PROLOGUE

A New Kind of Technician

In Search of the Culture of Public History

My primary problem was to take a man trained in history and make a real Park Service man out of him. Some men trained in history never fit that bill. . . . Some were good in the books, but they couldn't deal with the public; they couldn't deal with the physical conditions on the ground. I had to create a new kind of technician.

—VERNE CHATELAIN—

Public History and the Problem of Definition

When Verne Chatelain, the first chief historian of the National Park Service, recounted his efforts to create a "new kind of technician" during the 1930s, he implicitly understood that the historians he brought into his division were the inheritors of a distinct professional genealogy.[1] Before 1930 not a single historian had worked for the National Park Service. By the end of the decade, however, a small but growing number would be employed in the bureau's Washington, D.C., administrative offices, in each of the regional offices, and at many of its historic sites.[2] New Deal programs and initiatives expanded Park Service holdings and encouraged the development of historical programming. These initiatives enabled the Park Service to hire university-trained historians.

At the same time, it was evident to Chatelain that an advanced degree in history did not necessarily prepare historians for work in the federal government. Although trained to conduct research, many were unable to recognize material artifacts as historical documents, and few had the

personality needed to deal with either government bureaucracy or tourist demands. The men hired by Chatelain and by his successor, Ronald Lee, had to adopt work habits and values as much created by the marriage of government and science as nurtured by professors and university-based colleagues in the discipline of history. It was the strange alchemy created by the mix of science, government, history, and—to a lesser extent—the public itself that forged these new government workers, forcing them to become as good on the ground as they were in the books.

Examining both the long tangle of events that eventually called historians into government service and the first decisions they made as members of the Park Service History Division offers us a window into the formation of a unique field of expertise. Chatelain's new technicians were among the first public historians, and they had a profound impact on the evolution of the field. The programs they devised in the middle of the 1930s guided interpretive development, site selection, designation, and interpretive programming by the National Park Service through most of the twentieth century. The impact of their work remains tangible, evident in the number and kind of historic sites recognized and protected by the federal government.

Public history as a specialty field, a profession, and a course of study has earned broader recognition in recent years. In the United States, the practice of history for public consumption can be traced back at least 150 years and tracked through several stages of development—beginning with preservation work undertaken by women's voluntary associations in the mid-nineteenth century, maturing with the creation of state and regional historical societies in the late nineteenth century, and gaining legitimacy in the federal government during the middle part of the twentieth century.[3] Nonetheless, public history did not achieve recognition as a formal profession until the late twentieth century.

Beginning in the 1970s a group of university historians, concerned about the scarcity of jobs for history PhDs, created an often uneasy alliance with colleagues working in government agencies and historical societies. Their conversations about the usefulness of historical study for practical job training helped implement several significant milestones in the viability of public history: the founding of the first graduate program at the University of California, Santa Barbara (1976); the minting of a professional journal, *The Public Historian* (1978); and the creation of the National Council on Public History (NCPH) (incorporated on May 2, 1980). These relatively recent events are frequently recounted in textbooks, monographs, and articles

seeking to analyze or historicize some aspect of public history practice.[4] As a result, many students and instructors of public history, when asked to define the profession, point to the 1970s as the starting point.

Emphasizing the late twentieth-century ascendance of public history as a recognized field of intellectual inquiry has reinforced its stature as an academic specialty. The number of public history programs in colleges and universities grew from 60 in the 1990s to more than 110 in 2008. There is little doubt that the expanding number of public history tracks and programs in departments of history has had a measurable impact on the broader discipline. Public historians have been in the forefront of a movement to reform university promotion and tenure guidelines. Their work has helped to expand accepted definitions of scholarship so that exhibits, preservation reports, and other forms of historical analysis and interpretation may be recognized as the equivalent of books and articles for professors seeking tenure and promotion.[5] Professional associations have become increasingly welcoming to public historians not only as members but also as leaders.[6] Scholarly journals of history—most notably the *Journal of American History* published by the Organization of American Historians—include reviews of exhibits, documentary films, and websites alongside reviews of scholarly monographs. Furthermore, the ascendance of the field has had an impact on public perception. During the 1990s a significant survey of American attitudes found that a majority of those surveyed placed museums and historical societies among the most trustworthy sources for exploring the past.[7]

