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► To cite this version:

Chris Corley, Edward J. Gray. Introduction to H-France Salon on Enabling Curiosity & Starting Careers: Honoring the Retirement of James R. Farr. H-France salon, 2023, Enabling Curiosity & Starting Careers: Honoring the Retirement of James R. Farr, 15 (12). hal-04473811

HAL Id: hal-04473811

<https://hal.science/hal-04473811v1>

Submitted on 22 Feb 2024

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Introduction to H-France Salon on Enabling Curiosity & Starting Careers: Honoring the Retirement of James R. Farr

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In May 2020, as the world remained within the first wave of the coronavirus pandemic, James R. Farr retired from his position as Germaine Seelye Oesterle Professor of History at Purdue University. Due to his contributions to the discipline and his inspiring teaching and friendship developed with many of his graduate students over the years, his students subsequently decided to honor him with a modest series of essays in H-France. We believe this setting is most fitting because Jim was one of the early advocates and architects of H-France in the 1990s. These pieces emerged from a Retirement Symposium held in his honor in April 2021, hosted online by the Department of History at Purdue University.

Jim is most well-known as an historian of artisans and work in early modern France, having published several books on the subject. But his friends, family, and colleagues also know him as a kind and deeply curious individual, which provides some insight into his teaching and research explorations over the course of his career. This *Forum* proposes to trace the course of Farr's career through contributions by his graduate students, joined with some pieces from friends and colleagues. Indeed, Jim's curiosity led him to follow sources, historiographical trends, and theoretical movements to new research topics across his career, and each of these currents influenced him as a scholar and mentor. We propose a holistic survey of Jim's career, showing how the work of his students reflects the particular interests that impacted us when we were learning under him - much like the artisans that Jim studied, we were his apprentices, and our work reflects the influence of our mentor. This introduction serves as a brief biography of Jim Farr, opening the way for the contributions that follow.

Jim Farr was born in 1950 and grew up in Upper Arlington, near Columbus, Ohio. After high school, he attended the University of Mississippi between 1968-1972, where he double majored in Art and History, with a minor in English, while competing on the men's varsity basketball team. After a few years outside of academia, he decided to pursue his passion in history and thus enrolled in the graduate History program at Memphis State University in 1975 and then continued his Ph.D. work at Northwestern University under the mentorship of E. William Monter (1936-).

Like many other American historians of France, Jim first became fascinated with Europe and was tempted between Italian and French history. He decided to pursue French history, intrigued by the historiographical undercurrents of the *Annalistes* and French theory – à la Bloch, Foucault, Barthes, Certeau, Bourdieu, and Derrida. Jim decided that he wanted to be able to study history “from below” in an urban context, and confirmed an interest for a provincial city, where he could

immerse himself in the archives and write a total history, rather than focusing on just one *quartier* of Paris. He eventually found himself in Dijon because of the rich variety of early modern source material in the city's archives and libraries. Inspired by the work of Natalie Zemon Davis and theorists like Clifford Geertz, Jean Baudrillard, Pierre Bourdieu, and Michel de Certeau, Farr used theoretical questions to guide his primary source work in the archives.

Jim's experiences in Dijon, where he first lived for a year and a half conducting research, allowed him to develop lifetime relationships with fellow scholars Mack Holt, Jim Collins, and Peter Wallace. For us students, most of whom had never set foot in France prior to our dissertation research, Jim's ability to use his lived experiences in France provided an enlightening means of weaving theory and analysis of primary sources as we engaged the past in seminar discussions. Alongside several other Americans and British who veered away from the bright lights of Paris, Farr's work has highlighted for Anglo-American scholars the rich resources available in Dijon, notably its welcoming archivists, librarians, and supportive community of scholars at the Université de Bourgogne.

After he completed his dissertation, Jim taught at the University of Tennessee between 1983 and 1988. In 1988, he moved to Purdue University, where, with the exceptions of brief leaves for fellowships and sabbaticals, he would spend the entirety of his career.

In addition to numerous articles, book chapters, and reviews, Jim has authored six monographs, co-edited a collection, co-authored one world history survey textbook as well as a companion primary source book, and edited one reference work (a selected bibliography is available at the end of this essay). He served as co-editor of *French Historical Studies* between 1992-2001, and served on the Executive Council of the Society for French Historical Studies from 1991 to 2008. During his career, Jim was awarded many honors and fellowships, including the John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship, an American Council of Learned Societies Fellowship, and a residency fellowship at the Shelby Cullom Davis Center at Princeton University.

Jim's first and perhaps most well-known book, *Hands of Honor: Artisans and their World in Dijon, 1550-1650* (Cornell, 1988) demonstrated his deep interest in the social and economic history of early modern Europe. The book engaged contemporary debates about social class identity, arguing that artisan guild members had articulated clearly developed notions about working class culture centuries before the development of capitalism and the industrial revolution. In the study, Farr used the traditional tools of social history – tax rolls, marriage contracts, and other notarial documents – to demonstrate a kind of cohesiveness and solidarity across guild and trade lines.

