

Tenured Faculty Enhancement Leave Program

Application and Letter of Understanding

I agree to all terms and conditions outlined below:

1. I agree to return to KSU as a full-time faculty member for twelve months after completion of this Leave. If I resign or retire from KSU before the end of that year, I agree to reimburse KSU for the amount of compensation I received while on leave, as well as any other expenses paid for my benefit by KSU or its affiliated entities during the leave, including all benefit costs.
2. I will complete the Leave project goals and activities as accepted by the selection committee in the time frame specified in the proposal.
3. I will submit a comprehensive final report to the Executive Director for Faculty Development, Recognition, and CETL no later than 6 months after the completion of the Leave. The report will delineate:
 - a. All work and activities completed during the Leave.
 - b. How the goals and outcomes of the Leave have been met.
 - c. Any dissemination of results (e.g., publications, presentations, grant proposals submitted, seminars or workshops, materials developed for classroom instruction, etc). Attach one copy of submitted, published, or presented papers (or other disseminated products).
 - d. Ongoing activities and follow-up.
4. I will conduct a workshop or seminar for colleagues on the outcomes of my Leave within 6 months of the end of the Leave.
5. I understand that the purpose of the Leave is to provide me time or the opportunity to work on the project full time and agree to suspend all KSU-related responsibilities and activities unrelated to the project during the term in which the Leave is taken, except as allowed by the Enhancement Leave Guidelines.
6. I understand that my successful application will be published on the CETL faculty development website as a model for future applicants.
7. I understand that if any of the above conditions are violated, I will not be eligible for funding from any KSU Funding Award program for a 5-year period.

Required Signatures:



Faculty Applicant Signature

William Thomas Okie

Print Name

January 10, 2019

Date



I have read the proposal, approve of its implementation, and agree to provide course releases as funded and scheduled.

DocuSigned by:

F3A21785DFBC468...

Department Head Signature

Alice Pate

Print Name

January 10, 2020

Date

Sharing Department Head Signature
(for jointly appointed faculty)

Print Name

Date

DocuSigned by:

C9F0D3FF36B148A...

Dean Signature

Shawn Long

Print Name

January 10, 2020

Date

Sharing Dean signature
(for jointly appointed faculty)

Print Name

Date

Old Fields: A History of the American South in Five Ordinary Plants

Abstract

This project explores the history of the American South via the stories of five widespread but little-known botanical colonizers of old fields: sassafras, muscadine, broomsedge, magnolia, and loblolly pine. Using first-hand observation, archival investigation, and synthetic research across multiple disciplines in the humanities and sciences, the project will culminate in a book—part field guide, part public history, part personal narrative—that argues for the conceptual and environmental significance of old fields, the untended and unintended landscapes of everyday southern life, and the plants that have helped to make them.

Narrative

Project Description

This book project explores the history of the American South via the stories of five widespread but little-known botanical colonizers of old fields—sassafras, muscadine, broomsedge, magnolia, and loblolly pine. Old fields, or former agricultural lands, are landscapes in transition, marked by human abandonment and surrender, on the one hand, and by nonhuman vitality and repossession on the other. Accordingly, the project explores “old field” not just as an actual southern landscape, but also as a concept for thinking about and interacting with what we have often called “nature” or “wilderness.” For scholars, “Old Fields” joins a recent movement in the humanities away from anthropocentrism, highlighting the world apart from human effort and control. It also emphasizes the interplay of intended and unintended landscapes in the American South and the racial and class dynamics that have shaped that interplay, for although old fields are ubiquitous across the continent and, indeed, the planet, they have defined and haunted southern history. For general readers, meanwhile, “Old Fields” aims at a simpler, yet more encompassing goal: to learn to perceive and attend to the world of living organisms still abroad in everyday landscapes.