These milestones are worthy of celebration. Yet such intense focus on the legitimacy of public history has obscured a different set of questions—not about the profession's trajectory but about its habits of work and multidisciplinary culture. Ethnographers and anthropologists have led the charge in this direction. An important body of literature examines public history as a cultural field composed by differential power relationships among workers and between workers and visitors in specific institutions. Although this work has provided practitioners with a window into the dynamics that shape public interpretations of the past, their response to studies of this nature has often been defensive.[8]

Among public historians, the effort to define "public history" in the years following the establishment of its professional scaffolding has been ongoing and occasionally frustrating. Debates tend to circle around two general trends of thought. Some scholars emphasize the term "public," arguing that

the environment in which historians apply their craft impacts the questions, methodology, and content of interpretation. Others underscore the term "history," insisting that credentialed historians perform their work in accordance to the same disciplinary standards regardless of location or audience. During the 1970s all participants in this discussion had an equal stake in achieving professional authority and stability. But defining "public" as a place or an orientation and "history" as a strict discipline has stalled public history's maturation. Most casual observers can list the kinds of jobs that public historians do: They create exhibits. They conduct research that justifies preservation of particular buildings or landscapes. They collect artifacts and analyze their significance. Yet few people can articulate the qualities that mark public history as distinct from the larger discipline. Is any historian who writes text for a website accurately described as a public historian? Is every staff member in a government history office practicing public history? What about a historian who appears as a pithy talking head on PBS? Are scholars who study the role of museums, historical societies, and monuments in the creation of public memory necessarily practitioners of public history?

That it may be difficult to distinguish public historians from public intellectuals—a better term for scholars whose work resonates beyond the academy—is compelling evidence that the field has achieved legitimacy. Given that, it seems an appropriate time to move toward a more proactive effort to historicize and theorize the attitudes and habits of mind that make public history distinctive.

A History of the Public History Idea

The professionalization of public history was, indeed, fostered by specific historical events and conditions of the mid-1970s. The United States had entered into a period of severe economic recession, worsened by energy shortages, climbing inflation, and high unemployment rates. Academic institutions were not immune to these conditions. A shortage of tenure-track jobs in history departments across the United States led many doctoral programs to shrink the number of students they accepted into their programs, and a special committee of the American Historical Association advised department chairs to send letters of warning about poor job prospects along with letters of acceptance to those admitted into the program.[9] Concerned about the future of the profession and the usefulness of higher

education, historians across the country began developing new curricula and new programs of study designed to identify practical applications for intellectual work. Public history gained a firm foothold in the academy as a result of these trends.

Leaders in this academic public history movement were not primarily practitioners who had carved careers in the public sector. Rather, they were university-based historians such as Robert Kelley, who had supplemented his work as a university professor at the University of California, Santa Barbara, by serving as a consultant and expert witness for the state on matters related to water rights. Looking for ways to improve job prospects for their graduate students, academics like Kelley began to emphasize the broad marketability of a history degree, arguing that skill in research, analysis, and interpretation could be applied to a variety of jobs. Kelley's particular experience had piqued his interest in the intersection between public policy and history. Convinced that policymakers had, at best, misused history and, at worst, completely disregarded it, Kelley successfully applied for a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation to design a program that would foster better interplay between history and policy. He brought fellow historian and public policy expert G. Wesley Johnson into the project, hoping to draw on his experience in both developing specialized programs of study and managing grants from the Rockefeller Foundation. Together, they established the UCSB Public History Program as an experiment in practical job training for doctoral students in history.[10]

Seeking funding and promoting their program required Kelley and Johnson to develop a precise definition of public history. For them, the term captured their practical intentions. They sought to train students to export their historical skills to jobs outside university departments of history. At its most basic, Kelley explained, "Public History refers to the employment of historians and historical method outside of academia." Johnson recalled that the term "meant to us that historians had skills that could be used for public benefit, whether in business, government, foundations, historical societies, or wherever." They imagined sending their graduates "out, one by one, to demonstrate their value by their work."[11] Kelley saw that value as largely political. He advocated for the expansion and creation of government history offices as a way to both ease the job crisis and improve the effectiveness of public policy. Policymakers should, he believed, think like historians and recognize civic issues as taking shape in both time and place.

