

# THE TRILLIUM



## Big Berks 2023 Program Committee Chairs

The Program Committee Chairs for the 2023 Big Berks are Maile Arvin (Utah), Miroslava Chavez-Garcia (UC-Santa Barbara), Karen Leong (Arizona State), and Sasha Turner (Johns Hopkins). The committee chairs are hard at work assembling the program committee and working with the executive committee to plan the conference. We asked them to respond to four questions about their hopes for the 2023 conference. Here are their (edited) responses.

### What are you most excited about seeing as part of the 2023 Big Berks?

All the committee members expressed their excitement at the ways in which the CFP reframes our understanding of women's history by centering intersectionality and geography and decentering nationality. Turner wrote that she is

“hoping we can create opportunities to bring together scholars critical of western definitions of the human that place some people as being outside the category of the human to facilitate accumulation and consumption and mastery and exploitation of the environment. How can an intersectional feminist accounting of history, that is attentive to the perils of -isms (racism, sexism, colonialism, etc.) expose similar dangers in placing differently bodied forms – oceans, islands, continents – beyond the realm of intellectual inquiry and agency, and therefore suited only for exploitation and



Sasha Turner

## Call for Submissions

Submission for the 2020 Article and Book Prizes are now open!

Authors, publishers and colleagues are encouraged to submit monographs and articles written by women normally resident in North America in the following categories:

- a first book that deals substantially with the history of women, gender, and/or sexuality;
- a first book in any field of history that does not focus on the history of women, gender, and/or sexuality;
- an article in the fields of the history of women, gender, and/or sexuality;
- an article in any field of history other than the history of women, gender, and/or sexuality.

See <https://berksconference.org/prizes/> for more details.

accumulation?"

### How do you think the pandemic will impact the conference?

The chairs all commented on the impact the pandemic will have not only on our scholarship, which has been slowed or constrained by the inability to travel and the need to rely on digitized resources and on attendance. The program chairs are particularly attentive to the ways in which the pandemic will exacerbate existing barriers to participation from scholars outside the U.S. and scholars not at research universities. Leong said that the pandemic highlights our need to reflect on the impact of our scholarship on

our communities and how we can more effectively communicate our relevance as scholars of women's history to



Karen Leong

society at large.

### What drew you to participating in the Berks as an organization?

The program committee chairs are made up of veteran

### #SAYHERNAME

The Berks stands with Black women as scholars, as activists and as individuals.

members and scholars new to the organization. Leong was invited to participate by the co-presidents and was excited by their vision. Turner and Chavez-Garcia were already members and both commented on the importance of the organization's diversity and its role as a space for mentoring and nurturing scholarship and friendship.

### What is the one thing you want panel organizers to think about as they develop their proposals?



Miroslava  
Chavez-Garcia

The chairs call on panel organizers to challenge the traditional panel and think about new connections and diversity of membership. Chavez-Garcia wrote, "I would very much like them to think about how they might make their panels more diverse, that is, how they might invite new perspectives, voices, and vantage points that might make them uncomfortable. In an era of Black Lives Matter, we need to recognize the social, political, and economic inequities across nearly all sectors of our lives, especially in academia. It's no surprise -- at

## Letter from the Editor

I hope you all are nearing the end of your fall semesters and planning some rest and rejuvenation for winter break. Since the last issue of the newsletter we have held an amazingly successful Little Berks, watched a key election in the United States, and survived the rest of a semester teaching virtually or masked. Many of us have lost family, friends, colleagues or students to COVID-19 and we are facing ever higher rates of infection. As I think about how I will recover from a tough semester of teaching remotely and reinvigorate myself for the spring, I have thought carefully about how to incorporate reflection and deliberate pauses into my teaching and service in 2021. I am building points at which I ask my self, students and colleagues to reflect on our own mental and physical health, the health of our community and how we might support one another into my syllabi, meeting agendas and research plans. As many expressed at the virtual Little Berks, the pandemic has left many of us bereft of our communities and while virtual connections cannot fully replace the joy of being together in a room, at least we can make an effort not to forget to stop, connect and reflect together.

In solidarity,

Stephanie J. Richmond, Editor



"Women belong in all places where decisions are being made. It shouldn't be that women are the exception." - Ruth Bader Ginsburg



least to me, as a first-generation, immigrant, Chicana of working class origins -- of why academia has so few people who look like me and my community. We need to change that."

## People of the Berks

Each issue, a short bio of one of our members will appear in this column. This quarter, we will meet Katrina Gulliver, who has been a Berks member for ten years.



Katrina is a teaching associate in History at Bristol University and contributor to a variety of magazines. She is also serving as the chair of the article prize committee for 2020 and was just elected a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society. Her first experience with the Berks was attending a Little Berks about a decade ago and she says "It was the first time I had been to an academic event that wasn't 'academic.' It was about socialising with the group; not racing from panel to panel." She continued to attend Little Berks after her first experience and recalls one of her favorite experiences, when

long-time member and former Berks President Mary Beth Norton gave a few attendees a guided tour of the Saratoga Springs National Park.

## History, Threatened

2020 has brought an overwhelming number of challenges to higher education. Online learning, questions about the safety of dormitories, and declines in enrollment have lowered profit margins and threatened budgets at universities and colleges across the world. As always happens when budget shortfalls loom, the arts and humanities have come under attack. Universities have announced plans to lay off faculty, eliminate programs and close departments in history, gender studies, African American studies and other programs which don't generate major dollars in student tuition or grants. The "distance" required by COVID-19 precautions has made it easier for administrators to make plans to cut programs while faculty and students are off campus and alumni are distracted by the constant deluge of bad news. As a result, faculty in history programs across the country are having to justify the continuation of their programs and their jobs. Sadly, for many of us working at institutions that operate with little or no financial safety net, this is nothing new. Some advice from veterans of this war: know your numbers.

