

museums and academic history is comparatively weaker, and the American ideas of public history have not forged as strong a bond.³

Local history has a long respectable past. In the United States, as in other national traditions, the past has been fascinating and often sacred to its citizens. This led to the establishment of many local historical societies charged with saving both the material culture and documentary heritage of the community's history. Historical societies are as old as the United States. Some of the first historical societies, such as the Massachusetts and New York Historical Societies, were founded soon after this country was established. They initially sought to save materials from the people involved with the Revolution.⁴ These states were formed on the basis of colonial boundaries and forming societies on the basis of states seemed reasonable. The inclination for Americans to divide themselves into regions is deeply embedded in the colonial past and the tendency for historians to create societies based on the different regions is a natural one.⁵ It was only logical for early historical studies in the United States to center on localities. In its early incarnations, local histories and historical societies were handled by "patrician historians," interested in preserving the past of the elite, to honor the venerable pioneers, and to teach the younger generation the great feats that their ancestors had performed before they were lost to the past.⁶ After the Civil War, as W.B. Hesseltine notes, the United States national government was stronger, which influenced studies in politics, culture, economics and history to be national in their focus.⁷ Odes to local founders and hearty pioneers continued, but a national conception of history began to emerge in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

³C. Wesley Johnson Jr., "An American Impression of Public History in Europe," *History Today* 34 (Fall 1984), 87-97.

⁴American Association for State and Local History. *Local History. National Heritage: Reflections on the History of the AASLH* (Nashville, 1991).
⁵ See David Russo, *Keepers of our Past: Local Historical Writing in the United States, 1820s-1930s* (New York, 1988), 10-1.

⁶Jensen Merrill, ed., *Regionalism in America* (Madison, 1952), 3-20.

⁷Carol Kammen, *On Doing Local History: Reflections of What Local Historians Do, Why, and What It Means* (Nashville, 1986), 14-7.
⁸Merrill, *Regionalism in America*, 143.

Locally Speaking: United States and English Local History Compared

Jennifer Van Haften

Jennifer Van Haften is a graduate student in the Historical Administration program at Eastern Illinois University. This essay was written for a seminar in Historical Interpretation with Professor Terry Barnhart during Fall 1996.

Local history has been an anomaly—a stepchild—in the academic discipline of history. In the European and American historical traditions of the nineteenth century, history was written to highlight important people and events in the dominant nation-states of the western hemisphere within a national framework. A paradigm shift occurred in historical profession in the 1950s and 1960s that emphasized study of the general population or specific groups at various periods of history, i.e., social history. The shift underscored the potentially valuable use of local history as case studies of national trends. Local history began to take on a broader meaning.

The public history movement of the last twenty years has given further impetus to the study of local history. While in Europe public history, or applied history as Europeans are apt to call it, is exclusively equated with the formation of public policy, the United States views public history as that which is applied for the use of the public.¹ American historians see the advent of public history as the link between local and academic history, giving both greater use and validation by the general population at large. Public history is also the arena in which museum and historical agency professionals ply their craft and serve as a link between local history, historical methodology, and public audiences.² In Great Britain, the link between local history,

¹Anthony Sutcliffe, "Gleanings and Echoes of Public History in Western Europe: Before and After the Rotterdam Conference," *The Public Historian*, 6 (Fall 1984): 8, 13.

²John Alexander Williams, "Public History and Local History: An Introduction," *The Public Historian* 5 (Fall 1983): 13-4.

agriculture, topics that often were left untouched by academic historians before the 1960s.¹²

Despite its apparent popularity with the public at large in the United States, local history has had a difficult struggle to become a part of professional history. This was because the people who were heading local societies and writing county histories were often not trained academic historians. It made their work seem suspect. Indeed often there were good reasons for these low opinions. However, there were many avocational historians who contributed distinguished works. They analyzed their locales as case studies for trends in national events. They were already performing the work that Kammen was promoting.

W.G. Hoskins took an integrated approach to the subject in *Local History in England*. Like Kammen, Hoskins notes that people interested in doing local history cherished and were interested in their own local community. Hoskins instructs his readers that a local historian needs to have a good general knowledge of English history to be able to put the local history in perspective, a sentiment shared by Kammen. He is also concerned that local historians seem to concentrate only on documents and suggests the use of fieldwork to add depth.¹³ Cultural geography, or cultural history broadly defined, is a hallmark of Hoskins school of English local history.

