

2014 American Society of Environmental History Society Executive Committee Meeting
Saturday, 15 March 2014, 1:30-5 pm
San Francisco, California

Attending:

Officers:

Gregg Mitman, President
Kathy Brosnan, Vice President and President elect
Mark Madison, Treasurer
Jay Taylor, Secretary and Co-Chair Journal Management Group

Executive Committee Members:

Sarah Elkind
Sterling Evans
Sara Gregg
Ellen Stroud
Paul Sutter
Louis Warren
Graeme Wynn
Lisa Brady, Editor of *Environmental History*
Bathsheba Demuth, Graduate Student Representative
Nancy Langston, Ex Officio, Past President
John McNeill, Ex Officio, Past President
Lisa Mighetto, Executive Director
Harriet Ritvo, Ex Officio, Past President

Guests:

Steve Anderson, Forest History Society President
Colin Coates, Chair 2013 Local Arrangements Committee
Erin Ganley, Oxford University Press
Carolyn Merchant, Local Arrangements
John Perkins, Local Arrangements
Trish Thomas, Oxford University Press
Laura Watt, Local Arrangements

1:18 p.m., Gregg Mitman called the meeting to order.

After brief introductions, the minutes for the 2013 Executive Committee Meeting were moved, seconded, and approved.

A) Conference Report

The co-chairs of Local Arrangements—Carolyn Merchant, Laura Watt, and John Perkins—reported that the ASEH meeting in SF had 716 registered attendees and raised \$65,884 in contributions. This was the largest ever gathering, with the largest ever book exhibit. The

committee briefly discussed these details, the high quality of panels, problems with unregistered presenters, and ways of expanding the number of presenters. The rejection rate of proposals has now topped 50 percent. The three co-chairs were then thanked for organizing a wonderful conference. Each was given a copy of Don Compton's *America's National Parks: A Pop-Up Book*. The co-chairs then left the meeting. There was no report by the program committee.

B) Journal Reports

Trish Thomas of Oxford University Press noted that *Environmental History* subscriptions are still shifting from the institutional to consortia category, and individual subscriptions are still falling. Net revenue was up last year, but the growth curve is leveling. OUP has worked to build institutional subscriptions at the global level, focusing on China, India, and Latin America. This will increase revenues, but translation costs—dual language webpages and abstracts—will offset new profits. Thomas noted that digital usage has also grown, and that OUP has been conducting seasonal marketing strategies to increase usage. The ISI impact factor finally rebounded. The decline from very high numbers four years ago partly reflects the exit of popular articles from the ISI calculation and partly correction of an initial accounting error that collated *Environmental History* and *Environment and History* citations as one journal. This is why we thought *EH*'s impact factor was so high in 2010. Finally, Thomas reported on changes in the production team.

Erin Ganley discussed OUP's movement into social media advertising. Twitter is growing in importance as a way to flag new material to users. Ganley also noted that the main concern at this point is to increase the number of submissions to the journal, since this number has fallen precipitously the last two years. Members then inquired about why digital collections are spread across JSTOR, EBSCO, and ProQuest. Thomas replied that the ProQuest contract had expired, and EBSCO gives us broader coverage for a better price. Members asked OUP for data on which universities and colleges subscribe to current content of *EH*. Anecdotes revealed that a surprising number of schools are not subscribing. Other members noted that there were still problems with gaining individual access to the OUP website and with international transaction charges. This seems to be an ASEH-based problem because FHS and joint members are not experiencing these problems.

Lisa Brady made the editor's report. Brady discussed the declining submission numbers, noting that the fall off was real but also statistically exacerbated by the editorial decision last year to count forums as one submission for the ISI calculation. This has had a deleterious effect on the journal's European Reference Index for the Humanities (ERIH) rating, which is currently a Tier 2 status, making it a less prestigious journal than *Environment and History* for European authors. The numbers can be boosted by having authors submit gallery pieces through ScholarOne. Brady wants to get article submission numbers back up to 80 or 90 in 2014. The editor was asked whether declining submissions had affected journal quality. The answer is no. Other members noted that one upside of the decline is that 49-day turnaround time for journal submissions is remarkably fast. We should get the word out about turnaround.