The book will take shape in five chapters, each telling the story of a single plant. Chapter One, “Sassafras: Natural South,” presents the story of sassafras (*Sassafras albidum*)—from native medicinal to European tonic to American root beer to FDA-banned carcinogen—to recount the ordeal of European colonization, and the shifting understandings of human health, medicine, and food that have shaped the South ever since. In Chapter Two, “Muscadine: Promised South,” I examine the South as a place of possibility and promise, via the story of muscadine (*Vitis rotundifolia*), whose wild abundance seemed to augur a great wine industry

that, despite the efforts of horticulturists in the nineteenth century, never emerged. In Chapter Three, “Broomsedge: Squandered South,” I move from promise to disappointment, surveying the wastelands of the plantation South by following broomsedge (*Andropogon virginicus*), a native bluestem grass that became a symbol of poverty, agricultural prodigality, and infertility from the mid-nineteenth century on. In Chapter Four, “Magnolia: Remembered South,” I examine the fragrant and stately magnolia (*Magnolia grandiflora*), which provided a focal point for the notorious “moonlight and magnolias” mythology of the slaveholding South as a place of sweet gentility rather than violent oppression. Chapter Five, “Loblolly: Manufactured South,” narrates the history of loblolly pine (*Pinus taeda*), a tree that earned the common name “old field pine” due to its vigorous colonization of disturbed sites, and, unlike the other plants on this list, became an economic mainstay for vast swaths of the Southeastern coastal plain.

The book will be partly synthetic and partly based on original fieldwork and archival research. Like other environmental historians, I will look to the work of plant biologists and ecologists, but I have also intentionally chosen plants to which other humans, both contemporary and historical, have paid attention, and which are therefore present in human traces such as farm diaries, scientific articles, and the agricultural press. In addition to these typical methods of the environmental historian, I will also use site visits and firsthand observation of pine plantations, muscadine vineyards, magnolia nurseries, and of course many, many old fields across the South. Environmental history has a strong tradition of what we might call the “methodology of presence,” and “Old Fields” will model and extend that tradition.

Outcomes and Professional Development

There are several short-term and long-term outcomes related to this project. In the short-term, the focused time away from other university responsibilities would allow me to produce a book

manuscript by the end of the enhancement leave period (May 2021). Longer term, the book will build on the professional identity I've developed as a historian of southern culture, environment, and agriculture through my award-winning first book, *The Georgia Peach: Culture, Agriculture, and Environment in the American South* (Cambridge University Press, 2016). That book earned praise from scholars and the general public alike, with favorable reviews in academic journals and coverage from National Public Radio, *The New York Times*, and local news outlets, and the research I conducted it book familiarized me with much of the source material for "Old Fields": horticultural and agricultural society proceedings, the agricultural press, scientific publications, personal papers, and oral history. But *The Georgia Peach* also began to raise questions of aesthetic and affective experience that I could not satisfactorily address in an agricultural history concerned primarily with production, distribution, and labor. I made an initial attempt to revisit some of those issues in "Beauty and Habitation," an article I published recently in *Environmental History*, but "Old Fields" will allow me to explore more fully the historical and environmental importance of aesthetic and affective experience. It will, I hope, have a sustained influence on how environmental and southern historians account for the role of ordinary plants and environmental aesthetics in how we tell the story of the South, and on how undergraduates and general readers perceive and experience the southern landscape.

In addition to establishing my scholarly identity, the project has already shaped and will continue to shape my own teaching. In the last few years, my goals for my history students have shifted from learning the *events* of the past to helping students perceive the layers of human and natural history that surround them in the physical landscape. I have used field trips, for instance, to help accomplish this purpose in my Historical Methods and US between the World Wars courses. "Old Fields" will model the kind of embodied research I am asking of my students.

Strategic Goals

“Old Fields” aligns with the new transdisciplinary “Sustainable and Safe Communities” theme recently announced by the Office of Research as part of its “Research with Relevance” emphasis. Learning to perceive and appreciate the non-human residents of the world in which we live—starting with five ordinary plants—is a crucial component for maintaining sustainable communities, especially in an era when human activity seems to outweigh other environmental factors in shaping the possibility of life on Earth. These five plants are everywhere in the South, have remained wild, and, I argue, are quietly though not conventionally beautiful. “Old Fields” invites readers to know the everyday places they inhabit and visit by paying more attention to the plants that reside there, and in knowing them, to love them as well.

This project also fits squarely into the History and Philosophy Department’s vision of faculty and students being “engaged with the community” with projects that have “relevance to the present.” This project should “enhance the department’s visibility” (Goal 3) through engagement with several distinct communities. Among historians, the book will engage the ongoing conversation about the relationship between humans and the non-human world, especially in the South. The project’s cross-disciplinary forays—into literature, botany ecology, geology, and so on—will also help to build collaborative relationships with scholars in other disciplines. And the project’s use of the “methodology of presence” presents an opportunity for engagement with local and regional communities as well.