Jim continued exploring the history of labor, solidarity, and power with two subsequent volumes, *Artisans in Europe, 1300-1914* (Cambridge, 2000) and *The Work of France: Labor and Culture in Early Modern Times, 1350-1800* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2008). Both volumes, primarily intended for graduate and undergraduate students, sought to offer clear but nuanced interpretations of the changing relationships between material culture of work and the cultures created by and through it. These books focused not only on the nature of work, but also on the hierarchies and measurable differences that led to a view of work as a fundamental aspect of understanding society and culture.

In casual conversations, Jim offered a friendly warning to colleagues that your first publication will become what you are known for, explaining that during his career, “he couldn’t get away from work.” This was true in more ways than one. Later in his career, he continued exploring power and market forces by working with a Purdue colleague, Patrick J. Hearden, on a world history survey, *Wealth, Power, and Inequality in World History* (Cognella, 2022).

The last chapters of *Hands of Honor* used tools from anthropology and introduced Farr to what would become the focus of much of his teaching and research over the next decade of his career. These chapters focused on his use of criminal records to uncover a cultural identity that bound the artisans together – a deep sense of masculine honor and identity tied to their status as craftsmen, their sexuality, and their Catholicism. Jim’s explorations of the early modern judicial and legal culture provided the basis for his next two book-length studies.

In 1995, Jim published *Authority and Sexuality in Early Modern Burgundy (1550-1730)* with Oxford University Press. Scholars responded with over a dozen reviews published between 1996 and 2000, including one in a then relatively new medium, H-France. *Authority and Sexuality* contributed to the understanding of early modern events and themes that continue to remain significant today: the Catholic reform movement, state formation, the law, women, gender, sexuality, and patriarchy. Farr’s questions were deeply informed by post-structuralist theory, namely the disciplining processes outlined by Michel Foucault, theories of the civilizing processes created by Norbert Elias, legal anthropology, and nearly a generation of women’s and gender historians working to understand the changing dynamics of gender power within state and social systems.

Farr argued that local Burgundian secular judicial elites responded to the chaos of the sixteenth-century Wars of Religion, and associated political and economic instability, by immersing themselves in Catholic Reform and neo-stoic philosophies. In the process, they stressed control of the body, particularly but not only the female body, in criminalizing sexuality beyond the confines of marriage. Farr’s study placed gender and sexuality at the center of political and cultural processes that culminated in the rise of the neoclassical state. In doing so, his book engaged Reformation scholars increasingly interested in looking at the Reformation’s long-term impacts, and late seventeenth and early eighteenth-century scholars interested in understanding the origins and workings of the “absolutist” state. The work was part of an important period that saw scholars across disciplines attempting to work out how gender has been central to the construction of political and social order.

While in the archives working on *Authority and Sexuality*, Jim stumbled upon a double murder trial involving one of the elite judges in the Parlement of Dijon, Philippe Giroux. Entitled *A Tale of Two Murders: Passion and Power in Seventeenth-Century France* (Duke, 2005), the book was Jim’s foray into microhistory and storytelling. Based on the trial records of the murder of a judge in the Chambre des Comptes, Pierre Baillet and his valet, Philibert Neugot, in 1638, Farr traced the winding story to its bitter end in 1643. Jim used the trial to uncover the complexities of seventeenth-century social and political relations, family rivalries, venal officeholding, patronage networks, judicial processes, and the dynamics of honor as an early modern commodity. Fitting the sense of the tale and the intended broader audience, Farr never biased the reader one way or

the other as to the alleged guilt of Giroux, leaving it to the reader to determine their own understanding of the situation.

Microhistory highlights the problematic relationship between individual agency and larger social and cultural contexts. Jim's subsequent work on autobiography (or personal narratives/egodocuments) exemplified a shift in social and cultural history as scholars began to emphasize the subjective experience and more particularly the construction of the self in relation to multiple historical contexts. Challenging the idea of an ahistorical self, or deep inner identity, Jim developed an extended analysis of William Hickey (1749-1830), which he published as *Who was William Hickey? A Crafted Life in Georgian England and Imperial India* (Routledge, 2020). In the monograph, Jim both questions modern sensibilities of the ahistorical inner self, as well as older historical approaches that trace the beginning of the modern self in Renaissance Italy. Instead, Jim utilizes insights, partially gained from literary theory, to argue that the self is constructed through multiple narratives shaped by the recollections of the individual's interaction with the external world. Jim has most recently examined these issues with his long-time friend and fellow early modernist Guido Ruggiero in a co-edited volume, *Historicizing Life Writing and Egodocuments in Early Modern Europe* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2022).