Jay Taylor reported for the Journal Management Group. He repeated Thomas' findings that revenues were up, individual subscriptions were down, and the editors were doing a good job. The JMG is experiencing its first significant turnover. Tom Dunlap stepped down as the FHS co-

chair last fall, and Taylor will step down as the ASEH co-chair this fall. Richard Judd and Adam Rome will be the respective replacements. At its own meeting that morning, the JMG discussed the need for a mid-term report each fall, and the fiscal implications of emerging open access policies by the Research Councils of the United Kingdom (RCUK), University of California System, and the Tri-Councils of Canada. Taylor and Mitman then motioned a formal open access policy in response to RCUK policy. Members discussed the fiscal implications of the UC policy—there isn't any yet—and Thomas said OUP encourages authors to post url's of articles rather than pdf copies of articles. The refined motion was moved, seconded, and passed: "The ASEH Executive Committee approves the journal *Environmental History* to set a fee of \$1600 for 'Gold Open Access.' The *EH* Editor can waive an open-access fee for one article per issue. *EH* will comply with the UK green policy that an article will be made available as open access after 24 months."

Members then discussed the committee motion to approve a new six-year journal contract with Oxford University Press. Mitman explained the central facets of the contract that was negotiated by Anderson, Hayes Brown, Bill Cronon, Mighetto, and Mitman. There will be increased fiscal support by OUP for the editorial office, subscription costs to the society will remain at \$24, an e-reader version of the journal will be available for members, and OUP will manage JSTOR revenues. Discussion refined some of the language in the contract, including adding the ASEH's tiered membership costs.

At this point Anderson, Ganley, and Thomas left the room and the Executive Committee reconvened in camera.

A motion to approve the new contract with OUP as outlined in the draft contract was unanimously approved.

2:20 break

2:36 meeting reconvened

C) Treasurer Report

Mark Madison began by noting that the Society had more income than was reported, but that the streams were uneven. We've had two good conferences, the new OUP contract stabilizes journal revenues, and grants are the ASEH's fastest growing revenue stream. Conversely, membership losses pose a growing concern, and investment returns have been poor. The 2014-2015 budget was moved, seconded, and approved.

In discussion one member noted that the Leopold-Hidy contribution was not clearly recorded in the financials. Madison could not answer the question. He thought the expense might have been paid from the FHS profit share, and Mighetto observed that the two societies often "horsetraded" expenses. Madison also reported that he was seeking investment advice on how to restructure the Vanguard accounts because the fund has not performed well. He concluded by advising members to establish a process and plan for the succession of the Executive Director. We have neither, and sooner or later Mighetto will step down.

Discussion shifted to the problem of monetizing digital products. Paper journals have been the bread and butter of academic societies, but this is no longer an effective business model. Digitization has been coinciding with a decline in individual subscriptions, and the ASEH has not developed additional reasons for memberships. Meanwhile, the ASEH budget has grown since 2001 from \$17K to \$120K. One way to enhance the value of memberships is to provide services such as what AHA offers with job notices and mentorship programs. We might also increase revenues by enforcing our mandate that conference presenters must register, and monetizing the website by linking hits to ads, an idea that the committee has already approved.

Discussion shifted to the topic of divesting the ASEH's oil stocks. Madison cautioned against this. A few years ago the committee voted to explore socially responsible investment strategies, but the preliminary audit process delayed things long enough that we were spared when socially responsible portfolios tanked in 2008. Since then the committee has not acted on the proposal for a socially ethical investment policy. Others noted that there are competing models surrounding oil stocks: one is divestment; the other is greater investment to support proxy fights. We should also guard against assuming all members share a common political view on this or any issue, and that politicized policies can threaten the society's tax exempt status. Madison reminded us that we have a fiduciary duty to ensure the ASEH remains solvent.