Other Funding and Resources

This project has received department, college, and university support. I received the 2020 Departmental Seed Grant to support travel to archives in spring/summer 2020, and the CHSS Scholarship Support Grant to support research and writing in June and July 2020, and graduate

research assistants have assisted in gathering materials since spring 2019. I am not collaborating with anyone on this project, though I plan to apply for a GRA in 2020–2021. For the term of the proposed leave, although I have applied for a number of external grants, I currently have no funds or resources beyond my normal salary and ordinary departmental travel funding.

Sustainability

I began work on this project in 2016 and have given two presentations and published one peer-reviewed article (in the Spring 2019 *Southern Cultures*). Along with my GRAs, I have created a research library of approximately 1,200 primary and secondary sources. Using departmental and college support this spring and summer, I will gather the remaining research materials. The Tenured Faculty Enhancement Leave will then allow me to devote five full-time months in Spring 2021 to completing the full manuscript. Revisions, copyediting, and indexing can then be completed as part of my regular workload over the next four semesters.

Dissemination

The primary means of disseminating this project will be a peer-reviewed book for scholarly and general audiences, to be published by a university press such as UGA Press (see attached letter of interest). After initial submission and editorial review in May 2021, I should receive comments from peer reviewers sometime in fall 2021. I anticipate revising the manuscript and starting the publication process in 2022, with a likely publication date in spring 2023. I have already begun disseminating findings from my research as described above, but I also plan to present my research at the spring 2021 conference of the American Society for Environmental History in Boston. Once the book is published, I anticipate that there will be further opportunities to present the research in both popular and scholarly settings, from local historical societies and gardening clubs to university classrooms and academic conferences.

Timeline

- June 2016 – Presented “Amber Waves of Broomsedge” for a panel I organized at the annual meeting of the Agricultural History Society
- September 2018 – Submitted “Amber Waves of Broomsedge” article manuscript to *Southern Cultures*
- January–May 2019 – Gather primary sources with assistance of graduate research assistant (I currently have approximately 1,200 sources to review)
- April 2019 – “Amber Waves of Broomsedge” published in *Southern Cultures* 25, no. 1 (Spring 2019).
- June 2019 – Presented “Tangle of Vines: Muscadines and the Prospects for a Biocentric Southern History” at the annual conference of the Agricultural History Society (already accepted)
- March 2020 – Site visit to Ison’s Nursery (muscadines), Griffin, GA; research trip to UGA libraries (for the H.P. Stuckey papers on muscadine breeding, among others) and Cherokee Garden Library at the Atlanta History Center
- May 25–29 – Begin drafting sassafras chapter, roughly 2,500 words
- June 8–12, 2020 – Archival research at University of North Carolina Libraries Southern History Collection (Chapel Hill, NC), North Carolina State University Archives (Raleigh, NC), and Forest History Society Archives (Durham, NC)
- June 15–July 3, 2020 – Finish sassafras chapter, roughly 2,500 words/week, for a total of 10,000 words.
- July 6–31, 2020 – Draft muscadine chapter, roughly 2,500 words/week, for a total of 10,000 words.
- August–December 2020 – Draft magnolia chapter, roughly 800 words/week for a total of 10,000 words
- **January–May 2021 – Period of proposed leave**
 - January 2021 – Draft loblolly chapter, roughly 2,500 words/week for a total of 10,000 words
 - February 2021 – Revise and extend broomsedge article (approximately 3,700 words) into a full chapter, roughly 1,200 words/week for a total of 10,000 words.
 - March 2021 – Revise remaining four chapter drafts, approximately one chapter per week, and prepare presentation for ASEH in April.
 - April 1–9, 2021 – Draft and revise introduction, approximately 800 words per day for a total of 5,000 words
 - April 12–19, 2021 – Draft and revise introduction, approximately 800 words per day for a total of 5,000 words
 - April 20–26, 2021 – Present material from book at American Society for Environmental History in Boston, MA
 - May 2021 – Finalize and submit manuscript to university press
- January–May 2022 – Based on comments from peer reviewers, begin revisions and any additional research
- June–July 2022 – Finalize revised manuscript and submit to university press to begin publication process
- Spring 2023 – Book published

