

Introduction: *Localités* and Nationalism as the Vestigial and the Incipient?¹

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Welcome to *Localités/Localities*, the inauguration of a web-based center for local history. This introduction and the accompanying articles and documents are being published simultaneously on the web at <http://www.eiu.edu/~localite> and in a special issue of Eastern Illinois University's *Research and Review* series.

In 1997, historians at Eastern Illinois University began a project to expand the use of computing in history.² The project links three major components: a technology in history graduate assistantship (which began in Fall 1999), a web-based center for local history (which began with the semester projects of Archives graduate students in Fall 1998), and historical publishing online (which began with Historical Publishing students putting on the web the student journal, *Historia*, <http://www.eiu.edu/~historia>, and the department newsletter, <http://www.eiu.edu/~histnews>, in Spring 1999). Historians recognize that as effective teachers, researchers, and members of the community we must create and shape digitally-stored historical information. Materials currently available—from websites, listservers, and gopher sites—link local history with worldwide academic endeavor. We seek to increase access to and use of these historical materials, particularly materials from the disparate worlds of local history, by Eastern Illinois and regional secondary school students. Second, and more originally, we look to introduce new archival material onto the web: from the local history research of professors at Eastern Illinois, from university archives, from the Illinois Regional Archives Depository, from local libraries, from research around the world.

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We are excited to be taking local history onto the Internet. Local history is not mere antiquarianism, to be jettisoned in an environment of global interaction. Academics around the world—Germans researching *Landesgeschichte* (regional history), French and English studying the *pays* (the environmentally-determined country), English and U.S. Americans emphasizing the county community, Mexicans discussing *patriachica* (little fatherland)—have noted repeatedly that sub-national groupings and identities influence world history. Increasingly, historians are asking the big questions in small places.

The following essays speak to this larger theoretical rationale. We have explored the meanings, possibilities, and limitations of local, regional, and community history in our specific research fields. *Localités* is very much a work in progress and our dialogue and debate will help us refine our project. We are pleased to publish this special issue/section simultaneously in print and online at our new website. We invite and hope for responses.

The professionalization of history was tightly bound to nationalism. Historians in early modern Europe distinguished between story and inventory: chronology and chorography. The latter was the domain of the local antiquarian and county historian.³ Nineteenth-century historians sought to validate their narratives as the story of something important, the growth of the nation-state. The earliest professional journals and organizations—*The English Historical Review* (first published in 1886), the American Historical Association (founded in 1884 and incorporated by Congress in 1889)—were national. Even as local history professionalized and cut its antiquarian/chorographical roots, the profession still marginalized it, and local history was mainly published by antiquarian or local societies. Thus, for example, even though the *Transactions of the Woolhope*

³D.R. Woolf, "Erudition and the Idea of History in Renaissance England," *Renaissance Quarterly* 11, 1 (Spring 1987): 1-48, esp. 14-7; Richard Helgerson, *Forms of Nationhood: The Elizabethan Writing of England* (Chicago, 1992), 132-47; Joseph Levine, *Humanism and History: Origins of Modern English Historiography* (Ithaca, 1987), esp. 176-7.

Naturalists' Field Club included Herefordshire history when it began publishing in 1852, *The English Historical Review* claims to be “the oldest journal of historical scholarship in the English-speaking world.”⁴ Even those who carved out a field distinct from national history, such as the German genre of *Landesgeschichte* (regional or provincial history), were considered subordinate if not actually suspect endeavors by the profession. Recently, however, European historians have embraced the locality and the region not just as a convenient sample or area of analysis, but as the salient tool to understand continental historical development. In contrast to the modernizing thesis of works from the 1960s and 1970s, such as Eugen Weber’s *Peasants into Frenchmen: the Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914* (Stanford, 1979), recent books include Celia Applegate, *A Nation of Provincials: The German Idea of Heimat* (Berkeley, 1990) and Alon Confino, *The Nation as a Local Metaphor: Württemberg, Imperial Germany, and National Memory, 1871-1918* (Chapel Hill, 1997). More recently, Celia Applegate delivered a paper on “A Europe of Regions” as part of an *American Historical Review* Forum “Bringing Regionalism Back to History.”⁵

As for common parlance outside the history profession, focus on the region or the locality is actually a fairly modern development. Early modern Europeans never spoke or wrote about their “region,” *per se*. And 19th-century nation builders viewed the localist past as particularist and corrupt. But nation-state builders and central administrators need local knowledge. In this sense, regionalism is the language of modern policy bureaucrats. Indeed, the British Economic and Social Research Council defined “localities” as journey-to-work areas during research in the 1980s.⁶ Perhaps the acceptance of and study of

⁴Aims and Scope: <http://www3.oup.co.uk/enghis/scope/>. Of course the division suggested here is not absolute. The Organization of American Historians was founded in 1907 as the Mississippi Valley Historical Association.

