

AMERICAN
HISTORICAL
ASSOCIATION

**2020
Presidential
Biography**



Mary Lindemann

Professor
University of Miami

President of the
American Historical Association, 2020

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The Archive Rat

*A dusty smell, dim lights,
yellowed paper scattered on tables
A rattling sound
Something moves, something sniffs around
wait, it is the archive rat!
She scratches, grabs, devours for hours
crackling documents filled with truth and fables*

Mary has a wonderful penchant for engaging her readers with her playful use of the English language. Take the term “archive rat.” In July 1978, she traveled to the *Staatsarchiv* in a surprisingly cold Hamburg to research early modern poor relief for her dissertation. It was a daunting enterprise. She had only basic German, no paleography skills, little financial support from her home institution or previous experience in archival research or living abroad. All she had was \$1,500 and a determination to succeed. She was also terrified to ask questions. The local archivist, Dr. Martin Ewald, did not seem at first to be helpful either. A “rather stern, even forbidding looking gentleman,” he was somewhat wary of this eager and, in her own words, “clueless American” who seemed intent on consulting sources he deemed not appropriate. But he eventually gave in and, in the end, became a good friend and mentor. Mary continued researching for two years to the point that Guido Ruggiero, her unofficial thesis advisor, feared that she would stay in the archives forever. But Mary thought reading archival records was, and still is, the most pleasant way to spend time. The archive rat was born.

A heuristic approach to history also characterizes Mary Lindemann. Known for her deep archival research and eloquence, Mary embraces topics that range widely: urban history, poor relief, medicine, diplomatic history, merchant history, war, finance, and the state. She refuses to be boxed in. Her careful scrutiny of sources allows her to unravel how things work. This seemingly simple premise has been a consistent *Leitmotif* throughout her career. She does not merely expound upon or challenge traditional narratives or study what impact broad political, economic, and cultural changes had on groups that have received less scholarly attention.

Instead, her works emphasize contingency, exposing how the seemingly small and disconnected actions of individuals set into motion changes that were neither deliberate nor pre-ordained. In each case, her focus is people, their values, their actions, and what makes them tick. This drive to understand people on their own terms also makes her a phenomenal mentor, colleague, and friend. Mary is one of a kind. She is disarmingly charming, humane, and gracious. This combination of wide scholarship and collegiality explains why Mary has had such a decisive and lasting influence in so many areas and on so many different people.

The Cincinnati Kid

*The postwar Cincinnati kid
had no golden pedigree
thought Ivy League was off the grid
stayed home for her education
earned respect and admiration
crowned by her peers who all agree
on her life-long excellence and dedication*

During the thriving postwar years, Mary was born and raised in the suburbs of Cincinnati, Ohio. Her family belonged to the lower middle-class milieu. Her mother worked as a veterinarian assistant and her grandfather for the post office. Her home was filled with music (her mother played piano) and she had doting grandparents who read to her from *The Three Musketeers*, military fiction, and the *World Book* encyclopedia. Books provided a fantasy world for a household that did not have a television for much of Mary's childhood. Feeding the inquisitive mind with stories foreshadowed her future career, even if Mary first attempted another direction. Like many undergraduates, Mary went to college with one plan for her life and left with another. She intended to go into medicine and enrolled as a pre-med student at the University of Cincinnati. To her chagrin, she found that she lacked the necessary calculus skills. But because she had taken German "for reading knowledge" as part of her science major, she soon also discovered the charms of its history and literature. She opted for a history degree instead and graduated with an honors thesis on American reactions to the Russian Revolution.

She pursued her graduate studies in Cincinnati as well. Thanks to the mediation of a senior professor at the University of Cincinnati, opportunities at other places opened up but the specter of going into debt deterred her; it just "wasn't done." Since Cincinnati offered her the best fellowship to attend graduate school, Mary stayed. As the campus was only a bus ride

away, she completed all of her studies from home. Initially, Mary focused on twentieth-century history, like most Germanists at the time, and also on the history of medicine with the late Saul Benison, a well-respected historian of medicine in 20th-century America. But Mary soon found the early modern period more appealing and specialized in three fields that would define her career: early modern Europe, early modern Germany, and the history of medicine. Mary quickly learned to be independent as academic support was mostly lacking. As she puts it: “there were no mentors in those days.” Neither were there courses in paleography, or seminars on applying for scholarships and grants; all problems she would rectify in dealing with her own students.

