

**aseh news**

summer 2019

volume 30, issue 2

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and moreopportunities**WEHN thank you**

The Women's Environmental History Network conveners would like to thank everyone involved for a lively and fun reception at the Columbus meeting. In particular, thanks goes to our sponsors MIT Press, the Penn State History Department, Julie Cohn and John Connor, as well as individual registration and pass-the-hat donors. Thank you also to our "Table Mavens" - senior scholars who anchored casual discussions around selected topics throughout the evening. This year, we also took the opportunity to honor Susan Flader, an "Original Maven" whose work helped establish the field of Environmental History and whose leadership and mentorship has inspired us all.

**update on 2020 conference****president's column: the parable of the filing cabinet**

## Welcome to Our Home

I extend a warm welcome to all those who are new to environmental history. We are glad you are joining our intellectual and professional home, and we hope you will stay with us for the rest of your career.

## The Parable of the Filing Cabinet

The story that follows is, embarrassingly, true.

Like many historians, I use file cabinets to store research materials. I do not remember ever locking the cabinets, but want to keep the keys visible should they be needed in the future, so I tape them to the sides of the cabinets.

That system worked well until my move from Boston to Pittsburgh last December. The movers delivered the file cabinets with tape remnants, but no keys, on the side. This was not a problem for most of the cabinets because they remained unlocked. It was a problem for one cabinet, however, because it had a simple locking mechanism. Pushing in the lock cylinder, even with no key in it, locked the cabinet. The movers lost the key and pushed in the cylinder. That meant I had four drawers of inaccessible research materials.

I tried my usual trick to open a locked file cabinet-tipping it, finding a certain long rod underneath, and pushing it up. This cabinet, however, had no such rod. The more I studied the cabinet, the more it looked like it had been built under contract from the U.S. Air Force during the Cold War. It had enough steel in it to withstand a nuclear blast, and the lock seemed designed to foil the best KGB agent.

In hopes of learning how to unlock it, I turned to the Internet. I had recently read an article about a nun who learned to fix the plumbing of her convent by watching



**Theme:** "Reparative Environmental History"

**Location:** Ottawa, Canada

**Dates:** March 25-19, 2020

**Hosts and Sponsors:**

Nipissing University,  
Canada Research Chairs,  
and Ingenium - Canada's  
Museums of Science and  
Innovation

**Proposals are due July**

**12, 2019.** [Click here](#) for

information on submitting a proposal. We are standing by to assist with proposals, if needed. Contact [dspatz@aseh.net](mailto:dspatz@aseh.net) with questions.

Our 2020 conference will include the following events:

- field trips Rideau Canal, Central Experimental Farm, St. Lawrence Seaway, and more
- large exhibit area
- poster presentations
- 100 sessions, including panels, roundtables, experiential sessions, lightning talks, and posters
- networking events and opportunities for students



Our conference will include field trip to Central Experimental Farm (pictured above).

instructional videos on YouTube. Although skeptical about reliability of Internet information, I decided it was time for this old dog to learn a new trick from the nun. I searched "open locked file cabinet" and marveled at the trove of information.

Many sites told me it was easy to pick the lock on a file cabinet. The first set of instructions said the nail file on a fingernail clipper was the same shape as a cabinet key, so it would open the lock. I tried that method and failed. The next site recommended using a bent paper clip to pick the lock. One stuck the clip in the lock and turned. That method, too, failed.

The next Internet site was by someone who buys and sells file cabinets without keys for a living. He removes locks by inserting a screwdriver into a keyhole, whacking it with a hammer, and driving the lock out of the cabinet frame. I tried the method. It did nothing to my beast of a cabinet, so I retrieved a heavy mallet and tried again. That effort bent the keyhole and cylinder, but the cabinet remained locked.

Having ruined the keyhole, I was willing to try a more desperate measure. Another site told me that drilling out the keyhole would open any file cabinet. I got out my drill, demolished the keyhole, and put a lot of metal filings on the floor-but the drawers remained locked.

Next, I decided to remove the whole cylinder. No lock cylinder would mean no lock, right? Whacking at the cylinder with the mallet, and pulling the cylinder with pliers, enabled me to remove the entire cylinder-but the drawers remained locked. I thought about searching for a steel-cutting blade for my circular saw and removing the sides of the cabinet, but it was late at night and I gave up.