Kelley and Johnson were not alone in their efforts. The Organization

of American Historians and the American Historical Association, concerned about the long-term ramifications of the university job crisis, organized meetings and conferences to foster creative solutions to the problem. Frequent speakers at these meetings, Johnson and Kelley touted their public history program and identified a network of like-minded colleagues from universities across the country. Scholars at the University of South Carolina, for example, were reinvigorating their program in historic preservation. Historians at Carnegie Mellon University were creating a program in applied history. Together, this expanding group of scholars developed programs of study they believed would provide history graduate students a well-imagined set of marketable skills. Their ideas gained traction in 1978 when Johnson—then a visiting professor at Arizona State University—received a grant from the Arizona Humanities Council to organize the first of several conferences focused specifically on public history, laying the groundwork for the creation of a professional infrastructure.[12]

The great bulk of this initial work took place in academic circles, reflecting and reinforcing rifts among historians that had divided the discipline since its establishment in the late nineteenth century. Federal historians participated in meetings and conferences leading up to the creation of the NCPH, and they held positions on the board of directors from the organization's first days. Yet they were wary of their academic peers' interest in public sector work. Indeed, as Johnson later admitted with a bit of self-deprecating humor, "it was increasingly apparent that there were a number of practitioners of public history out there that we were not aware of."[13] But this lack of visibility was not humorous to historians working in the federal government. Jack M. Holl, a historian in the Department of Energy, admitted he had "briefly and ineffectually tried to stem the rising tide of Kelley's public history movement in the federal government."[14]

Federal historians such as Holl and David Trask, the chief historian for the U.S. Department of State, felt a profound disconnect between their work and the goals of public history and believed that the public history movement further marginalized them. Their disenchantment was exacerbated when the Organization of American Historians and the American Historical Association circulated a questionnaire, designed to collect detailed information about the history job market, that described jobs for historians outside of academia as "alternative careers." Holl wrote, "I did not believe that the professional concerns of federal historians could ever be satisfied by an organization overwhelmingly dominated by academic

historians who regarded our employment as 'alternative careers' and lumped us into a professional category of 'public history,' their short-hand term for 'non-academic history.'" The questionnaire confirmed federal historians' sense that the public history movement was strictly an academic venture, designed to legitimize graduate degrees in history, not to integrate federal historians into a more broadly defined discipline of history.[15]

In addition, far from being a viable career option for history graduates, government history divisions and archives were threatened by a job crisis of their own. The economic recession was fueling efforts to eliminate government waste and streamline the number and size of federal agencies. Several history divisions were shut down and history advisory boards disbanded. Without advisory boards to serve as a conduit to their university colleagues, the remaining government historians found themselves cut off from the profession and concerned about protecting not only their own jobs but also crucial government documents. For Holl this need seemed particularly pressing because public discourse during the Carter administration was dominated by worry over the energy crisis and the environmental impact of nuclear waste. As a result, access to energy policy documents was increasingly politicized. Unable to add permanent employees to his history staff, Holl scrambled to contract out requests for information and analysis to graduate students and junior historians. He turned to the fledgling public history movement for assistance but found little relief. Academic public historians were eager to train marketable, history-literate public policymakers, not necessarily policy-savvy historians. Holl wrote, "That was fine, but of little immediate concern to me as a practicing professional historian in the federal government."[16] To better address those concerns, federal historians organized meetings and conferences that paralleled efforts by academic public historians, and in February 1980 they formally organized a separate professional entity, the Society for Historians in the Federal Government.[17]

There is evidence to suggest Holl was correct in his assessment. At the university level, historians won financial support for courses and programs designed to broaden the appeal of history classes for majors and nonmajors alike. They encouraged students to apply the skills they learned in history to careers beyond those with "history" in the job description. For example, shortly after the creation of the society, Otis Graham, a historian of modern America, taught a public history course at the University of North Carolina Business School, titled "History for Decision Makers." Funded by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the course sought to

provide future economic policymakers with tools for thinking about pressing issues in terms of time and context. While enthusiastically reporting on the success of his particular public history model, Graham also expressed concern about the impact of public history on the larger discipline. Many university-based historians were wary of public history, he explained, because public historians often went beyond historicizing political questions to formulating policy directly and making questionable predictions based on the direct comparison of past and present issues. Graham worried, "The threat to the scholar's objectivity mounts, most of us would concede, with the distance we move from Widener Library or a graduate seminar at Stanford toward the executive offices of governments or corporations."[18]