While he might have shied away from department administration, Jim did evince a commitment to service for the Society of French Historical Studies, where he, along with John Contreni, co-edited *French Historical Studies* for nearly a decade in the 1990s. This was a formative time in the history of the journal and of the society more generally. Jim and John emphasized some of the new work occurring in premodern French history, and they introduced the use of multi authored forums that dissected and debated key historiographic and theoretical issues at the time. By the end of the period, the use of internet listservs by scholarly communities was in full swing. Jim had worked alongside teams of colleagues in H-France to more fully utilize the tool to develop book reviews, which to this day H-France continues to build upon. Many scholars continue to identify the reviews as one of the most helpful tools of the listserv.

Jim's intense curiosity on social constructions of identity across time, and their multiple relationships to political and economic forces especially during the early modern era, often drove the content and questions for Jim's seminars across the decades. Indeed, Jim's students first and foremost saw him as a curiosity-seeker, and an enabler of curiosity in them. Throughout his career, he taught upper-level undergraduate and graduate courses on a wide range of subjects, including the Renaissance, Reformation, early modern popular culture, apocalypticism, a course on history, fiction, and film, and a course that examined globalization and economic power before 1800.

Jim enjoyed, above all, his upper-level and graduate courses, where he was able to lean into current interests and share them with his students. Regardless of subject matter, Jim always emphasized student understanding of historiography, developing an understanding and appreciation of theory borrowed from other disciplinary contexts (particularly philosophy, literary criticism, and anthropology), and an understanding and clear articulation of one's assumptions about the past (and the present). Because he enjoyed this work, his departmental colleagues frequently requested that he teach the historiography seminar that was a staple of every Purdue student's graduate experience.

But more importantly for us as students, Jim was an enabler of curiosity, a strand that ties together his work as a professor, adviser, and colleague. Jim taught his seminars because he was interested in growing as a scholar himself. He brought the latest scholarship to the seminar table and sought to learn from exchanges with students - and this was especially true in his graduate seminars. He advocated for the use of games in courses before it became a pedagogical novelty, and his most recent graduate seminars on autobiography not only positively impacted the students who took it, but also helped lead to his book on William Hickey.

Throughout his career, Jim enabled others to pursue their own curiosities and career paths. Jim was primarily interested in people, faculty-student mentorships, and friendly and engaging conversations. His office door was frequently open, with students navigating to a chair by meandering around papers and tall stacks of books Jim had lined up to read for his latest seminar or research project. Jim provided cogent advice to students, whether it was to pick them up in the middle of a down period in their seminar research and writing, or exploring career options. That advice continued long after graduation. Jim eagerly (and quickly) read student manuscripts years after students had launched their careers. Students returning to West Lafayette knew they could contact him to connect at the Lafayette Brewing Company or some other establishment.

Although most of his students have gone on to careers in teaching, the variety of careers his students have pursued are evidence of his ability to use history and historical methods in ways that applied to modern situations and needed skill sets. His multiple letters of reference and introductory letters were always on time, and he never seemed harried by the requests. As testament to Jim's effort as an enabler of curiosity and as an invaluable mentor who was able to teach skills that lead to many types of career paths, we can examine the career paths of his former students. Several of us have gone on to be university professors, including Michael Aradas (Johnson C. Smith University), Amy Rogers Dean (Sam Houston State University) Darrin Cox (West Liberty University), Elise Dermineur Reutersward (Stockholm University), and Dean Ferguson (Texas A&M-Kingsville), Jessica Nelson works in public history. Chris Corley, a Professor of History at Minnesota State University, Mankato, has served as Honors Program Director and most recently has been appointed Dean of Library & Learning. Edward Gray, who as Jim said, "went Native" and stayed in Europe, now coordinates national-level research infrastructure consortiums for DARIAH, the European research infrastructure for arts and humanities.

We hope that this series of contributions provides some evidence of his enormous personal and professional impact on the wide swath of students he encountered over the course of his career. Mack Holt, Jim's friend from the archives, opens with a piece on Jim's early career with their shared adventures in Burgundy and how Jim was a great colleague. John Contreni, another colleague, reflects on Jim's contributions to French Historical Studies. Dean Ferguson, Jim's first student, provides reflections on ragpickers in Lyon and thus Jim's influence where he was most actively involved in the study of artisanship. Elise Dermineur Reuterswård continues to show Jim's influence in economic areas, but it is broadened to include greater sociological debates about economy. Alexander Dessen's piece examines the influence of Jim's work on order and magistrates through an examination of *parlementaire* and alchemist Jean Despagne's writings. Edward Gray's piece on the Marillac family's genealogy and their bending of reality to fit self-representation reflects Jim's interests in social and political history as developed in *Authority and*

Sexuality and A Tale of Two Murders as well as questions of identity raised at the end of his career in *Who Was William Hickey?*. Finally, Jim responds to these collections and gives his own thoughts on his career.

These pieces will celebrate the diversity of the scholarly interests and the variety of people that Jim impacted. Jim is not only a great scholar, but a great person. We hope that the reader can identify the personal side of the friendships, mentorships, and collegiality evidenced in these pieces.

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H-France Salon
ISSN 2150-4873
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