Coincidentally, a locksmith came the next day to rekey our doors. I asked him if he knew anything about file cabinet locks, and he said yes. After about half an hour of work with pliers in the cylinder hole, he repositioned a spring-loaded rod and unlocked the cabinet permanently. So now the cabinet works, and I can access my research materials.

The experience made me feel like a fool. Not only had I relied on invalid information from the Internet, of all places, but I had allowed others to walk me up a ladder of violence. Unable to solve the problem with smarts, I turned to more brutal methods that promised to solve the problem for good-but did not.

Desperate to rescue something of value from the debacle, I asked myself whether there might be a lesson. My mind ran to the purpose of the file cabinet. The file drawers contain primary sources about the past. Opening the file cabinet resembles historical research.



Above: Rideau Canal- site of 2020 conference field trip.



Parliament Hill, Ottawa



Saunders Farm Spiral Maze, Ottawa

## conference hotel

The 2020 conference will take place at the Delta Hotels Ottawa City Centre. To reserve a guest room, follow these links: [Click here](#) to reserve a traditional or deluxe room at the group rate.

## travel grants

A limited number of travel grants will be available for students and low-income scholars presenting at ASEH's 2020 conference. Once the program committee selects the sessions and creates the program, we will contact presenters with more info., including how to apply.

File cabinet keys are books and articles by historians. Sometimes a historian has written something that unlocks the meaning of a set of documents that I have collected. Those keys are to be treasured (and not taped to the outside of cabinets).

Typically, however, no key is to be found. Most of us research understudied topics and sources. The keys of other historians often fit their file cabinets, not the ones in front of us. We may try analytical techniques we used in the past on new data sets, but they can be the equivalent of looking for the non-existent rod in the bottom of the file cabinet. Nor do nail clippers, paper clips, or mallets—that is, crude tools that some pundits claim fit every circumstance—work on the toughest historical locks.

What does work is careful, sustained labor that increases our expertise. It involves a lot of false starts and discouragement. At times we get frustrated and feel ready to pick up a mallet and bludgeon documents into conforming with preexisting ideas, which never works. But, with time, we grow more like the locksmith. We gain a body of knowledge about a lot of file cabinets that enable us to unlock the secrets of ever more aspects of the past. That is worthy work that benefits other scholars, our students, and the public.

Edmund Russell, ASEH President

## announcements

### **Final Notice - Call for Proposals for ASEH's Conference in Ottawa, Canada, March 25-29, 2020**

There are many opportunities to participate in our next conference:

- panels
- roundtables
- experimental sessions
- lightning talks
- posters

**Proposals are due July 12, 2019.** [Click here](#) for more information on submitting proposals.



## future conferences

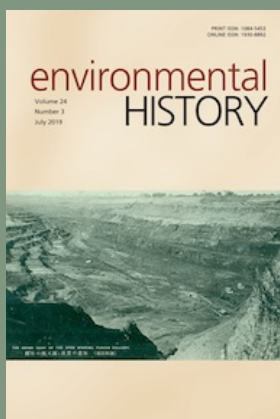
Florianopolis, Brazil  
July 22-26, 2019

Ottawa, Canada  
March 25-29, 2020

Boston, Massachusetts  
April 20-26, 2021

## journal

[Click here](#) for information on the July issue of our journal *Environmental History*, which includes a forum on the environmental history of energy transitions, an article about toxicological information and environmental protection, a close reading of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, and much more.



## world congress of environmental history

The 3rd world congress, sponsored by the [International Consortium of EH](#)



### J. Donald Hughes Research Fellowships

ASEH is delighted to announce two additional research fellowships for graduate students. We thank Don's daughter Melissa and son-in-law Eric for their generous gift to support research in environmental history. Students enrolled in any Ph.D. program worldwide are eligible to apply for the J. Donald Hughes Research Fellowships. **Deadline: November 15, 2019.** [Click here](#) for submission instructions.

### ASEH Award Submissions Due

ASEH presents awards for scholarship, service, and achievement. These include prizes for best book, article, dissertation, and public outreach project, and more. **The deadline for this year's award submissions is November 15, 2019.** For a list of awards and instructions on how to submit, [click here](#).

### ASEH Fellowship Applications Due

The Samuel Hays Fellowship is open to practicing historians (academic, public, or independent). Graduate students are ineligible. A Ph.D. is not required. **Deadline: November 15, 2019.** [Click here](#) for submission instructions.