Despite federal historians' unwillingness to be lumped in with self-described public historians, they were cast in the same light when university-focused colleagues raised questions about the "objectivity" of any historian who produced scholarship on behalf of a paying client. Both public historians and federal historians invested a great deal of intellectual capital into efforts to defend their professionalism in terms defined by the larger disciplinary structure. For federal historians, this was a particularly knotty problem. Buffeted by uncertainty about the future of their programs, suspicion about the usefulness of the public history movement, and dismay about the lack of respect from the larger discipline, federal historians were often the more dogged in insisting that public sector work was no different than work by historians in university settings. David Trask argued, "This has been an issue—whether public historians are different than academics. I say 'No.' I say they just have a different constituency, they work in a different context, but that the fundamental training and purpose and functions of historians are the same everywhere." Jack Holl viewed the issue similarly: "Because I made my living practicing my craft, why wasn't I simply a paid, professional historian?"[19]

Members of the academic public history movement often reflected a similarly defensive posture in their efforts to define the field. But efforts to establish an organizational mission for the NCPH and win administrative support for new academic programs required them to define and justify their creation of a new specialization. Philip Scarpino, an environmental historian and founder of the public history program at Indiana University–Purdue University, Indianapolis, famously argued that academic and public historians shared "common ground." He wrote, "All historians conduct research; all historians analyze and interpret what they

find; and all historians communicate their findings to others." Specialized training in public history would not alter historical methods or damage the discipline; rather, it would strengthen the discipline by broadening its appeal. He explained, "The differences between public history and the rest of the profession are found in the area of communication, in the audiences with whom we communicate, and in the methods that we use to communicate our scholarship to those audiences."[20]

Several scholars echoed the idea that public historians' communication with diverse audiences would help the discipline reaffirm its core values and larger usefulness. Robert Kelley argued that historical knowledge is more than simply the foundation of a "cultivated mind" or the basis of sophisticated foreign policy. Rather, historical methods are "essential in every kind of immediate, practical situation."[21] Although the focus on practicality and attention to contemporary problems often made public historians vulnerable to accusations of bias, the field's defenders insisted that a present-day perspective could generate high-quality scholarship. Theodore Karamanski, professor of public history at Loyola University in Chicago, argued that developing historical questions based on current events did not absolve public historians from adhering to standards of intellectual rigor: "All of our products, unlike many an academic monograph, contribute directly to society's daily activities, not just the life of the mind." Scholars such as Karamanski identified roots for public history in a specific disciplinary lineage. He noted the field's intellectual indebtedness to progressive historians such as Charles Beard and Frederick Jackson Turner, who sought to address through scholarship the profound social and political change they observed in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era. Following the lead of these forebears, public historians could reinvigorate the discipline's historical commitment to public service.[22]

Interestingly, most of the pioneering leaders in the public history movement stopped short of exploring the intersection of history and service, discipline and mission. For most, "public" remained a synonym for a generalized and somewhat passive "audience" and, as a result, public history programs initially focused on the products of public history work, not the process. They focused on the ways in which public history provided scholars with new avenues and methods for communicating their ideas, rather than raising questions about the relationships and motivations that drove such communication. Philip Scarpino clearly expressed the movement's reluctance to stray too far into these more challenging questions: "Public

history and the entire profession would be much better served by focusing on the research, analysis and interpretation, and communication that draws us all together. I like this approach because it emphasizes those things that all professional historians have in common; it argues for the legitimacy and importance of reaching a variety of audiences; and it assigns value to the different ways historians can communicate their scholarship to these audiences."[23] Such an approach retained the expertise and authority of public historians, but it left them unprepared for the extent to which audiences, employers, and others might resist and challenge such authority.

This observation should not call into question the tremendous importance of early efforts by public historians to define their specialty. Their dialogue on this subject had many fruitful, indeed crucial, outcomes, such as fostering important debates about the definition of historical scholarship.[24] It also raised questions about the necessity of credentialing public historians and encouraged more historians to prepare for work outside of university history departments.[25] The discussion led to better cooperation among academics, museum professionals, and federal historians from a variety of bureaus, which, in turn, improved reviews of exhibits, preservation reports, archival study guides, and other history products.[26]