Curriculum Vitae

Academic Appointments

- Associate Professor of History and History Education, Kennesaw State University, Kennesaw, GA 2018–
- Assistant Professor of History and History Education, Kennesaw State University, Kennesaw, GA, 2013–2018
- Visiting Assistant Professor of History, Bowdoin College, Brunswick, ME, 2012–2013

Education

- The University of Georgia, 2007–2012
 - Ph.D., History
 - Dissertation: “‘Everything is Peaches Down in Georgia’: Culture and Agriculture in the American South,” winner of best-dissertation prizes from the Society of American Historians, the Southern Historical Association, the Agricultural History Society, and the University of Georgia Graduate School
- Covenant College, 1998–2002
 - B.A., History, *summa cum laude*
 - Georgia Teaching Certificate in Social Studies (6–12)

Research

- **Refereed Publications**
 - *The Georgia Peach: Culture, Environment, and Agriculture in the American South*, Cambridge Studies on the American South (Cambridge University Press, 2016), co-winner, Malcolm Bell, Jr., and Muriel Barrow Bell Award for the best book in Georgia history published in 2016 and 2017, Georgia Historical Society, 2018. Reviewed in *Reviews in American History*, *Enterprise & Society*, *Journal of Southern History*, *The American Historical Review*, *Environmental History* and others.
 - “Beauty and Habitation: Fredrika Bremer and the Aesthetic Imperative of Environmental History,” *Environmental History* 24, no. 2 (April 2019): 258–81. <https://doi.org/10.1093/envhis/emyl130>
 - “Amber Waves of Broomsedge,” *Southern Cultures* 25, no. 1 (Spring 2019): 58–71. <https://doi:10.1353/scu.2019.0004>; <http://www.southerncultures.org/article/amber-waves-of-broomsedge/>
 - “Southern Environmental History,” in *Reinterpreting Southern Histories: Essays in Historiography*, ed. Craig Thompson Friend and Lorri Glover (Louisiana State University Press, 2020), co-authored with Kathryn C. Newfont, <https://lsupress.org/books/detail/reinterpreting-southern-histories/>
 - “Problem-Based Learning and the Training of Secondary Social Studies Teachers: A Case Study of Candidate Perceptions during their Field Experience,” co-authored with Charles T. Wynn, Sr., *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning* 11, no. 2 (July 2017), article 16.
 - “Under the Trees: The Georgia Peach and the Quest for Labor in the Twentieth Century,” *Agricultural History* 85, no. 1 (January 2011), winner of the Agricultural History Society’s 2009 Everett E. Edwards Award for Best Student Essay. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3098/ah.2011.85.1.72>

- **Research in Progress**
 - “Agriculture in the US South, 1900–1945,” *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of American History*, (to be submitted February 2020)
 - “The Thin Ripe Line: Watermelons, Pushcarts, Death, and the Distribution of Modern Food,” in *Acquired Tastes: Stories about the Origins of Modern Food*, ed. Benjamin Cohen, Michael Kideckel, and Anna Zeide (under review with The MIT Press)
 - Old Fields: A History of the American South in Five Ordinary Plants (book project)
 - Ruin and Restoration in the Modern South (collaborative book project with Andrew C. Baker, Texas A&M-Commerce)
 - The Railroad Agent’s Fairy Tale: Storytelling, Progress, and Winter Legumes in the New South (article manuscript)
 - Study #18–155: Pedagogical Uses of Oral History in an International Context (article manuscript)
- **Honors and Awards**
 - Co-winner, Malcolm Bell, Jr., and Muriel Barrow Bell Award for the best book in Georgia history published in 2016 and 2017, Georgia Historical Society, 2018
 - Distinguished Early Career Faculty Award, Department of History and Philosophy, Kennesaw State University, 2016
 - Allan Nevins Prize for the best-written doctoral dissertation on an American subject, Society of American Historians, 2012
 - C. Vann Woodward Prize for the best dissertation in southern history, Southern Historical Association, 2012
 - Gilbert C. Fite Award for the best dissertation on agricultural history, Agricultural History Society, 2012
 - Excellence in Graduate Research Award for the best dissertation in the humanities and social sciences, UGA Graduate School, 2012
 - Everett E. Edwards Award for Best Graduate Student Essay, “Under the Trees: The Georgia Peach and the Quest for Labor in the Twentieth Century,” Agricultural History Society, 2010
- **Fellowships and Grants**
 - Seed Grant, Department of History and Philosophy, 2020
 - Scholarship Support Grant, College of Humanities and Social Sciences, 2020
 - Faculty Summer Research Grant, College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Kennesaw State University, Kennesaw, GA, 2015 and 2018
 - Manuscript Completion Award, College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Kennesaw State University, Spring 2017
 - Global Engagement Award, College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Kennesaw State University, Kennesaw, GA, 2015
 - Incentive Funding Award for Research and Creative Activity, Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, Kennesaw State University, 2014 and 2016
 - Pilot/Seed Grant to Attract External Funding, Office of Vice President for Research, Kennesaw State University, Kennesaw, GA, 2015
 - Dissertation Proposal Development Fellowship, Critical Agrarian Studies, Social Science Research Council, Summer 2009