Nevertheless, one faculty member became an influential figure in her academic life although neither of them is likely to admit it when the other one is in the room. The Italian Renaissance historian Guido Ruggiero took Mary under his wing. His tendency to treat students as junior scholars rather than as indentured servants became clear, for example, when Mary expressed nervousness about her comprehensive exams. Guido advised her to think of them as a conversation between scholarly peers (a suggestion she has since passed on to her own students). She did and passed with distinction.

Her graduate coursework behind her, Mary departed for research in Hamburg, a move that laid the foundation for her intellectual journey and scholarly career. She discovered how encounters with knowledgeable archivists and fellow users created stimulating and intellectual conversations; an environment that digital records cannot replace. Neither could be the city of Hamburg. Mary found it marvelous. Hamburg was a world away from Cincinnati as it was elegant, patrician, and rich, if also a working port city with a checkered history of labor agitation, political string-pulling, and several waves of cholera, to say nothing of a hardly blameless history with National Socialism. In finding ways to support herself, she showed the same diligence she exhibited in the archives. She worked part-time in a *Konditorei* (bakery), wrote a commissioned history of a nearby Jewish hospital, and taught English to employees of a Russian shipping company. After immersing herself in Hamburg’s working life, learning to speak, write, and read the German language with increasing fluency, and transcribing numerous documents for two years, Mary produced a hefty dissertation draft in the summer of 1980. As Guido Ruggiero sat in a friend’s penthouse in London, trying to resolve the mysteries of cricket, Mary tracked him down to seek his advice and his opinion. He advised to cut back slightly (!) on length. Guido later recalled that, on his return to Cincinnati, “Mary came sailing, smiling into my office with a [small] shopping bag,” containing a much improved and considerably shorter and

tighter dissertation. “How she did it and did it so well, I still cannot explain except by stating the obvious—she was then, and still is now, Mary.”

In the fall of 1980, Mary graduated with a PhD from the University of Cincinnati and directly took up a postdoctoral fellowship at the Herzog August Bibliothek (HAB) in the charming town of Wolfenbüttel. After raiding the offerings of the library and of the Archive of Lower Saxony for two years, doing most of the research for what eventually became *Health and Healing in Early Modern Germany* (Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1996), she returned to the United States to present her first-ever scholarly paper at the annual meeting of the American Association for the History of Medicine. In the audience sat William H. Schneider, then at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington. He invited her to interview for a visiting assistant professorship which she received in 1982. Mary was next hired on a three-year, non-tenure-track position as assistant professor at LeMoyne College in Syracuse, NY. Here too, as in Wilmington, she taught four courses a semester. In 1987, seven years after defending her dissertation, she finally landed a tenure-track job at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where she spent 17 happy years.

The Garden of Earthly Delights

*In the Garden of Earthly Delights
flowery scents and luring sensations
offer vicious temptations
unless the scholar writes
demons and devils are haunting sights*

At Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh (1987–2004), Mary climbed the ranks from assistant professor to full professor in 10 years. Even though humanities played a minor role on campus, she found the atmosphere of the Department of History refreshing and stimulating, thanks to a coterie of faculty and especially to the head of that department, Peter N. Stearns. Peter was another wonderful mentor who pushed his faculty to dedicate themselves to research but also provided support for those endeavors. To make sure faculty understood, he displayed on his office wall an enormous picture of Hieronymus Bosch’s *The Garden of Earthly Delights* crowned with the words: Publish or Perish. Mary heeded the words; she published, first *Patriots and Paupers: Hamburg, 1712 to 1840* (Oxford Univ. Press, 1990), then *Health and Healing in Early Modern Germany* (Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1996), and *Medicine and Society in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1999). She had many colleagues in Pittsburgh, both at Carnegie

Mellon and at the University of Pittsburgh, as well as a number of graduate students, who became, and remain, good friends to this day.

Her first book, *Patriots and Paupers*, and a contribution titled "Confessions of an Archive Junkie" to a collection on *Theory, Method, and Practice in Social and Cultural History* (New York Univ. Press, 1992) inaugurated her career as a publishing scholar. "Confessions" is a passionate and erudite discussion of the value of archival research. In "Confessions," she rejected a friend's unfortunate suggestion that archival research was nothing more than a "mechanical process" sandwiched between two truly creative processes: thinking about and writing a manuscript. In it, she argued, as she still firmly believes, that solitude in archives (whatever form they take) is "confrontational and creative," contending that despite the indisputable benefits of theory and method they should always be subjected to primary research. Research, theory, and method should be in a constant dialogue. She pursued this interest in archives in a much later publication in *German History* (2011) on "The Discreet Charm of the Diplomatic Archive."