## Membership Options

As the year draws to a close, we remind you to renew your membership. We have added a 3 year membership option to ensure that you don't have to remember to renew between Big Berks!. The fees for an Annual Membership are as follows:

- \$100 if your income is above \$100,000
- \$75 if your income is between \$75,000 – \$100,000
- \$50 if your income is between \$50,000 – \$75,000
- \$25 if your income is between \$25,000 – \$50,000
- \$10 if your income is below \$25,000

The fees for a **Three Year Membership** are as follows:

- \$280 if your income is above \$100,000
- \$210 if your income is between \$75,000 – \$100,000
- \$140 if your income is between \$50,000 – \$75,000
- \$70 if your income is between \$25,000 – \$50,000
- \$25 if your income is below \$25,000

To join the Berks or renew your membership, please fill out our secure online [membership form](#).

Make sure you have concrete numbers of majors, where alumni have been employed, and the number of students in and outside the major taught by the department each year. Get testimonials: qualitative data of stories of the impact your programs have on the community and alumni matter, especially if those alumni or community members are donors. Build bridges with STEM disciplines: find allies in the sciences, build interdisciplinary courses and

programs that will show administrators how the humanities are essential for everyone. Finally, get the students involved. Their tuition dollars matter to the university and if they (and their parents) are unhappy about plans to cut faculty lines or programs, they

will be heard when you may not be. Lastly, reach out to colleagues who can speak to the research importance of the faculty in your department. Since the humanities don't measure impact factor like the sciences do, it is often hard for

administrators to understand the importance of our work. Testimonials can do this, especially from colleagues at peer institutions or who have a high public profile. The Berks will support members in this task as well.

## 2019 Prizes Awarded at the Little Berks

Below are the prize committee's blurbs for the article prizes for 2019. The book prize blurbs will be printed in the next issue.

### **An article in the fields of the history of women, gender, and/or sexuality.**

Elisa Camiscioli, "Coercion and Choice: The 'Traffic in Women' between France and Argentina in the Early Twentieth Century," *French Historical Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 3 (August 2019): 483-507.

In her richly drawn article on French women who migrated to Argentina to work in the sex trade at the turn of the century, Elisa Camiscioli reconsiders the "formulaic quality" of melodramatic narratives associated with sex trafficking or "white slavery" that might "tempt us to dismiss them as evidence for understanding women's experiences (486)." In her reflection on the "power of the melodramatic narrative" (487), she grapples with polarized feminist debates over prostitution and trafficking at the beginning of the twentieth century that have survived into the twenty-first century. These debates turn on the extent to which prostitution can be a "choice" and a "viable survival strategy" versus "sexual slavery (487)." Camiscioli rejects this binary choice to focus on how, in myriad ways, women negotiated difficult and often limited options. Emphasizing this point, she writes, "What was a courageous transatlantic voyage for one woman—and, by extension, the flouting of gendered notions of social space that restricted women's mobility and confined their intimate labor to the domestic sphere—was disastrous for another (489)." The committee agreed that Camiscioli brought significant new insight into a subject—working-class women's work in the sex trade—that has been a topic of interest to women's historians for decades. They also praised her for bringing a transnational lens to the subject as women migrated overseas—some looking for "adventure or self-realization," some finding "danger and risk," many living versions of both, on the "route to Buenos Aires (489)."

### **An article in any field of history other than the history of women, gender, and/or sexuality.**

Bathsheba Demuth, "The Walrus and the Bureaucrat: Energy, Ecology, and Making the State in the Russian and American Arctic, 1870-1950," *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 124, No. 2 (April 2019): 483-510.

Bathsheba Demuth's pathbreaking and riveting article impressed the committee as it deftly brought together historical themes associated with environmental management of animal species, international energy imperatives, settler colonialism, and the establishment the Soviet Union and the United States in the Arctic, all refracted through the lens of fluctuating walrus herds hunted as both food and as a source of industrial fat in the Bering Strait. While the Soviet communist and United States capitalist systems are often thought of as polarized, Demuth demonstrates that they were both bound to "energy-acquisitive economic visions" in which "governing the non-human was as critical to modern state formation as national security and social welfare (484)." Demuth also raises interesting questions about historical periodization as combining both human and animal existence; she explains that "a pup born in the 1870s came of age in a Bering Strait newly divided between the United States and Imperial Russia, and gave birth to her last pups in the years before Lenin came out of exile (483)." The walrus becomes an actor in history as a result of "Beringian ecology meeting the material expectations of modern states (483-484)." The committee also praised Demuth for her historical treatment of Native peoples in this story—their grappling with assimilationist policies and starvation caused by over-hunting—in the face of the colonial "civilizing" ambitions of both the United States and the Soviet Union. While the United States and Soviet systems had different goals, both viewed Native people as instrumental pawns—settlers in an "empty" territory who could process energy and ivory for capitalist profit or "civilized socialists" who would populate a "communist territory (495)" and increase walrus oil production. She argues that "rather than providing freedom from nature . . . the United States and the Soviet Union managed their respective visions of freedom in this particular case with nature (507)."