Unintentionally, however, the early focus on legitimacy tended to harden disciplinary boundaries, forestalling a critical examination of the important impact that specialists from other fields have had on shaping public history. It is significant, for example, that simultaneous to the rise of public history in the mid-1970s, oral history was establishing its own professional identity. Oral historians, as part of this process, actively engaged in a conversation about methodology and work culture. J. Ronald Grele, groundbreaking oral historian and author of *Envelopes of Sound: The Art of Oral History,* made one of the first attempts to articulate his field's methodology and to make connections to the public history movement.[27] Grele praised scholars such as Kelley for raising important questions about the limited and limiting perception of historians as primarily researchers or university educators. At the same time, he observed that debates about public history had failed to articulate a clear sense of mission. He broadened the public history cohort, placing oral historians inside the movement and arguing, "Those of us who currently work in the field have not clearly defined what it is we do, why we do it, and why it is an alternative to other forms of historical effort." He observed that the focus on job placement, the emphasis on policy-making, and the conceptualization of the "public" as simply the "audience"

had failed to adequately conceptualize the function and value of historical research practiced outside the academy.[28]

Placing himself in the company of Karl Marx and the populist historian Carl Becker, Grele touted the belief that "every man can become his own historian." In this vein, "the task of the public historian, broadly defined, should be to help members of the public do their own history and to aid them in understanding their role in shaping and interpreting events." By imagining public historians as facilitators rather than communicators of history, Grele pioneered efforts to redefine the field, not as a product or an environment but as a collaborative practice. Grele saw public history as promising "a society in which a broad public participates in the construction of its own history. . . . If the public history movement lives up to its name, those of us who work in the field will recognize allies in the struggle to make historical consciousness a reality in American life."[29]

By the late twentieth century, public historians had finally begun to heed Grele's call. Scholars who bridged oral history and public history had introduced a better language for describing their relationship with audiences. Michael H. Frisch, for example, argued that oral historians' recognition of the ways in which interviewers and interview subjects share authority for shaping a narrative is a process that conveys to the practice of public history more generally.[30] As outgoing president of the NCPH in 2003, Rebecca Conard, professor of public history at Middle Tennessee State University, challenged public historians to identify the intellectual core of public history, tossing aside old fears about professional standing in favor of establishing a new foundation on which to build a set of best practices. Focusing on practice, she argued, provides students with a window for understanding what sets public history apart from the rest of the discipline and, specifically, allows students to recognize that "public history can be defined as the reflective practice of history."[31] In reflective practice, public historians engage in active collaboration, constantly reframing questions and improving interpretations in conversation with themselves and with their stakeholders—employers, audiences, and so on. In this way, public history requires both "shared authority" and "shared inquiry," a dynamic collaboration that ensures far more complex outcomes than simply engagement with matters of policy.[32]

Spurred on by this attention to the intellectual core—or, seen another way, the cultural value system, motivations, and beliefs that compose public history as practice—the NCPH board of directors began in 2007 to revisit its working definition of public history. Officers proposed a formal

definition that described public history as "a movement, methodology, and approach that promotes the collaborative study and practice of history" and described public historians as embracing "a mission to make their special insights accessible and useful to the public." Far from finding consensus, however, their efforts reopened debate about the field's origins, content, and purpose. Members of the council questioned the notion that public history constitutes a movement and debated whether or not public historians have a methodology distinct from other historians. They resisted the idea that the insights of public historians are more or less "special" than those brought to the fore by audience members, community groups, and others engaged in sharing and preserving stories about the past.[33]

This apparently endless and often exhausting debate illuminates several important aspects of public history practice. First, public history is, at its core, collaborative. Whether they work as consultants or in museums or federal agencies, public historians conduct research and develop interpretations in concert with a variety of audiences and stakeholders. Although public historians share a commitment to the best practices of historical scholarship, they are more likely than university-focused scholars to value collaborative inquiry over independent scholarship; they facilitate conversations that allow the interests and needs of diverse partners to shape the questions that will guide their historical research.[34] Although popular histories are often false or misleading, they do speak to communal values and beliefs, and public historians tend to engage these beliefs respectfully rather than dismissing them out of hand.[35]

The collaborative aspect of public history illuminates a second important point. Public historians share authority not only with their audiences and employers but also with colleagues from a variety of disciplines. This most recent effort to define public history revealed that a large percentage of public historians views disciplinary boundaries as permeable. Contradicting the notion that public history has a specific methodology, some argue that public historians take a multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary approach to historical subject matter, integrating perspectives from a variety of partners and fields.[36] Public historians working in national parks, for example, participate in cultural resource management with archaeologists and anthropologists. Museum historians' facility with material culture requires them to adapt and adopt interpretive models from linguistics, art history, sociology, and elsewhere.[37] Historians working in the field of preservation must remain mindful of the boundaries of law and public policy,

interpreting the value of a particular building or battlefield pragmatically. Far from undermining the scholarly integrity of their work, disciplinary fluidity enables public historians to advance original interpretations about the meaning and relevance of the past.