Since the second edition of Hoskins' book, several articles in British historical journals have revisited local history. As in the United States, local history enjoyed a rebirth beginning with Hoskins first edition of his book in 1959, which continued into the 1960s and 1970s as academic historians began to delve into the "new" social history. Local history provided more details about the deep structure of communities and "common" occurrences, as opposed to the national overview of politics and economics. There was a parallel resurgence in the use of local history in local schools. Several authors believed that local history, including visits to museums, can be used as a way to move away from the traditional textbook histories and towards a multi-cultural approach. As in the U.S.A., Great Britain has been struggling with its own debate about the use of history in schools

¹²Kammen, *The Pursuit of Local History*, 27-8, 38.

¹³Hoskins, *Local History in England*, 6, 8, 123.

Historians in Great Britain also followed the historiographical tradition of focusing on prominent people and events in their early national histories. W.G. Hoskins, a prominent pioneer in bringing local history to academia in England, noted that parish noblemen were some of the first historians to write local histories in England, appearing as early as the late fifteenth century. These types of writers concentrated on the people and the activities that occurred in the manor instead of the village. Although there were many such histories written, by the nineteenth century, historians in academic departments were concentrating on national social and economic issues, which rose out of the cultural nationalism that prevailed in the Western world during the nineteenth century.⁸ Carol Kammen, an American local historian and author, has noted that the history of the early writings on local history in England and the United States are similar. She believed it is because the upper classes had the time to write histories with that related stories of the successful and wealthy people like themselves.⁹

The nature of local history seems to be a difficult subject for many authors to define. The most comprehensive definitions have been put forth by Carol Kammen for the United States and W.G. Hoskins for England. In *The Pursuit of Local History: Readings on Theory and Practice*, Kammen charges authors of American local history to focus on the ordinary people of a specific community. She also stresses that local historians should not work in a vacuum and need to be aware of broad historical perspectives.¹⁰ She is adamant that material culture is an important part of writing good local history, and that a local audience is often the primary target for local histories.¹¹ Previous local histories in the United States were motivated by an attachment to the local community and a curiosity to trace the history of the area in which the historian lived. The subjects of local history have included education, poor relief, religion, and

⁸W.G. Hoskins, *Local History in England* 2d ed. (London, 1972), 17-26.

⁹Kammen, *On Doing Local History*, 17.

¹⁰Carol Kammen ed., *The Pursuit of Local History: Readings on Theory and Practice* (Walnut Creek, Cal, 1996), 15-6.

¹¹David Russo, "Some Impressions of the Non Academic Local Historians and Their Writing," in *The Pursuit of Local History*, ed. Kammen, 38. See also *Ibid.*, 27-8.

professional academic historians do not fully recognize this organization's contributions to historical knowledge.

In England local historians and museum professionals continue work separate from those doing history in universities. The rift in England seems to be greater, because there is very little dialogue between the two in professional journals, whereas the United States has active discussion on the role of museum professionals and other public historians in both academia and the general public.¹⁷ Historians in both countries see a rift between the many facets of history and there is a great clamor for cooperation between all branches of history, whether professional, amateur, student, professor, historians and laymen.¹⁸

In the United States, museum professionals are still often labeled amateurs as well, even though academia has created training programs promoting better historical methods and expertise in running historical agencies, and techniques for presenting history to the public.¹⁹ In Great Britain, the gap still remains wide. The few museum studies programs offered in England are often separated from history departments and placed in the realm of art history, as museums professionals are often thought of as people who work in art galleries. Again, the University of Leicester is a leader in museum studies programs that emphasize history in museums, and that relates museum work to the broader discipline of history.

Local history and academic history are struggling to find common ground in the United States and Great Britain. Both Kaminen and Hoskins charge local historians in their respective countries to follow academic standards, even if they have never had formal training. Local history continues to have a poor reputation in some quarters, because the earlier histories were often based upon legends and were biased as to what they

¹⁷Richard Cavendish, "British Association for Local History," *History Today* 41 (September 1991): 62-3; Dennis Mills, "Local History on the Council Agenda," *History Today* 43 (December 1993): 10-2.

¹⁸Judith Wellman, "Local Historians and Their Activities," in *The Pursuit of Local History*, ed. Kaminen, 46-50.

