

H-France Salon
Volume 15, Issue 12, #2

Becoming a Historian and Walking Through Burgundy's Vineyards

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I first met Jim Farr in Columbus, Ohio in October 1985 at a meeting of what was then called the Sixteenth Century Studies Conference. I had only recently come across his dissertation of 1983 at Northwestern University on Dijon's artisans in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. As I was about to embark on a new project based in Dijon's archives, I was very anxious to meet him and to learn more about Dijon's archives and what it was like working in the Burgundian capital. That fortuitous meeting nearly forty years ago, not only began a lifelong friendship, but it also served as a catalyst to remaking and reshaping me as a historian. What I mean by this is that up to that point I was trained as a historian of high politics and institutions, and the bulk of my archival research had been based in Paris. I wanted a new project that would take me into the provinces and allow me to delve more into social and cultural history. And I can say that whatever success I ultimately achieved in that regard is largely due to Jim's influence on me—though my failures are all on me, to be sure! Starting in the summer of 1986, Jim and I found ourselves in the Dijon archives for two to three months every summer. By the mid-1990s I got to know his two young boys, Mason and Quentin, on these annual summer excursions. It goes without saying that Jim had become my new mentor in the Dijon archives. And given that after publishing his dissertation on Dijon's artisans in 1988, he published two further books based in Dijon's archives in 1995 and 2005, we were destined to see each other in Dijon most summers for nearly two decades.

This larger narrative disguises some of the more specific ways Jim influenced me as a historian. Most important of all, Jim introduced me to some important people in Dijon. It goes without saying that the directors and entire staffs of the Archives municipales, the Archives départementales de la Côte d'Or, and the Bibliothèque municipale in Dijon welcomed me with open arms and treated me as a serious scholar entirely because of Jim. Normally, when you go into a new archive for the first time, it takes several weeks of the staff seeing you come in and working all day every day before they treat you as a serious scholar, and even then, maybe months before you develop a personal rapport with the staff, always difficult for a foreigner with halting French. But because Jim personally introduced me to these people, and because he had already spent an entire academic year and several summers in the Dijon archives, his *bona fides* gave me instant credit with them and extremely generous and friendly service for the next decade or so. I became especially close with the staff at the Archives municipales, where I spent the majority of time: they offered me consolation and several home remedies when I came down with a severe cold one time (including even a bottle of homemade *crème de cassis* from one of them); or when another archive staff-member took me out to lunch on my birthday. But Jim was the catalyst that started these relationships. And Jim also introduced my wife and me to two remarkable people he had gotten to know while he was doing research on his dissertation, Gisèle and Michel Baridon, and indeed four

generations of this remarkable family, and it was from them and at their dining table that I learned nearly everything I know about Burgundy wine.

Speaking of wine, Jim was responsible for accompanying me to my very first wine tasting (*dégustation*) in Burgundy that first summer there in 1986. I cannot remember which vigneron we visited for this, but I do remember that my wife and I had no idea of what to expect nor indeed how many wines we would be tasting. And we also had no idea that a spit bucket even existed, never mind why anyone would want to spit out such delicious—and expensive!—Burgundy wine. By the fourth or fifth wine we finally noticed that everyone else was not finishing the entire serving of each wine, and in fact they were dumping out all but a small taste. Meanwhile, Jim was just laughing as we were clearly getting a bit tipsy by this point. If memory serves, we tasted a total of three whites and five reds, then ended with a taste of the vigneron's *crème de cassis*. Afterwards, the vigneron insisted we take a tour of his winery, and he led us to a tight spiral staircase that went down to his *cave*. All I could see was this staircase spinning around like a top, but I was able later to thank Jim for letting me learn the hard way how to enjoy a *dégustation*.