These first two interrelated points focus attention on process, raising questions about *how* public historians practice history as a collaborative and multidisciplinary endeavor. But the ongoing debate has revealed a third fundamental point. Public historians remain divided in the relative emphasis they place on the term "public" and the term "history." Examining this division more closely than they had in the past, public historians began a debate about the function and value of history. What are the implications of practicing history not simply *in* public but rather *for* the public? How is history practiced as a public service? It is clear that the fissures that opened up during the founders' effort to define public history remain perceptible thirty years later.

Some public historians continue to emphasize scholarly authority, arguing that public historians must produce responsible narratives that challenge prevalent myths about the past.[38] Others question this particular definition of responsibility. They argue that even the most troubling beliefs about the past contain evidence about the fears and values of audiences, stakeholders, and partners. By acknowledging these emotional attachments, public historians can open up dialogue and foster a mutually educational experience, allowing public historians not only to educate their audiences but also to learn something about the ways in which average people understand, use, and value the past.[39] This troubles some who view public historians as ill-equipped to identify and engage a given community's emotions. Those who emphasize the "public" side of public history, however, argue that public historians exert authority most effectively by approaching their work reflexively, constantly asking how new narratives, new questions, and new interpretations challenge their partners' deeply held and often very personal notions of identity.[40] For this group, public historians' responsibility is best understood as a question: "In whose service do we work?"[41]

Toward a New Understanding of Public History

The unfinished debate over the definition of public history is more than simply intellectual; it is historical and contemporary, practical and

philosophical. To work with confidence, professionals of any stripe must stand on a firm foundation in the history, values, and purpose of their chosen field. The form and content of the ongoing debate suggests that any definition must include four crucial components: historical precedent, practitioner skills, collaborative practice, and intellectual value. This book is most fully engaged with the question of precedent. As this review of recent scholarship demonstrates, tracking the evolution of public history as part of the emergence of history as a discipline leaves us with an incomplete understanding of the conflicts and challenges historians in the public sector have faced for generations. Federal historians' initial unease in the creation of public history programs, professional associations, and standards raises important questions about the culture in which they work. We must step outside history's disciplinary box to accurately trace the emergence of history as a specialty in the federal government. This book seeks to challenge received wisdom regarding the professionalization of public history and argues that the effort to define pubic history will be improved by examining its emergence as a multidisciplinary government job.

With its focus on the federal government, this book rests on a more expansive notion of the public at the center of public history. For federal workers, the public is civic space, government funding, political constituents, and, more broadly, the citizens for whom government works. Examining the evolution of this public as a by-product of government expansion creates a road map for retracing the historical development of the field, the process by which particular preoccupations, conflicts, and understandings became institutionalized and invisible in the everyday work of public history. It is precisely these ideas that occasionally bubble up to the surface in the apparently neverending debate over definitions. Public history did not spring, fully formed, as a response to the academic job crisis of the 1970s. Rather, it evolved, consciously and unconsciously, through trial and error as government workers began to put history to work for the public. (It is only in the relatively recent past that government historians and other practitioners began to conduct history *with* the public.) This book traces the first part of that journey, drawing attention to the ways in which the slow emergence of history as a job in the federal government tended to institutionalize specific trends and beliefs in the culture of public history. Although historians eventually came to work in a variety of federal agencies and offices, this book is focused on the two government institutions most directly dedicated to the identification, protection, and interpretation

of history: the Smithsonian Institution and the National Park Service. The first professionals hired to collect, interpret, and study history joined these institutions well after the turn of the twentieth century, and this book argues that the National Park Service History Division was, initially, the more important of the two for establishing history as a public service. To understand the challenges these prototypical public historians faced and the decisions they made, however, it is necessary to begin before the beginning—to examine the ways in which the evolution of government-sponsored research and education enabled the creation of both these agencies in the first place.

I am indebted both to scholars who have traced the professionalization of history as a discipline and to those who have raised important questions about the role of public history in national identity formation. But this book departs from these lines of scholarly inquiry in two important ways. First, it does not primarily focus on the relationship of public history to the evolution of historical scholarship. Too often, such a focus devolves into debates over relative stature and disciplinary achievement that do not advance our understanding of public history's unique work culture. Rather, they only return us to unproductive defensiveness about the legitimacy of historical inquiry practiced in a public setting. Second, while this book does examine the attitudes of Park Service public historians toward park visitors, it does not address the relationship between public history and popular patriotism. This subject is well covered in the growing body of literature on commemoration, memory, and identity.[42] That scholarship is tremendously important in helping us understand how publics use the past, and the critique it stimulates about the position of public historians in patriotic discourse is crucial in our commitment to enabling meaningful civic discourse.