To prove her point in "Confessions," she used research from her time in Hamburg and in Wolfenbüttel. From Hamburg, she drew on poor relief administrative records that she had initially consulted and which then provoked new questions that directed her to other sources, including those on population policies and petty courts. The result, *Patriots and Paupers*, contributed to the social history of poor relief, albeit with a new focus on an 18th-century German imperial free city. Mary used Hamburg's unique situation to escape standard narratives that emphasized social disciplining and social control as the primary framework for organizing poor relief. Tracing the changes in poor relief from the era of patriotism to 19th-century liberalism, she dismantled the static categories of a powerless working class and a passive poor. Instead, she showed that individual beliefs, concerns, and decision-making explain how poor relief formed part of governance; it was not *sui generis* but as a manifestation of multiple changes in social and economic relations. Thus, Hamburg's patriots revived urban paternalistic concerns for the common good to battle growing poverty and adopted cameralist and enlightenment ideas that regarded poverty as a societal instead of a personal failing. They produced new, centralized, and largely successful programs, most notably the founding of General Poor Relief in 1788. The 19th-century shift from paternalism to liberalism changed the terms of the debate, as an increasingly impersonal municipal government reshaped poor relief yet again to cut costs and emphasize productivity. The ability to show this transformation in perceptions on poverty and poor relief confirms the advantages of delving into the nitty-gritty of the archives.

As “Confessions” made clear, Mary follows documentary traces wherever they lead. One such path resulted in her next book, *Health and Healing in Eighteenth-Century Germany*, which received the William H. Welch Medal Book Prize from the American Association of the History of Medicine in 1998. It was likewise the result of extensive research, in this case two years at the Herzog August Bibliothek and the Archive of Lower Saxony. *Health and Healing* rejected teleological narratives that backdated the role of the state in the professionalization of medicine. It accomplished this by understanding physicians as one of many groups of active medical practitioners, such as midwives, surgeons, and “quacks,” who shared many common beliefs about health and healing. Mary’s careful reconstruction of the lives of dozens of individuals let her break down the standard dichotomies of elite versus popular or, in this case, professional versus “illicit,” making the history of medicine both more complex and more relatable. Mary’s penchant for deep research did not go unnoticed; one reviewer called it “a model of research.”

Health and Healing was so successful that Mary was tapped to write another book on early modern medicine in which she synthesized the state of the field in a way that continued to challenge older and too-simple narratives, particularly the elite and professional versus popular dichotomies. *Medicine and Society in Early Modern Europe* was, and continues to be with newer editions, a highly accessible and much appreciated synthesis of the “new history of medicine.” It has been translated into Turkish, Spanish, and Portuguese and a second, revised edition appeared in 2010. It introduces more advanced scholars, graduate students, and undergraduates to the newest work in the history of medicine and discusses debates about the problems attendant on assuming unending scientific progress, the march of professionalization, and the decline of folk beliefs. But medical empiricism, as Mary carefully demonstrates, has always been around; there was no sudden breakthrough by “great men” and “daring pioneers” who embraced the Scientific Revolution.

Mary capped off her productive years at Carnegie Mellon with one more publication: she edited a volume entitled *Ways of Knowing: Ten Interdisciplinary Essays* (2004). Like “Confessions,” it engages questions of historical research by critiquing the new historicism and post-modernism that label historians as scholars oblivious to the social and cultural constructivism typical of the early modern world. As Mary argued, they miss the point. Good historians apply source criticism and are well aware that the truth, or early modern reality for that matter, is out of reach. The 10 essays in the volume address how historians of the early modern period carefully take into consideration the idea that texts (in whatever form) are created.

The Wicked Witch of the West

*The Wicked Witch of the West
flies by with a red pen
jotting down comments and questions
merciless, honest, constructive
The teacher at her best*

Mary's interest in research greatly enhanced her teaching and made her reconsider how to introduce students to historical study. She considers teaching and research as two disciplines engaged in a perpetual and necessary dialogue. She firmly believes that all those who teach should engage in research. The reverse is equally true. A researcher needs to explain historical processes in a clear and concise manner; they must teach. With this thought in mind, she formulated ideas about the introductory course that so many professors dread. A witty and thought-provoking piece in *Perspectives on History* articulates that while survey courses deserve merit for their scope, it would better suit any history department to draw freshmen directly into the secrets of the trade. Drafted to teach world history at Carnegie Mellon to a cast of hundreds, she jettisoned the idea of trying to do the impossible and teach it all. Rather, she broke the course into different sections each organized around a particular theme or themes. In discussing modern Chinese history, for instance, she focused on the question of why industrialization did not occur there at the end of the 18th century, crafting the section around ideas from Kenneth Pomeranz's *The Great Divergence* (no, students didn't read it). Mary thus demonstrated an important level of trust in her students when she built the courses around historical interpretations that many consider too difficult for freshmen but that allowed students to see the "making" of history and be introduced to the study of history as a series of debates and interpretations.

