

THE QUAD

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Have You Met

Have You Met Dominique Kirchner Reill?

Meet Dominique Kirchner Reill, Director of the Wirth Institute for Austrian and Central European Studies and Professor of History.

October 30, 2025



Kirchner Reill in Rijeka, Croatia. Rijeka (formerly known by the Italian version of its name, Fiume) was the subject of her settings of her forthcoming books on the European life of NYC mayor Fiorello LaGuardia. (Photo: Supplied)

What is your first U of A memory?

Arriving from Europe for my job interview, I remember stumbling completely jetlagged into a sushi restaurant on Whyte. At a table next to me, there was a group of young UAlberta students, dressed in some version of goth attire. They were laughing and telling stories. And then all of a sudden one of them glimpsed a woman walking by on the street outside and gasped “There she is! I just love her! She’s my favorite professor! Should I run out and say hi?” The other two friends encouraged her to do so. Within moments, the student was out on the street, then the prof, her friend, and her dog came into the restaurant to wish the students well. I thought to myself: Wow! I just love this energy. This is a place I can imagine working.

What’s something your coworkers don’t know about you?

I don’t collect books. Historians are renowned for their book hoarding ways. I come from a family of book hoarders. I take pride in not keeping this family tradition alive. Except for art books. I do hoard those.

What’s your favourite distraction?

Making travel plans.

If you were enrolling in one course, program or degree right now, what would it be?

A degree in the Faculty of Native Studies.

You can invite anyone — alive or dead, real or fictional — to dinner. Who would it be?

Currently I’m finishing a book about the former mayor of New York City, Fiorello LaGuardia, who lived in Central

Europe from when he was 15 to 23. I would like to invite LaGuardia's mother, Irene Luzzato Coen, to a long dinner chez moi. Irene was born in Habsburg Trieste (today's Italy) in 1859 to an impoverished Jewish family. Her father, Abram Coen, had been born in Split (Habsburg Dalmatia, today's Croatia) and moved to Trieste, where he struggled in many professions (though his true passion was journalism).

Her mother, Fiorina Luzzato — Fiorello LaGuardia's namesake — was born in Trieste and worked as a homemaker until her husband died; thereafter Irene's mother provided for her family by renting out sleeping space to actors and day workers. I would like to ask Irene LaGuardia what it was like to grow up always on the edge of poverty in Trieste, how she felt when she took the steamer for New York City in 1880 with her new musician husband, how she managed raising her three children on U.S. army bases in the lands of the Arizonas and the Dakotas, what it felt like to move back to Trieste after spending almost 15 years in North America and then how she made her way in Capodistria/Koper (today's Slovenia), Fiume/Rijeka (today's Croatia) and Budapest (today's Hungary) where her husband's and children's life choices brought her thereafter.

All in all, serving Irene Luzzato Coen LaGuardia several courses of home cooked food, with music playing in the background and one of my cats purring on her lap, I would love to hear her tell her tales about what it was like for a poor, assimilated Jewish woman to move back and forth across oceans, to live on the frontiers of Indigenous lands and the encroaching U.S. state and then to move over and over again across Central Europe, encountering different cultures of place, food and family expectations. That's a dinner where as host I would feel as an honored guest to the history that currently occupies my heart.

If you could see any live performance tomorrow, what would it be?

Hamilton. I still haven't seen it live.

What advice would you give your 18-year-old self?

Keep going. Go ahead: just keep learning more and more languages. The world is too big to not want to learn more about it and try to communicate with it on its own terms. And, yes, global warming is a real thing. Try, try, try to help find ways to protect and nurture our planet.

What's one thing you can't live without?

Garlic.

What three words describe your U of A experience?

Inspiring. Hopeful. Gruelling.

Do you have any upcoming projects or initiatives you are looking forward to at work?




So many! With the amazing team at the Wirth Institute — spearheaded by Sylwia Chrobak, Rychelle Wright and Alicia Campbell — we are working night and day to bring exciting culture makers such as musicians, intellectuals, artists and activists to campus to help connect this Edmonton community to lands east of France and west of Russia. Right now, we are working non-stop to make sure we can involve as many emerging scholars and artists from Canada and Central Europe in our projects as possible. On the horizon this November is [Jewish Studies Week](https://www.ualberta.ca/en/wirth-institute/online-programming/jewish-studies/index.html) (<https://www.ualberta.ca/en/wirth-institute/online-programming/jewish-studies/index.html>) which will feature the annual Toby & Saul Reichert Holocaust Lecture. This year's speaker is the renowned, extremely gifted Ari Joskowicz, who is the Eugene Greener, Jr. Chair in Jewish Studies & Professor of Jewish Studies and History at Vanderbilt University. His talk is titled "Jews, Roma, and the Holocaust."

And then there's monthly Friday Central European Cafes from 2 - 3:30 p.m. on the first floor of Old Arts/ Convocation Hall, where people from all over the university and Edmonton community are invited to drop by, enjoy yummy pastries and hot beverages, chat and listen to a short introduction of what someone is working on. I invite anyone to join us for the upcoming [November 7](https://www.ualberta.ca/en/wirth-institute/online-programming/jewish-studies/index.html#Bonny) (<https://www.ualberta.ca/en/wirth-institute/online-programming/jewish-studies/index.html#Bonny>) event, where we will be hosting Bonny Reichert, who will talk about her new culinary memoir *How to Share an Egg: A True Story of Hunger, Love, and Plenty*

Oh goodness, there's so much in the works I'm excited about. I just hope as many people come to learn, listen, enjoy and discuss all the stuff we have planned. To see what is happening, where and when, just check out the [Wirth Institute's website](https://www.ualberta.ca/en/wirth-institute/online-programming/jewish-studies/index.html) (<https://www.ualberta.ca/en/wirth-institute/online-programming/jewish-studies/index.html>).

About Dominique

Before joining the University of Alberta, Dominique Kirchner Reill was a professor of modern European history at the University of Miami. She received her PhD with distinction from Columbia University. She is president of the Central European History Society, co-founder and co-organizer of the first Central European History Convention and member of the board of the Botstiber Institute for Austrian-American Studies. Her first award-winning book, *Nationalists Who Feared the Nation: Adriatic Multi-Nationalism in Habsburg Dalmatia, Trieste, and Venice*, was published by Stanford University Press in 2012. Her next book, *The Fiume Crisis: Life in the Wake of the Habsburg Empire*, came out in 2020 with Harvard University's Belknap Press and received an Honorable Mention from the Jelavich Book Prize. She is in the final stages of finishing her next book, currently titled *The Habsburg Mayor of New York: Fiorello LaGuardia*.

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