At the same time, the critique has sometimes preceded the history. Focusing sharply on public history's complicity in reinforcing an exclusive form of patriotism has sometimes obscured the important events leading to the integration of history and government in the early years of the twentieth century. This process created an altogether new sensibility about the value of working in and with history. The contents of internal memoranda, conference proceedings, meeting minutes, and interagency debates that surrounded the formation of history collections and divisions in both the Park Service and the Smithsonian give form to the foundations of public history and, in many ways, prefigure current debates about the role of historical interpretation in public service.[43]

Perhaps most important, this book recognizes that the original public historians were only eventually historians by training. The first efforts to identify and protect historically significant artifacts and landscapes on behalf of the federal government were made by former businesspeople, college professors, self-trained archaeologists, and other practitioners of natural science. In the 1930s a handful of graduate students in history entered into this work, following in their footsteps. Together, they helped expand both the physical holdings and the educational purpose of the National Park Service in the two decades following its establishment in 1916. A few of them are highlighted in the following pages. Some, such as Jesse L. Nusbaum, were particularly good on the ground. Nusbaum had been apprenticed in the building trades as a teenager. By the age of twenty, he was a college professor, training students for work in what was called the "manual arts." He spent his summers working alongside pioneering American archaeologists, stabilizing Native American ruins in western parks and monument grounds.

Others, such as Horace Albright, were remarkably efficient and diplomatic bureaucrats. Albright came to Washington, D.C., shortly after his 1912 graduation from the University of California, Berkeley. He toured public lands as the private assistant to secretary of the interior Franklin Lane. His civil service career advanced quickly—from clerk, to solicitor, to assistant director of the National Park Service. After serving a ten-year stint as the superintendent of Yellowstone National Park, he was named director of the National Park Service in 1929. During his four-year tenure in that position, he expanded Park Service holdings into the eastern part of the United States, stretching the definition of a national park to include historic as well as natural places. Albright's work required him to bring new experts into the Park Service workforce: men such as Verne Chatelain who were "good in the books." A historian and educator, Chatelain had worked in local history, but he had little experience with national parks before Albright hired him. Only after accepting the position did Chatelain familiarize himself with the parks, taking a lengthy tour and spending time with Nusbaum and other hands-on park interpreters in the West. Chatelain finally arrived in Washington with plans to implement a new interpretive program designed to illuminate and quantify the nation's history.

Despite their differences, men such as Nusbaum, Albright, and Chatelain viewed their work through a common cultural lens. They carried with them to their Park Service jobs a distinct sense that what they were doing was something altogether new. They all struggled to find adequate words to

describe their work and its value. Albright said he was "dabbling" in history. Chatelain said he was trying to "create a new kind of technician." Nusbaum said, "I was always getting something else beside what I was doing—I was always getting another job."[44] Indeed, all three men held a variety of positions inside and outside the Park Service, and each one left a distinct footprint on the soil in which public history took root. Their work informed the cultural milieu of something we now call public history; for them, it was altogether new, a body of work for which they could find no suitable name.

An Intervention for the Definition Debate

By beginning in the middle of the nineteenth century and taking readers to the 1930s, this book examines the process by which federal workers began to conceptualize the protection of landscapes and artifacts as valuable public work. It pays particular attention to the role of scientists in selecting nationally significant places, and it sheds new light on the challenging work conducted by the National Park Service between 1916 and 1933 in its efforts to carve historical landscapes out of places long identified as "natural" and "scientific." The goal of the book is to illuminate the cultural roots of the work we now call "public history" so that we may more fairly and more accurately define and critique it.

Part 1 paints a broad historical canvas, providing necessary background to students unfamiliar with the emergence of government agencies dedicated to the collection, management, and interpretation of specimens between the middle of the nineteenth century and 1916. The establishment of the National Park Service was the pinnacle of a steep and treacherous series of cultural transformations that, over time, connected the interests of science to the interests of government. Chapter 1 describes the pre–Civil War struggle to interest the federal government in research and education. Elected officials were reluctant to exacerbate sectional tensions by imposing federal authority into areas typically left to local control. Nonetheless, a coalition of scientists gradually connected the interests of the nation to the interests of science. They convinced the federal government to gather data and assemble collections that would help foster economic development and enable military planning. Pragmatic scientists took advantage of this effort, becoming adept at explaining the usefulness of their research to local boosters, military leaders, and representatives alike.