Mary continues to educate the next generation at the University of Miami, where she and her husband, Michael B. Miller, accepted positions in 2004. Her old mentor, Guido Ruggiero, was chair and she worked with him and other colleagues in the process of rebuilding of the department through a vigorous, several-year-long program of hiring faculty. Students adore her even if many find her intimidating. She famously comments on papers quickly and critically, leaving innocent students gasping for breath when they see her remarks littered on the page. In emails, she occasionally and gleefully signs off as the Wicked Witch of the West. Students understand that the red pen she so freely waves reflects dedication and a desire for them to improve and succeed. They appreciate that her office door is always open and, as one recalled, "if she cannot immediately

address a student's problem or concern, she always responds in a timely fashion." Mary, as professor and as long-term chair of the department, provided the mentorship that she did not receive as a student. Working with her colleagues, she organized graduate student workshops on publishing, applying for grants, and navigating the job market. Indeed, she is selfless in accepting requests for reading manuscripts, chapters, articles, reports, or proposals and for penning letters or recommendation even for students who are not "hers." No matter what the topic or the problem, she immediately understands and offers solutions. Fearful as people may be about the returned document with so many tracked changes, they know their work will improve because of Mary's critical eye.

Equally important, Mary emphasizes that graduate students are junior scholars and should be fully integrated into the intellectual and social life of the department. At these occasions, as one commented, she gives students "a chance to air any concerns or just ask advice in a relaxed atmosphere. . . . I credit Mary for encouraging this welcoming and supportive [environment]." This total commitment to graduate life makes Mary, as another phrased it, "one of the most caring and approachable" people she knows. These comments testify to Mary's approach in PhD advising: treat students as junior scholars, be honest, provide mentorship, and let them know we share the same problems.

The Archive Junkie Strikes Again

*The archive junkie strikes again
when she continues her voyeurism
into the lives of people in long gone ages
scrutinizing their ways through the historian's prism
she leaves no stone unturned in churning countless pages
the insane, diplomats, midwives form a kaleidoscope
of the nitty-gritty and the unexpected trope
armed with a multidisciplinary sword and shield
she is a master of her field.*

During her tenure at the University of Miami, Mary continued to publish important scholarship. Her *Liaisons Dangereuses: Sex, Law, and Diplomacy in the Age of Frederick the Great* (Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2006) is perhaps the greatest example of Mary's ability to use deep research to bring past individuals to life by demonstrating how standard diplomatic or political narratives often obscure history's complexities and contingencies as much as they explain them. The story revolves around a murder investigation in Hamburg with an international cast of colorful characters. By situating

them in their 18th-century contexts, Mary shows how their world enabled the various lives they lived and how contemporary institutions responded to their different demands. *Liaisons Dangereuses* contributed to the new diplomatic history by showing how personalities, status, particular interests, and other mundane preferences and informal channels proved at least as important as traditional great power politics in directing events. Cultural diplomacy, rather than the “true crime” story itself, was the focus of the work.

Mary’s latest monograph, *The Merchant Republics: Amsterdam, Antwerp, and Hamburg, 1648–1790* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 2015), unites the different methods that have made her research career so influential. *The Merchant Republics* moved Mary outside her original “comfort zone” of early modern Germany to take on the writing of a comparative history of three entrepôts between the end of the Thirty Years’ War and the close of the *ancien régime*. As demonstrated in *Liaisons Dangereuses*, her history combines long-term structural changes with individual actions and initiatives in discussing the interaction of political and economic/mercantile endeavors that made these three cities “merchant republics.” The book’s comparative element shows that these conditions were not limited to one particular city. During the “long” 18th century, each of the three cities stood at a different moment in their historical development and endured under different political conditions. The significance of mercantile success to civic self-identity was such, however, that every economic shift and every alteration in a sense of proper business ethics, fostered anxiety but also stimulated commercial activity. One reader commented that “comparative history of this kind is a very difficult genre to produce,” yet she “succeeded to a remarkable extent.”

Mary has also produced excellent scholarship with colleagues, all of whom praise her intelligence, energy, and collegiality. She recently co-edited two volumes for SPEKTRUM: Publications of the German Studies Association (Berghahn Press) (one on *Mixed Matches: Transgressive Unions in Early Modern Germany* [2014] with David Luebke; the other on *Money in the German-Speaking Lands* [2017] with Jared Poley). She and two colleagues at the University of Miami, Anne Cruz (Modern Languages and Literatures) and Mihoko Suzuki (English), co-edited the journal *Early Modern Women: An Interdisciplinary Journal* for six years, and she has served on a number of editorial boards. She has filled numerous leadership positions in scholarly associations, such as president of Frühe Neuzeit Interdisziplinär, president of the German Studies Association, and, of course, she is currently the president of the American Historical Association.