- **Writing for popular audiences**
 - “The Georgia peach may be vanishing, but its mythology is alive and well,” *The Conversation* (July 20, 2017), <https://theconversation.com/the-georgia-peach-may-be-vanishing-but-its-mythology-is-alive-and-well-80262>, This article was reprinted in many other publications, including *The Week* and *Smithsonian Magazine*.
 - “Whose Peach Is It Anyway? The Story of How Georgia Claimed the Peach,” *The Local Palate* (July 29, 2016) <http://thelocalpalate.com/articles/whose-peach-is-it-anyway/>
 - “The Georgia Peach in Black and White,” *Gravy* (Winter 2015), 38–47. <http://www.southernfoodways.org/the-georgia-peach-in-black-and-white/>
- **Media Appearances**
 - Tove Danovich, “The Un-Pretty History of Georgia’s Iconic Peach,” *The Salt*, July 21, 2017, <http://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2017/07/21/537926947/the-un-pretty-history-of-georgias-iconic-peach>
 - David Marcus, “Consider the Peach; Become a True Hedonist,” *The Street*, July 9, 2017, <https://www.thestreet.com/story/14197704/1/consider-the-peach-become-a-true-hedonist.html>
 - Kim Severson, “The South Faces a Summer With Fewer Peaches,” *The New York Times*, May 30, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/30/dining/peach-crop-georgia-south-carolina.html>
 - Bill Fields, “Berckmans Family Planted Seeds of Augusta Beauty,” *Masters*, April 4, 2017, http://2017.masters.com/en_US/news/articles/2017-04-04/berckmans_family_planted_seeds_of_augusta_beauty.html
 - Bill Kirby, “Kirby: Home of the Georgia Peach a Familiar Washington Road Address,” *The Augusta Chronicle*, April 1, 2017, <http://chronicle.augusta.com/columnists/news/2017-04-01/kirby-home-georgia-peach-familiar-washington-road-address>
 - Jim Morekis, “A Peach of a Good Book,” *Connect Savannah*, May 10, 2017, <https://www.connectsavannah.com/savannah/a-peach-of-a-good-book/Content?oid=4728227>
 - Sally Sears, “Cold Weather Could Take Bite out of Georgia’s Famous Fruit,” *CBS46 News* (Atlanta: CBS, March 16, 2017), <http://www.cbs46.com/story/34935759/cold-weather-could-take-bite-out-of-georgias-famous-fruit>
 - Celeste Headlee and Trevor Young, “How The Peach Became a Symbol of Georgia,” *On Second Thought* (Atlanta, GA: Georgia Public Broadcasting, February 21, 2017), <http://gpbnews.org/post/how-peach-became-symbol-georgia>
 - “The History of Georgia Peaches Offers Lessons,” *The Newnan Times-Herald*, March 16, 2017, <http://times-herald.com/news/2017/03/the-history-of-georgia-peaches-offers-lessons>
- **Presentations**
 - “Tangle of Vines: Muscadine Grapes and the Prospects for a Biocentric Southern History,” Annual Conference, Agricultural History Society, Washington, DC, June 6, 2019