¹⁹Myron A. Marty, "The Place of Local History in the training of Public Historians," *The Public Historian* 5 (Fall 1983): 77-87; Peter J. Beck, "Forward with History: Studying the Past for Careers in the Future," *The Public Historian* 6 (Fall 1984): 40-64.

and the question of instilling national patriotism through history. Some that an introduction to town elders and their knowledge of its history would give children a sense of pride and place.¹⁴

Part of the problem in the defining local history and its value to the general public and the historical profession comes from the difficulty of pinpointing who exactly can be or is a local historian. The struggle is similar in the United States and England. Both Hoskins and Kaminen, and other writers on local history, conceded that some local history was written by amateurs untrained in historical methods and writing for their own gratification, which produced histories that were inaccurate, non-analytical, and often lacked documentary and bibliographical references.¹⁵ At the same time, they recognized that there were local historians writing at a scholarly level. The books they have written are models for local historians to emulate.

Tensions have sometimes developed between local historians who are sentimentally tied to the community and outside academics using histories of localities removed from their own experience as case studies. In the United States, historians such as Herbert G. Gutman in *Work, Culture, and Society*, have worked within the realm of local history to flesh out their theses. England has created a Chair of Local History at the University of Leicester. But local history is still separated from the general study of history. In the United States and England, local history is also considered the realm of most museum professionals, although Hoskins does not include museum staff in local history.¹⁶ Local museums could benefit from the advice on local history given in Kaminen's works. Museum professionals and local historians in the United States come together in the American Association for State and Local History, but often

¹⁴Damen Gregory, "Threads of Lancashire History," *History Today* 39 (October 1989): 4-5; "Editorial," *History Today* 39 (October 1989): 2.

¹⁵Kaminen *The Pursuit of Local History*, 24-6, 38-9; Kaminen, *On Doing Local History*, 14-33; Hoskins, *Local History in England*, 27.

¹⁶Gregory, "Threads," 4-5; Williams, "Public History," 14; Harvey Green, "The Role of Research in Public Historical Agencies," *The Public Historian* 5 (Fall 1983): 71-6; Mark Rawwisch, Sandra Metzler-Smith, and Kathleen Kane, "Toot, Hug, or Die," *History News* (August 1982): 8. Also see Hoskins, *Local History in England*, *passim*.

included and excluded. The reputation also follows museum professionals, even after many of them are being trained in universities. Many historians, academic and otherwise, find value in the use of local history in academic studies and in publishing it for the public. Increasingly historians, academic and otherwise, have called for all to work together rather than to criticize each other from separate camps. Because this is echoed so many times on both sides of the Atlantic, it is surprising that so little has been done to bridge that gap. England and the United States could learn much from each other by developing an exchange between local historical organizations, since the problems associated with local history are often quite similar.²⁰ A fuller recognition of the museum profession in local historical studies in England, could, for example, create new alliances and collaboration serving all who work in the field.

Reviews

Iconoclasm: A Historiographical Essay

Lois A. Dickenson

Lois Dickenson is a graduate student at Eastern Illinois. This review essay was written for a graduate seminar on the Renaissance and Reformation for Professor Joy Kammerling during Fall 1996. It examines the historiography of iconoclasm across Reformation Europe.

Historians have long acknowledged that the rejection of the validity of image worship, often followed by outbursts of iconoclasm, was the hallmark of the Protestant Reformation in many communities. Interpretations of the changes in the popular perception of religious images differ widely. Some historians have noted an abrupt, rapid, and widespread change in image perception, while others argue that it occurred slowly and reluctantly on the part of the common population. The basis for iconoclastic acts has also been debated. Was iconoclasm a natural product of Protestant theology, or was it an expression of local/regional socio-economic or political factors? Alternatively, was iconoclasm an expression of ritualistic symbolism traditional among the general population?

This essay reviews the scholarly debate on these questions. Because of the multi-faceted dimensions of the problem of images and iconoclasm during the Reformation, the theses and arguments examined herein are drawn from several schools of historical thought—art history, social history, intellectual history—with the belief that these differing approaches contribute unique insights. Likewise, the broad geographic range of iconoclastic events has prompted the inclusion of arguments based on incidents scattered from France to Russia. The variance in local background provides not only a basis for examining similarities and differences in the arguments concerning the basis for iconoclasm, but also provides an opportunity to examine the

²⁰Cavendish, "British Association," 62-3; Larry E. Tise, "State and Local History: A Future from the Past," *The Public Historian* 1 (Summer 1979): 14-