Students enrolled in any Ph.D. program worldwide are eligible to apply for the Hal Rothman Fellowship.

**Deadline: November 15, 2019.** [Click here](#) for submission instructions.

### ASEH Equity Graduate Student Fellowship

This fellowship recognizes a graduate student from an underrepresented group for their achievements in environmental history and provides \$1,000 for Ph.D. research and travel. Students must be members of ASEH at the time of their application. For more information, please see <http://aseh.net/awards-funding/equity-fellowship>. Please spread the word about this great opportunity. **The deadline is November 15, 2019.**

[Organizations](#), will take place in Florianopolis, Brazil July 22-26, 2019. Conference theme: "The Global South and the Global North in the Era of Great Acceleration." It promises to be a fantastic conference that will bring together scholars from all over the globe. [Click here](#) for the schedule and detailed information.

*See you in Brazil!*

### graduate student caucus election results

Ramya Swayamprakash has been elected President-Elect of the ASEH graduate student caucus. Ramya will serve as President-Elect from now until May 2020, then President from May 2020 to May 2021. Christopher Slaby has taken over for Charlotte Leib as graduate student caucus media officer. Sherri Sheu is the current President. Congratulations to all!

For more information on the graduate student caucus and plans for ASEH's 2020 conference, contact Sheu at [Sherri.Sheu@colorado.edu](mailto:Sherri.Sheu@colorado.edu)

### aseh news

Published quarterly by the American Society for Environmental History. If you have an article, announcement, or an item for the "member news" section of our next newsletter, send to [dspatz@aseh.net](mailto:dspatz@aseh.net) by **September 13, 2019**.

## opportunities

The **Center of the American West at the University of Colorado Boulder** with the support of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation is implementing an Applied History training program. This program will train History postdocs and adjunct faculty to become applied historians who can draw on the expertise of scholars from a range of disciplines to reach a wider audience. Post-docs, adjuncts, and recent Ph.D. in History graduates are encouraged to apply. The Center will sponsor eight participants throughout the 2019-2020 Academic year. Each participant will take part in their own, three-day "Individual Skills Repurposing" weekend workshop. For information and to apply, [click here](#). **Applications due June 30, 2019.**

### Grey Towers Scholar-in-Residence Fellowship

With generous support from the USDA Forest Service, Grey Towers National Historic Site and the Grey Towers Heritage Association welcome applications for a one- to four-week writing retreat and residency at Grey Towers National Historic Site in Milford, PA. Fellows reside at Gifford Pinchot's ancestral home, immersing themselves in the place that inspired Pinchot to write, legislate and work tirelessly on behalf of forest conservation.

**Who can apply:** Professional historians or graduate students with a research project regarding the Pinchot family, the US Forest Service, or conservation history. Program provides:

- Single payment from \$1500 - \$3000 for travel expenses and per diem
- Lodging in the mansion's gate or farmhouse
- Opportunities for scholar to give presentations of their work at the conference center

**How to apply:** Please email a copy of your CV plus a two-page description of your project, including progress to date, to Dr. Lincoln Bramwell at [lbramwell@fs.fed.us](mailto:lbramwell@fs.fed.us). **Winter Residency (Nov-Feb) Deadline September 15, 2019.**

**ASEH invites proposals to host the annual conference in 2022.** The annual conference is one of the most important services that our organization provides to the field of environmental history. We invite proposals to host our annual conference for 2022 and 2023. Proposals should be submitted by ASEH members affiliated with a university, agency, or institution. Hosting an ASEH conference involves forming a local arrangements team, working with a local hotel or conference facility, assisting in forming partnerships with



See you in Ottawa in  
March 2020!

Photos courtesy Ottawa Tourism.

stay connected



local universities, agencies, and institutions, and helping the program committee form a theme for the conference. If you are interested, please contact Fritz Davis, chair of ASEH site selection committee, at [frdavis@purdue.edu](mailto:frdavis@purdue.edu) or David Spatz, ASEH director, at [dspatz@aseh.net](mailto:dspatz@aseh.net).

**ASEH seeks nominations for Assistant Treasurer** to aid the Treasurer in his duties. If you are interested in the position, or would like to nominate someone for the post, please contact David Spatz - [dspatz@aseh.net](mailto:dspatz@aseh.net) or Mark Madison at [mark\\_madison@fws.gov](mailto:mark_madison@fws.gov) for details.

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