- “What’s with All the Peaches? How the Georgia Peach Became a Southern Symbol,” Invited Presentation, Smyrna Public Library, July 8, 2018
- “The Georgia Peach: Culture, Agriculture, and Environment in the American South,” Invited Roundtable Presentation, Berry Fleming Book Festival, Augusta, GA, September 22, 2017
- “Amber Waves of Broomsedge,” Annual Conference, Agricultural History Society, New York, New York, June 2016
- “The Traveler, the Gardener, and the Bishop: Horticultural Reform in the Nineteenth Century South,” Atlantic Environments and the American South, Rice University, Houston, TX, February 5–6, 2016
- “Everything is Peaches in Georgia,” Invited Lecture, Southern Foodways Alliance Symposium, Oxford, MS, October 15–18, 2015
- “Orcharding Georgia: Taste, Culture and the Agrarian Imagination in the Nineteenth-Century South,” Invited Presentation, St. George Tucker Society Annual Meeting, Savannah, GA, July 23–25, 2015
- “Doctor Mead Has Dreamed a Dream,” American Society for Environmental History Annual Conference, Washington, D.C., March 18–21, 2015
- “The Georgia Peach and the Russell Library,” Invited Lecture, Fortieth Anniversary Conference, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, Athens, GA, October 27–28, 2014
- “The Georgia Peach in Black and White,” Transforming New South Identities Symposium, University of Mississippi, Oxford, MS, February 2014

Teaching and Mentoring at Kennesaw State University

- Historical Methods. *Seminar*
- The United States between the World Wars. *Seminar*
- Southern Food in American History. *Graduate Seminar*
- Technology for Historians and History Educators. *Graduate, Online*
- Food in American History. *Seminar*
- U.S. History since 1877. *Lecture*
- Honors U.S. History since 1877. *Lecture*
- Introduction to History Education. *Seminar, Practicum*
- Methods of History Education. *Seminar, Practicum*
- Supervision for Yearlong Clinical Experience, History Education (6–12)
- Supervision for Graduate Research Assistant

Service

- **Professional Service**
 - Associate Editor, *Agricultural History*, 2017-
 - Conference co-host and organizer, Thirteenth Annual Southern Forum on Rural, Agricultural, and Environmental History (SFARE), Kennesaw State University, Spring 2020
 - Program Committee, Southern Historical Association, 2018–2019
 - Manuscript Referee, Cambridge University Press, University of Nebraska Press, University of Georgia Press, University of Chicago Press, *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, *Environmental History*, and *Agricultural History*

- Vernon Carstensen Memorial Award Selection Committee, for the best article published in *Agricultural History*, 2015–2017
- Editorial Board, *Agricultural History*, 2014–2016
- **University Service**
 - R2 Roadmap Committee, Research Focus, College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Kennesaw State University, 2019
 - Promotion and Tenure Committee, Department of History and Philosophy, Kennesaw State University, 2018–2020
 - Graduate Policy and Curriculum Committee, Kennesaw State University, Spring 2018
 - Education Policy and Curriculum Committee, Kennesaw State University, 2016–2018
 - Faculty Senator, Department of History and Philosophy, Kennesaw State University, Fall 2015
 - Department of History and Philosophy Curriculum Committee, Kennesaw State University, 2014-
 - History Education Admissions and Academic Standing Committee, Kennesaw State University, 2013-
- **Reviews**
 - Matthew Roth, *Magic Bean: The Rise of Soy in America* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2018), in *Journal of American History*, forthcoming
 - “Southern Cuisine and the Future of Food History,” Review Essay, David S. Shields, *Southern Provisions: The Creation and Revival of a Cuisine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015) and Marcia Cohen Ferris, *The Edible South: The Power of Food and the Making of an American Region* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014) in *Canadian Journal of History / Annales canadiennes d’histoire* 51.1 (Spring Summer 2016): 119–23.
 - *The American Yawp: A Free and Online, Collaboratively Built American History Textbook*, <http://americanyawp.com/>, created and maintained by Joseph Locke and Ben Wright, in *The Journal of American History* (March 2017): 1121–22.
 - Marguerite S. Shaffer and Phoebe S.K. Young, *Rendering Nature: Animals, Bodies, Places, Politics* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), in *Pacific Historical Review*, 86, no. 3 (Aug. 2017): 523–25.
 - Lake Douglas, ed. *Steward of the Land: Selected Writings of Nineteenth-Century Horticulturist Thomas Affleck* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2014), in *Agricultural History* 89.4 (Fall 2015): 611–12
 - Helen Zoe Veit, *Modern Food, Moral Food: Self-Control, Science, and the Rise of Modern American Eating in the Early Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), in *Agricultural History* 89.2 (Spring 2015): 299–300.
 - Aaron D. Anderson, *Builders of a New South: Merchants, Capital, and the Remaking of Natchez, 1865–1914* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2013), in *The Journal of Southern History* 80.2 (May 2014): 499–500.