But her duties as a teacher, as department chair, or in other scholarly capacities have not slowed her down. Indeed, she is currently finishing up the research and beginning the writing on a study tentatively entitled “Fractured Lands: Northern Germany in an Age of Unending War” that also, by focusing on Brandenburg, reevaluates the role of hyperactive leaders such as the Great Elector in creating the Prussian state and advancing the “rise of Prussia.” Research for “Fractured Lands” has been supported by the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Alexander Humboldt Foundation, and the Thyssen Foundation. These grants are only the most recent additions to a long list of major awards including grants from the National Library of Medicine, the German Academic Exchange Service, and, in 1999, a John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship.

A Good Citizen of the Scholarly World

*A citizen without borders
creates new intellectual orders
weaving research and the inquisitive mind
into a global network of scholars.
Fierce, independent, intellectual
with boundless energy
she lives and breathes history.*

Mary’s *oeuvre* cannot be reduced to a single enterprise. Her scholarship and professional contributions cross topical, temporal, and geographical boundaries while continuing to move at the forefront of best practices. Her work remains grounded first and foremost in deep archival research that brings to life her subjects and the world they lived in far beyond any book’s stated subject. Patricians, physicians, patients, mistresses, disgraced nobles, real life Lovelaces, merchants, swindlers, crooks, and more retain their character in Mary’s prose.

In a similar manner, Mary weaves together the lives and work of current scholars, whatever their stage in their career. Indeed, Mary’s passion for history is not restricted to research and teaching alone. One of her major contributions to the discipline is building a network of scholars. Students, early career professionals, and senior scholars alike benefit from her goodwill and guidance. Several years ago, an early career historian related the following. He was part of a panel that outnumbered the two audience members. One of those audience members was Mary, who ensured the panel’s success with the “best conversations” about the new diplomatic history. She has since advocated for him with advice, alerting him to opportunities and putting him in touch with other scholars. She

became, in his words, “the best professional mentor I have ever had: thoughtful, energetic, perceptive, and eminently approachable.” At another conference, a master’s student found herself suddenly having dinner with the president-elect of the AHA. As intimidated and frightened as the student was, Mary’s “disarming personality” quickly put her at ease as Mary adroitly drew her into the conversation.

Faculty at the University of Miami agree. Her impact on the department derives from consistency of small, every day, but meaningful actions (rather than grand gestures) that cultivate a strong department. She never forgets to celebrate an accomplishment and is the first to invite new hires to her house for dinner. She recognizes and rewards faculty who take on extra service. Receptions at conferences bring together the University of Miami faculty past and present. Her approach to job searches also deserves praise. It reflects her work ethic, her innate sense of fairness, and her sympathy for the underdog. The many search committees she has run or participated in (often *ex officio* as chair), looked carefully at all qualified candidates, not just those from prestigious institutions. Committee members often ended up reading 15 or more dissertations. On more than one occasion, job applicants have expressed their surprise that Mary has read their work so carefully, sometimes even referring to some remark they made in a footnote. This labor-intensive method has been fundamental to the success of the department at the University of Miami and in making sure that everyone is treated with the respect they deserve.

Mary’s humanity and decency matter. She is modest and down to earth. When she told us about her nomination as president of the AHA, she wrote in all honesty: can you believe this? We did. We were not surprised at all, but that little sentence reveals genuine humility. But ours is not the only opinion. Who else but her mentor Guido Ruggiero can sum up best what Mary means to the academic community? “In the end I am not sure that to claim she is a good citizen of the scholarly world is actually enough to describe this; in fact, I prefer to think of her as not simply a good citizen, but as a deeply committed scholar and true intellectual who has built a life of thought that makes her a unique figure in the wide community of scholars that she nurtures and that makes her exceptional in terms of her quality and commitment to ideas, truly exceptional.”

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The logo for the American Historical Association is centered on a white rectangular background. It features the words "AMERICAN", "HISTORICAL", and "ASSOCIATION" stacked vertically in a clean, sans-serif font. A thin teal horizontal line is positioned between "AMERICAN" and "HISTORICAL". Vertical teal lines are placed between the letters "M" and "E" in "AMERICAN", and between "H" and "I" in "HISTORICAL".

AMERICAN
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