Chapter 2 argues that the needs of the nation changed dramatically

after the Civil War, allowing the federal government to expand its role in scientific research, land management, and conservation. After the war, most Americans believed that the nation was changing at an uncontrollable pace. Commentators from a variety of backgrounds found evidence of novelty in social arrangements, work, and status. While many saw cause for optimism in the swirl of change, the period was marked by a general sense of anxiety about the loss of tradition and the lack of order. The longing for order and predictability lent legitimacy to science. Scientists' emphasis on objectivity, efficiency, experimentation, and repetition provided an antidote for the emotionalism and havoc stirred by modernization.

The language of science became a useful tool for reasserting federal authority in a nation so recently divided. In this atmosphere, scientists with an established track record of research on behalf of government interests joined forces with a new generation of American-educated naturalists and others. They became the directors and key researchers for new federal expeditions, agencies, and bureaus—ultimately including the National Park Service—that advanced conservation (broadly conceived) as a science, creating an institutional framework strong enough to support the emergence of new perspectives on the value of landscapes and artifacts. This section also documents the parallel development of history as a realm of inquiry and a new profession, arguing that a rift in the discipline cut against historians' efforts to craft a viable and broad professional network. The leaders of the discipline's professional association discounted the value of local and regional history and dismissed preservation as too emotional. As a result, historians' work on behalf of the government was rather marginal to the evolution of the federal bureaucracy.

Part 2 argues that the emergence of public history was enabled by the work of nineteenth-century scientists who had, over time, established the American landscape as a resource to be studied, interpreted, and managed. Given that, each chapter examines the emergence of public history at a microscopic level, looking at the decisions made from inside the institutional framework established during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Chapter 3 analyzes the emergence of park museums during the 1920s, paying particular attention to the rocky but symbiotic relationship between Park Service museums and the museums of the Smithsonian Institution. Jesse Nusbaum is a key figure in this chapter, bringing professionalism and a certain amount of stubbornness to the creation of museums in the western parks. Focusing on both disputes and collaboration

that took place between Nusbaum and other Park Service interpreters on the one hand and Smithsonian curators on the other amplifies the deeper significance of questions about the disposition, organization, and display of artifacts by and for the federal government. These questions laid the philosophical foundation for defining history as an arena of public service.

Chapters 4 and 5 look at the establishment and growth of the Park Service History Division between 1928 and 1942, introducing Verne Chatelain and analyzing his effort to create a "new kind of technician." Horace Albright is a central character throughout. His understanding of the Park Service mission, his vision for expansion, and his political savvy enabled the transformation of a landscape long defined as scenic and scientific into one that might be recognized as historic. The cultural conditions of the New Deal established the tensions inherent in the practice of public history. These chapters suggest that lingering debates about the definition of public history must begin with an even more basic set of questions: "Who are public historians?" and "What purposes have they served?"

Part 3 examines the complicated relationship between public historians and their audiences during the 1930s. Recognizing that early public history practices took shape during an era of uncertain class relationships sheds new light on the defensiveness underlying public historians' sense of authority and professionalism. Chapter 6, the most theoretical of the chapters, suggests that the relationship between Park Service professionals and their audience was shaped by several historically specific cultural transformations. The rise of domestic tourism expanded the class of visitors entering the parks and raised anxieties about the extent to which tourists might change the meaning of the landscape. Park Service interpreters and administrators were idealistic, believing park education could open visitors to new experiences. But the desire of park professionals—particularly practitioners of young sciences—to define and defend their expertise limited dialogue with tourists.

Ultimately, this book exposes much deeper and more tangled historical roots for the debates that have both advanced and hindered the professionalization of public history. The conclusion argues that the decisions made by Park Service historians during the 1930s had a long and profound influence on the nation's historical landscape. Fledgling public history inherited from its late nineteenth-century origins a pragmatic approach to research and an impulse to manage change. It is the core argument of this book, then, that the events leading to the establishment of public history as a

federal job created an attitude toward public service that government historians and other practitioners have only recently begun to analyze more fully. This book is designed to shift debates regarding public history away from matters of definition and toward questions regarding the larger value of history practiced as public service.