College of Humanities
and Social Sciences

Department of History
and Philosophy

TFEL Awards Committee
CAMPUS

8 January 2020

To whom it may concern:

I write in support of Dr. Tom Okie's application for Tenured Faculty Enhancement Leave for Spring 2021. Dr. Okie's plan to complete a draft of a new book, "Old Fields: A History of the American South in Five Ordinary Plants" is attainable. This new work represents a pivot in Dr. Okie's research trajectory that supports new transdisciplinary research initiatives at KSU. It supports the mission of the department to advance knowledge of the past and enhance our visibility.

Dr. Okie has established his reputation as an expert in environmental history. He has received awards for his first book *Georgia Peach: Culture, Agriculture and Environment in the American South*. He has completed a number of significant projects which provide evidence of his ability to bring work to fruition in the form of published scholarly works. He is also associate editor of *Agricultural History* which is housed in our department.

With this award, Dr. Okie will be able to finish his detailed study of the environmental history of five plants that have impacted the history and environment of the southern United States. He has received a college grant for summer research and a department seed grant to cover research expenses. By next spring, he should be ready to review these materials and complete the draft of the book.

Dr. Okie regularly offers upper division undergraduate courses in environmental history. He also teaches a graduate course on this topic for the M.Ed. Social Studies program. In addition to the publication of the book manuscript, he will continue to present his research at conferences appropriate to his area of expertise. The topic would also be suitable for the department's brown bag lecture series as well as the Dean's lecture series in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences.

It is without reservation that I recommend his application be fully funded.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alice K. Pate". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dr. Alice K. Pate.
Professor and Chair,
History and Philosophy Department



MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY™
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

January 7, 2020

To Whom It May Concern:

I write to enthusiastically support Dr. Tom Okie's proposal for the Tenured Faculty Enhancement Leave program.

I met Okie when he was a graduate student and I have followed his career very closely since. His primary research field, southern environmental history, is mine as well, so I've been in a good position to watch his career develop. As editor of the main book series in the field, The University of Georgia Press's Environmental History and the American South series, and as the Executive Secretary of the Agricultural History Society from 2009 to 2019, I've watched Okie grow into one of the two or three most important environmental historians in and of the South. Indeed, he is now at that crucial stage of having one very successful book and creating lots of buzz about his next project. Those of us in the field are anxious to read the results of this new work, "Old Fields: A History of the American South in Five Ordinary Plants."

Before I appraise his new research proposal, let me briefly remind you of his career thus far. Okie earned his Ph.D. from UGA, which at the time had the best southern environmental history program in the country. His dissertation was nothing short of a tour-de-force. I know of no other scholar, in fact, whose dissertation has been awarded as broadly as Okie's. First, he won the Gilbert Fite Award from the Agricultural History Society for the top dissertation of the year. He followed that up with the Southern Historical Association's C. Vann Woodward Prize for the best dissertation on southern history, and finally the Allan Nevins prize for the best doctoral dissertation in *any subject of American history* in 2012. To be clear, the Nevins is the top prize for all dissertations in the field; it is akin to a Pulitzer Prize for dissertations.

To no one's surprise, this successful dissertation became a major book published in 2016 by Cambridge University Press in their Studies on the American South series. *The Georgia Peach: Culture, Environment, and Agriculture in the American South*, was favorably reviewed by a range of academic and public venues. Beginning with the ubiquitous image of the Georgia peach, Okie wove together a history from the perspectives of the environment, race, agriculture, economics, and popular culture. The transformation of the fruit from a relatively rare commodity to the image backdrop of the state's license plates is a surprisingly nuanced story, but Okie's ability to present the history in an understandable—even, dare I say, *fun*—narrative is remarkable. The book has become a must-read for my graduate students and I present it to them as a model of environmental and southern scholarship.

