

Editor's Corner

Addressing the Legacy of Eugenics in California State Parks

Sarah H. Case

The current issue features multiple authors who detail a model of publicly engaged, collaborative, and activist historical work. Titled “Reckoning with Our Past: California State Parks and the Dark Side of the Conservation Movement,” the issue examines a collaborative effort that began in 2020 between academics, public historians, and representatives from California State Parks to remove a plaque honoring eugenicist and white supremacist Madison Grant and to change the name of the Madison Grant Forest and Elk Refuge, which is part of Prairie Creek Redwoods State Park. Paul Spickard of the University of California, Santa Barbara introduces the special issue and David G. McIntosh, a professor of history and anthropology at Southeast New Mexico College, provides context on Grant’s career as a conservationist and eugenicist as well as his particular interest in northern California’s redwoods. Performance studies scholar Rena M. Heinrich of the University of Southern California then details the process of working with California State Parks and the state legislature to remove the plaque and create a new panel to more accurately assess the legacy of Grant and the history of the park. Leslie Hartzell, Chief of the Cultural Resources Division of California State Parks, describes the reaction of state parks officials to the effort to remove the plaque and its incorporation into the “Re-examining Our Past Initiative,” a state-wide effort to survey place names and monuments within the state park system and change those deemed offensive, inaccurate, or out of date. Victor Bjelajac, District Superintendent of the North Coast Redwoods District State Parks, where the plaque was located, discusses his work with the Re-examining our Past Initiative. Finally, we include a 2017 letter written by Jim Wheeler, a longtime National Park Service employee and interpreter in North Coast State Parks, voicing dismay that the park honored Grant in a document that predated and anticipated the effort discussed here. The articles together provide a model of multidisciplinary, university–state agency collaboration.

In this issue we also feature a section of reviews of public history sites in the city of Atlanta, the 2023 NCPH meeting host city. With the return of in-person meetings, we reestablished our practice of highlighting the host city, and Atlanta, as well as other Georgia communities, offered a rich array.

Finally, I would like to introduce our two new special editors. Taylor Stoermer, our Film and Digital Media Editor, is a historian of early America with extensive

public history, museum, and digital media experience. He is also an Emmy Award-winning filmmaker with his own studio, Størmerlige Productions LLC, and he teaches public history and at Johns Hopkins University. His wide-ranging expertise will help elevate our attention to film as well as digital media, an increasingly important aspect of public history scholarship. Likewise, we welcome Jennifer Scott, previously a member of our editorial board, as our new Museum and Exhibitions Editor. Scott is currently founding Executive Director and Chief Curator of the Urban Civil Rights Museum (UCRM) expected to open in Harlem, New York, in 2025. She has also served as director of the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum and the Senior Vice President of Exhibitions and Programs at the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History in Detroit, one of the nation's earliest and most significant Black arts, history, and cultural institutions. I am so pleased to add these brilliant and accomplished public historians to our editorial team.