The past is what happened. History is what we write about it.

“Histories of memories” offers an interdisciplinary, scholarly approach to study of the past. Written histories are always informed by memories, since memory of the past is alive in individuals’ minds, as are memories of learning about the past. Memories exist in individual brains, but they would not persist without social and collective memory frameworks. The histories we learned in school are only one type of those frameworks.

This course will examine histories of memories during the “long” nineteenth century (1789-1918) through Western institutions and technologies that facilitate recall: museums, photography, print media and visual culture, as well as academic disciplines which emerged in western civilizations to study memory phenomena, such as history, psychology, archaeology, paleontology and more – many of which were formalized in the 19th century. The emergence of modern notions of time and its rapid pace of change will be considered alongside practices of preservation, conservation and the creation of memorials and monuments. Topics include: the human body as a site of memory (tattoos, funerary practices, wax museums, postmortem photography); Napoleonic and Civil War commemorative sites; theories of extinction; the creation of public history museums; the emergence of mass tourism and the mass market for antiques and souvenirs.

A pair of curated book chapters and/or articles is assigned for each class meeting; digitized copies will be provided. We will discuss the texts during the class, as well as material presented by the instructor. Each chapter is from a book highly recommended for those interested in further reading.

Week 1
Defining the Century: Remembering Revolution

Week 2
Teeth, Tattoos and Tourists: Collecting Historical Objects in and beyond Museums
Week 3  
Bringing the Past Back to Life: From Wax Museums to Missions

Week 4  
Fearing/Preventing Oblivion: Civil War Commemoration, Postmortem Photography and Theories of Extinction

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