Another very fond memory of a shared wine experience occurred a few years after that first *dégustation*. Jim and I were both in Dijon without wives or kids and we decided to take a local bus down the *route de vin* to buy some wine directly from the vignerons. We left Dijon one morning from the bus terminal and travelled past Nuits-St. Georges and Beaune to the village of Pommard, where we got off and had lunch in a local café. Afterwards we started tasting wines with the hopes of finding some good wines that we could afford. But our plan had one fatal flaw: we discovered that most vignerons refused to accept our American credit cards and would only accept cash, a *Carte blue* (a French debit card), or a check from a French bank. We walked from Pommard down the road to Volnay, where we were met by the same resistance to credit cards—this was not Paris or Dijon, but *la France profonde*, where both credit cards and foreigners, even those who could speak French, were met with suspicion. And one woman in Volnay even excoriated us for being typical Americans. “You come here,” she huffed in her Burgundian-accented French, “and you only want to buy our best vintages. You pay too much attention to Robert Parker, and you don't understand, like our regular customers do, that we have to sell wine from every vintage.” She went on to argue that we should want, enjoy, and expect each vintage to be different and enjoy them all accordingly, rather than cherry-pick just the top vintages. It was a humiliating lesson Jim and I both learned that day, and a lesson I have come to cherish and adopt as my own mantra. Needless to say, Jim and I departed somewhat stunned, though better educated, and wandered down the hill from Volnay to Meursault, where we finally found a *vigneron* willing to accept our credit cards as payment, Domaine Ropiteau Frères. After tasting some of their wonderful red and white wines, we each bought six bottles, and with these wines in plastic carrier bags we clambered back onto the bus to Dijon. It was a day neither of us will ever forget, as we both achieved our goal of walking through some lovely Burgundian vineyards, purchasing some good wine direct from the cellar, and getting a proper education as well as a scolding from the *vigneronne* in Volnay as a bonus.

As a scholar, historian, colleague in the profession, not to mention friend, Jim continued to influence me long after he moved on from Burgundy after his first three books. As a co-editor of *French Historical Studies*, Jim commissioned me to write a review essay on five books published in the early 1990s by Denis Richet, Denis Crouzet, Barbara Diefendorf, Michael Wolfe, and Henry

Heller on the role of religion in the French Wars of Religion.¹ As it turned out, this particular piece would become the most oft-cited thing I ever wrote in my entire career, and I have Jim to thank for that. To be sure, that the most oft-cited piece I ever wrote was a book review rather than any original research of my own is a more a reflection on me than on Jim. But I was honored to be asked to review the work of some already established scholars, and I hope I repaid the faith Jim showed in me in asking me to write it. And I particularly cherished his sage advice in helping me decide whether to reply to one of the authors in the review essay who submitted a rejoinder to my initial review. And it needs to be said that Jim and his co-editor of *French Historical Studies*, his Purdue colleague John Contreni, introduced new formats and ideas essay into the journal like the review that live on to this day.

Yet it was Jim's influence on me as a historian and showing me by example how to become a proper historian that is his greatest contribution to me and my career. Unlike Jim, who published three books on Burgundy relatively early in his career, my own single book on Burgundy did not appear until very late in my career.² But anyone who has read this book knows very well how much Jim's first book on Dijon's artisans influenced my entire analysis of Dijon's *vignerons*.³ His sources on artisans' wages, their baptismal records, their living conditions based on tax rolls, and their working conditions made it possible for me to examine Dijon's *vignerons* in the same way he had done in his trailblazing first book. His second book on sexual politics not only served as an entry point for me into Dijon's criminal archives, but it allowed me to make better sense of how patriarchy and gender operated in Old Regime France in ways I had not previously thought about.⁴ And Jim's third book on the murder of a presiding judge in Dijon's *Chambre des comptes* by his cousin, who happened to be a presiding judge in Dijon's Parlement, introduced me to the records of the Parlement of Dijon as well as provided an entry into the leading elite families that not only dominated the court but also municipal politics in the period.⁵ Whatever the merits of my own book, it could never have been written at all, nor would I have even attempted it, without Jim's scholarship in the Dijon archives as well as his friendship and encouragement over the years. In the end, it seems clear that he taught me how to do social and cultural history in the archives as well as in the vineyards. *Salut*, Jim! And I thank you for letting me tag along with you in both places.

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¹ "Putting Religion Back into the Wars of Religion," *French Historical Studies* 18 (Fall 1993): 524-551.

² *The Politics of Wine in Early Modern France: Religion and Popular Culture in Burgundy, 1477-1630* (Cambridge University Press, 2018).

³ James R. Farr, *Hands of Honor: Artisans and their World in Dijon, 1550-1650* (Cornell University Press, 1988).

⁴ James R. Farr, *Authority and Sexuality in Early modern Burgundy, 1550-1730* (Oxford University Press, 1995).

⁵ James R. Farr, *A Tale of Two Murders: Passion and Power in Seventeenth-Century France* (Duke University Press, 2005).

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H-France Salon
ISSN 2150-4873
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