

2009 CHE Symposium Speaker Biographies

Kellen Backer

Kellen Backer is a dissertator pursuing a joint Ph.D. in the departments of history and history of science. Before attending Wisconsin, he received a BA from Rice University in math and history. His graduate studies have focused on the social and cultural history of science, technology, and medicine. More recently, he has been working on how science, medicine, and technology shape food history. His dissertation, “World War II and the Triumph of Industrialized Food,” follows how food in the U.S. changed because of World War II.

Chelsea Chapman

Chelsea Chapman is a doctoral student in the department of Anthropology at UW Madison with research interests in environmental anthropology, cultural geography, and North American studies. She is currently working on a critical ethnography of energy in grassroots environmental activist organizations, Alaska Native corporations, and fossil energy extractive industries in and around her hometown in interior Alaska. In her dissertation fieldwork starting next year, she will investigate cultural conceptions of energy that underpin crisis and conflict in that rapidly changing Northern landscape.

Michael Dockry

Michael is a registered member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation and was born and raised in Green Bay, Wisconsin. He works for the United States Forest Service as their liaison to the College of the Menominee Nation in Keshena, Wisconsin, and is a third year PhD Student in the Forest and Wildlife Ecology Department studying with Nancy Langston. As a forester, ecologist, forest planner, and an environmental historian, Michael facilitates resolutions to environmental conflicts and fosters community participation in natural resource management. He sees research as a collaborative process between communities and himself. The ultimate goal of his research is to empower communities and provide them with new tools for understanding sustainability,

understanding environmental change, and making decisions. Michael's current research focuses on Indigenous community forestry in Bolivia and Wisconsin.

Steve Laubach

Steve Laubach is a 2nd-year PhD candidate in the Curriculum and Instruction Department working with John Rudolph in the Science Education Program. He received a Master's Degree in Conservation Biology and Sustainable development in 2000 from the UW. Most recently, Steve taught high school biology at The Lawrenceville School in New Jersey and developed a strong interest in field and classroom teaching of ecology. Outside of school, Steve spends most of his time with his wife Nina and their two children Noah (4 years old) and Aurora (5 months).

Brian Leech

Brian Leech is a PhD Candidate in the Department of History who is currently an adjunct in the department of liberal studies at Augustana College in Rock Island, Illinois. He has long been fascinated by mining communities. His masters thesis considered how mining labor, ethnic divisions and the populist movement influenced Montana's politics. Currently, he is currently working on a dissertation that discusses the social and environmental effects of open-pit copper mining in Montana. It is tentatively titled "The City that Ate Its Own Guts: Ethnic Neighborhoods, Environmental Hazards, and Labor in the Mining Landscape of Butte, Montana." The following presentation is drawn from this research.

Jen Martin

Jen Martin up in a New York suburb, Scarsdale. She graduated from Bowdoin College in Brunswick, Maine, with a major in History and German. Before graduate school, she worked for a government affairs firm in Washington, D.C., doing mostly environmental advocacy. At UW-Madison, she has been a TA in History and now work at the History of Cartography Project in the Geography Department. Her interests include environmental history, U.S. West, animal studies, and history of science. Jen's dissertation explores how Americans' ideas about sharks—as garbage fish, perfectly-evolved killing machines,

endangered marine predators, or luxury consumer goods—have expressed themselves via scientific, cultural, and commercial practices. She is trying to explain how these historical relationships have contributed to steep declines in many shark populations in unexpected and complicated ways.

Michelle Niemann

As a graduate student in the English department, Michelle Niemann focuses on twentieth-century American literature, particularly contemporary poetry. Michelle is interested in representations of decay and the organic in contemporary literature; in her dissertation, she plans to explore the ways in which the depiction of decay as beautiful may be tied to changing conceptions of nature. Michelle is pursuing a minor in U.S. History and is involved in the English department's Contemporary Poetry Reading Group and the Mellon seminar on "What is the Posthuman?" as well as CHE.

Megan Raby

Since completing a BS in geology and an MA in history at Montana State University, Megan Raby has spent the past two years here in Wisconsin working on her PhD in the History of Science Department. Her research interests center on the role of place in shaping scientific knowledge and the flow of knowledge and practice across physical and disciplinary space. She is particularly interested in the history of the field sciences during the 19th- and early 20th-centuries. Having endured the better part of a decade in cold climates, a dissertation on American science in the Caribbean sounded like a good idea.

Christine Vatovec

Christine Vatovec is a PhD candidate in the Nelson Institute's Environment & Resources program and lecturer in the Department of Rural Sociology. Christine's personal environmental history has provided her with insights from the diverse fields of sustainable agriculture, endangered species conservation, and urban environmental planning. Her current research interests focus on sustainable consumption in end-of-life healthcare and mortuary practices. Christine was honored to receive a CHE Graduate Student Research and Travel Grant in 2008 to aid in her dissertation research.