresslocalhistory2017.wordpress.com/noticiasnews/>

C. Brief Review of Creative Work / Professional Enhancement Activity

As the name of the congress indicates, this conference was the first of its kind. Its organizers noted that most professional historians have ceded the study of local history to amateurs and antiquarians. The conference sought ways to “re-affirm and re-establish local history as a vital part of contemporary historiography.” The conference fit very well with my position as Public History Program Director. The conference was very important for me as a public historian as it represented an interdisciplinary and intra-disciplinary effort to bring local history back to historiographic prominence. The conference represented an interesting expansion of the field of public history.

I was given an extraordinary amount of time to present during the conference. Several people who were slated to present in my session did not attend the conference, so I was told that I could talk as long as I wanted. The title of my paper was “Civic Engagement and the Noble Pioneers.” In it I discussed several things.

First, I discussed the problems with current K-12 educational standards, discussing both how and when the skills of historical analysis are taught. I demonstrated how a re-evaluation of those standards could help improve students’ appreciation of the importance of history, particularly by focusing on their local history. I also discussed the process of civic engagement, the process by which the National Park Service develops interpretations of their historic resources and how it can be applied to the study of local history. Finally, I provided the example of Pipe Spring, Arizona, a National Monument, of how the process of civic engagement works.

D. Summary of Outcomes / Experiences

My attendance at the conference was fruitful, and promises to continue to bear fruit. One of the goals stated in my grant application was to increase the visibility of Arkansas Tech and of our public history program. I was the only scholar to attend from the United States, and this was much more significant than I realized it could ever be before I attended. Portugal does not have a tradition of local history, or in most of the sub-fields of public history. This fact was one of the main reasons that the organizers planned the conference. Though there were many skilled and

enthusiastic historians in attendance, I was the only one who had any formal training in public history, and the only one who was able to regularly teach classes dedicated to the study of local history. This placed me in the unaccustomed position of being the “expert” at a conference. After my presentation, I had many discussions with people who had specific questions about their projects.

A couple of the people I talked to at the conference asked for my contact information, and indicated a desire to remain in contact regarding projects that they were working on. I look forward to collaborating with them in the future. The experience also opened my eyes to the possibility of visiting Portugal as a Fulbright Scholar as there seems to be an interest in what I have to offer.

E. Conclusions and Recommendations

The paper I presented at the conference was a good starting point for an article on K-12 educational standards and how an increased focus on local history could improve student engagement and learning. I am continuing research on the topic in preparation for revisions with an eye on publication in *The Public Historian*, the primary journal in my field. As I am also up for tenure and promotion this year, I am also tentatively planning for a sabbatical as a Fulbright Scholar in the future.

I am extremely grateful for the professional development grant that allowed me the opportunity to attend the historic conference.

Copies to: Dr. David Blanks, Department Head, History and Political Science
 Dr. Jeffrey Woods, Dean, Arts and Humanities
 Dr. Mohamed Abdelrahman, Vice President, Academic Affairs

F. Appendix

Copies of my paper are available upon request