⁵Celia Applegate, Kären Wigen, Michael O’Brien, and Vincente L. Rafael, “Bringing Regionalism Back to History” (AHR Forum), *American Historical Review* 104, 4 (1999): 1156-220.

⁶Philip Cooke, ed., *Localities: The Changing Face of Urban Britain* (London, 1989). See also, Michael Harloe, ed., *Place, policy and politics: Do localities matter?* (London, 1990).

the regional can only flourish where the nation-state is least contested. Thus, for example, Michael O’Brien has recently suggested that the South was only described as a region of the United States well after the Civil War left the Southern nation and to some extent Southern nationalism in tatters. Throughout Europe it was only in the 20th century that “[r]egion came to radiate from the nation, upward and downward.”⁷ One person’s region is another person’s nation. In the 21st century, local historians must not worry so much about the pitfalls of antiquarianism, which the following essays successfully avoid, that they become mired in the “officialese” of area studies and modernization theory.

It is paradoxical, then, that *Localités/Localities* trumpets the establishment of a web-based center for local history established by professional historians. The web is the shibboleth of modernity. (Historians are not the only ones who prefer the incipient to the vestigial; compare the share price of any web-based company with its revenue.) What role could local antiquarianism have in an age of super-fast, super-national transfers of information? Of course, perhaps local historians like ourselves are simply seeking a path towards self-preservation, establishing an electronic as opposed to printed journal.⁸ Or perhaps we are following the lead of the many historians who have seen the virtues of hypertext markup language (HTML, the basis of all web pages) as the key to integrating large amounts of data, text, and images.⁹ Perhaps, however, one can better explain the paradox by noting the web’s peculiar relationship to nationalism. The nation-state seems a limited idea when measured against the world wide web. Exactly how, for example, will one nation’s politicians regulate the web? Can the Chinese

⁷Michael O’Brien, “On Observing the Quicksand,” *American Historical Review*, 104, 4 (1999): 1202-7. The waning of Southern nationalism is, of course, a contentious topic. See Drew Gilpin Faust, *The creation of Confederate nationalism: ideology and identity in the Civil War South* (Baton Rouge, 1988); Paul D. Escott, *After secession: Jefferson Davis and the failure of Confederate nationalism* (Baton Rouge, 1992). O’Brien’s point with regard to the language of regional study, however, still holds.

⁸David Ransel, “The Present and Future of Historical Journals,” *Perspectives* (Oct. 1995): 5-6.

⁹See, for example, Roy Rosenzweig and Steve Brier, “Historians and Hypertext: Is It More than Hype?,” *Perspectives* (March 1994): 3-6.

keep international ideas out? Can nations tax e-commerce? Further, in the new world order of super-national entities like the European Union, national identity and national history appears as just one of many choices, not the prime choice, possible to explain the past.

In the post-1989 world of the break-up of the U.S.S.R., the Eastern bloc, and Yugoslavia, one might argue that nationalism is, once again, the driving force of the modern world. But is nationalism the most refined tool for understanding the Kosovo Albanians or Bosnian Serbs? Recent articles have suggested that the Bosnian war teaches that future conflicts will be shaped by regional not national history and identities.¹⁰ Furthermore, is nationalism really progressive? Mike Zwerin's *A case for the Balkanization of practically everyone* (London, 1976) rather naively viewed "Balkanization" positively. Although, today, such a process looks much more like a return to barbarism, one could agree that Balkanization is a trend, rather than a manifesto, in current history. Two years ago, Britain allowed English counties again to refer to their pre-1974 names (for example, the 1974 creation "Hereford and Worcester" county allowed Hereford to reclaim its archive as the Herefordshire Record Office). And, recently, a political storm erupted in France when President Jacques Chirac looked all set to sign the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages, which would have granted cultural legitimacy to Bretons, Alsatian, Basque, and other regional languages. Several French politicians saw national unity threatened and noted that the Charter contradicted the 1992 constitution of France, which states that "the language of the republic is French." France's senior judicial body, the *Conseil d'Etat*, ruled that the French constitution was incompatible with the Charter. In 1999, President Chirac refused to change the Constitution.¹¹ France, evidently, still takes the *mentalités* of local identity (*localités*) seriously enough to fear it, even though Corsica is the only area with an armed and active separatist