Indeed, reading back through some of the reviews of the book I found a quotation that is very much germane to his current application for a semester leave. In the *American Historical Review*, one of the top two history journals in the U.S., historian George Ellenberg wrote a glowing review of *The Georgia Peach*. But it is his conclusion that sticks out today: "The

challenge for the author is to maintain the same level of quality in his subsequent works. Given the many strengths of his first work, much will be expected, but it is clear that Professor Okie is more than up to the task.” Indeed, Okie now has a reputation to uphold and he will certainly benefit from a semester away from other tasks to concentrate on this new project.

I have no doubt that the book that results from Okie’s “Old Fields: A History of the American South in Five Ordinary Plants” research will be important and influential. His creative approach of telling the history of the region in five chapter-length biographies of plants promises to recenter our understanding of the region in both the minute ecologies of specific places in the South, but also to connect the people, cultures, and landscapes of these places to the entire region and country. Like with his first book, the impact of the second book should reach far beyond experts in a narrow corner of history. His approach promises to make environmental history a newly important method for understanding key and long-standing ideas about the South. This will be an important book that reaches a large audience.

I encourage KSU to support this leave so that Okie can devote time and energy to this project. Please don’t hesitate to contact me if you have further questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James C. Giesen". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial 'J'.

James C. Giesen
Associate Professor of History and John Grisham Master Teacher
Mississippi State University



UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA PRESS

February 4, 2019

National Endowment for the Humanities
Public Scholar Program

Re: William Thomas Okie/*Old Fields: A History of the
American South in Five Ordinary Plants*

Dear NEH:

I am writing to offer my support and the University of Georgia Press's strong interest in publishing Tom Okie's book. It's combination of good science, rigorous environmental history, and (importantly) vivid, lucid prose are a perfect fit for the University of Georgia's publishing program. With the Press's expertise and some support from the NEH, we can help this important book to reach the broadest possible audience.

I have been in conversation with the author for some time now, exchanging details and discussing options. We are a Press with a good track record for straddling the worlds of the academy and the public square. This book would be a lively addition to our ["Environmental History of the American South"](#) series and series editor Jim Giesen has also been a resource for the author.

We have discussed the book at a Press "early decision" meeting and I have been encouraged to seek outside peer reviews of the project when Tom Okie is ready to share more. Our peer review process readers gathers constructive feedback that will guide the author and the Press on next steps toward publication (including, we hope, an advance contract). With a contract in place, we will work with the author on revisions and hone the manuscript prior to publication.

This will be a book that can benefit from significant illustrations and a modest price to encourage a broad readership. We have not nailed down a specific publishing plan yet, but we know we will either issue a jacketed clothbound edition priced for the retail trade (perhaps printing between 2 and 5 thousand copies) or a simultaneous cloth and paperback printing, with the paperback being priced at a good, accessible price (and with a similar initial print-run).



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The University of Georgia Press is very proud of the rigorous peer review process that we follow to formalize publishing decisions as well as to help develop the strongest possible publishing projects. We are similarly proud of our track record of publishing smart books that educate general readers about our region and our environment.

I am delighted that we may have the opportunity to publish this work and look forward to working with the author on the broader research and writing going forward.

If you need any additional information, please do give me a call or email.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Mick Gusinde-Duffy', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Mick Gusinde-Duffy
Executive Editor for Scholarly and Digital Publishing
mickgd@uga.edu
706-542-9907

Previous Kennesaw State University Funding

- Seed Grant, Department of History and Philosophy, 2020
- Scholarship Support Grant, College of Humanities and Social Sciences, 2020
- Faculty Summer Research Grant, College of Humanities and Social Sciences, 2018
- Manuscript Completion Award, College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Kennesaw State University, Spring 2017
- Incentive Funding Award for Research and Creative Activity, Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, 2016
- Global Engagement Award, College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Kennesaw State University, Kennesaw, GA, 2015
- Faculty Summer Research Grant, College of Humanities and Social Sciences, 2015
- Pilot/Seed Grant to Attract External Funding, Office of Vice President for Research, 2015
- Incentive Funding Award for Research and Creative Activity, Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, 2014

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