¹⁰See, for example, John Newhouse, "Europe's Rising Regionalism," *Foreign Affairs* 76 (1997): 68.

¹¹Council of Europe, European Treaties, Ets No. 148, "European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, 1992," <http://www.coe.fr/eng/legaltxt/148e.htm>; Celtic League, "Ruling blow to Breton Language—22-02-97," <http://www.manxman.co.im/cleagu/chirac.html>.

movement. We embrace the history of *localités* and of regions, counties, and villages (localities) because they effect history as a whole.

The accompanying articles explain how historians of Europe and the Americas have used and are using local history. Terry Barnhart thoroughly overviews local history in the United States. He suggests that local history bridges between the professional historian and the public's understanding of history. Nora Pat Small's study illustrates what local history can reveal. Her study of the Industrial Revolution in Sutton analyzes, among other things, the historical evidence that remains rooted in the locality—the material culture and architecture. Her example of what nineteenth-century Massachusetts inhabitants thought about their past also reveals something about *localités* (although, admittedly, she does not use the term). Debra Ann Reid reveals what the material culture of one region tells us about racial, gender, and even political history in the area. Community studies such as her examination of black community canning centers takes us to the level of the individuals that comprise the smallest level of local history. But the findings are no less significant.

"All politics is local," as that famed social historian Speaker Tip O'Neill said. And a crucial component of local history is politics. Daniel McMillan discusses the importance of local politics in the formation of Modern Germany. Of course, nation-states, like Germany, were built in part on the suppression of previous local identities: Würtemberg, Saxony, etc. Did McMillan's gymnastic clubs ever refer to regional identity outside the Fatherland (which, of course, was incipient at best in the mid-nineteenth century)? The politics of national and regional identity is the subject of Ben Fallaw's analysis of the history of Yucatán and other regions in Mexico. There are good methodological and hermeneutic reasons for studying voluntary, small groups or regions, as McMillan and Fallaw, respectively, demonstrate. But there is also a political reason. These local identities often resisted and shaped national development and, therefore, need to be recovered in order to do justice to the history of the whole. "*Localités* and early modern Britain"

focuses mainly on *English* local identities, primarily allegiance to the county community. One might ask whether Welsh, Scottish, English, and Irish identities are not *localités* so much as nationalities. But, as one book title asked, *When Was Wales?* Do *localités* and nationalism intersect at some point on a spectrum? Christopher Waldrep's analysis shows how the criminal law was used to very different purposes in three different communities in the nineteenth-century United States. Local input into supposedly national processes was considerable. His conclusion, that "neighborhoods and villages decide when the state should intervene," should resonate with historians outside legal history and the United States.

The last set of articles begins the history of our own locality, Coles County, Illinois, in earnest. We hope this chronicle and narrative will be useful to students of history from fourth grade to post-graduate studies. While Barnhart's critical review on local history and the American experience rightly points to the hagiographic chronicles of town, county, or state "firsts" that some local historians have fostered, a timeline of known details is useful if only to point to the established sources which have provided those details. Mark Voss-Hubbard and I offer a chronicle of Coles County history in that spirit. Terry Barnhart wrote a brief narrative of Copperheads in Illinois during the Civil War for the *Illinois History Teacher*, and we are grateful to the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency to reprint that along with a guide to further reading. Finally, as we go to press, we have put the initial legal cases drawn from the records of Coles County housed at the Illinois Regional Archives Depository (IRAD) in Booth Library at Eastern Illinois, into a database online. We are grateful to Bob Hillman of Booth Library and Karl Moore of IRAD for enabling this project to continue. We are quite excited about the potential of this database and seek to make it useful for high school and college students as well as genealogists and researchers around the world.