D) Evaluation of the Executive Director

Mighetto left the room. The committee then reconvened in executive session to discuss renewal of the executive director's contract. Mitman summarized the new contract, which includes a COLA adjustment and increases in the office and travel budgets. The motion for the new contract was moved and seconded. After a brief discussion about the executive director's status as a contractor rather than a salaried employee, and the need to work toward putting an operations manual and general succession plan in place over the next few years, the motion to approve the new four-year contract to extend Lisa Mighetto's role as Executive Director of ASEH from 1 July 2014 to 31 December 2018 was enthusiastically and unanimously approved.

E) Gift for Lisa Mighetto

A motion, brought forth from the Local Arrangements Committee, to offer Lisa Mighetto a token of appreciation in the amount of \$1,000.000 paid from the conference proceedings for all the work put into the ASEH San Francisco conference was made and seconded. The motion unanimously passed.

F) Fundraising and Development Committee Report

Brosnan began by thanking committee members Sarah Elkind, Marty Melosi, Marty Reuss, Paul Sutter, and Brett Walker, and ex-officos Mighetto and Mitman. The ASEH has a growing number of donors and cultivates a "culture of giving," so the committee drafted and submitted a policy for seeking and handling contributions. The goal was to develop a systematic policy rather than one focused narrowly on "corporations":

1. The ASEH will conduct its fund-raising efforts professionally and ethically and expects the external donor organization (hereinafter "donor") to reciprocate in kind. The

ASEH Executive Committee will review proposed donations for their consistency with ASEH's mission and objectives.

2. Except for unrestricted donations, the donor and the ASEH will agree in writing on the purpose and financial amount of the donation and, if applicable, the schedule of payments. The Executive Committee of the ASEH must by majority vote approve the arrangement. The written arrangement, once approved, can be modified only with the approval of both parties. In the case of unrestricted donations from donors, no written arrangement is necessary, but the Executive Committee must still approve the donation.

3. Unless the donor wishes otherwise, the ASEH will gratefully acknowledge in public the donor's support.

4. The ASEH and the donor agree that acceptance of a donation does not indicate either endorsement or disapproval of specific programs, projects, and policies of either party. Neither party will attempt to influence the other's activities except to clarify matters relating to a donation.

5. In the case of ASEH awards for whatever purpose, the ASEH retains sole control over both the awards process and final choice of recipient regardless of extent of outside financial support.

6. ASEH Executive Committee members who have a serious financial relationship with a donor will recuse themselves from any Executive Committee vote related to the ASEH's relationship with the donor. In general, "serious financial relationship" means service (past or present) on a donor's executive board, present employees of the donor, or present consultants and contractors working for the donor.

7. ASEH will attempt to promote a well-balanced portfolio of donors in order to eliminate any suspicion that its activities are unduly influenced or funded by one or two donors.

8. The Local Arrangements Committee for the annual conference will consider this policy with respect to potential conference sponsors.

9. ASEH will post its Donations Policy on its website.

The meeting then discussed the policy. One conversation revolved around the practicality of having the executive committee approve a donation, especially given the large number of donations that local arrangements committees now receive for each conference.

At this point Evans left the meeting.

One idea was to set a minimum level of donation of \$10K, \$5K, or \$2.5K; others suggested delimiting the approval process to restricted or unsolicited donations, or allowing the president and executive director to review solicited donations but requiring the full executive committee to

review unsolicited donations. The size of the donation seemed to matter to most members, but some noted that the source of the donation could also matter. Many agreed that the ASEH should be transparent about its donors, but opinion divided on whether the policy language should be specific or flexible. Ritvo cautioned that there was no way to develop a donation policy that will please all members. Mitman saw no emerging consensus, so he asked Brosnan to have the committee refine the language of the motion and then resubmit for a web discussion and ballot. Brosnan concluded by thanking all the past presidents for their donations to the Four For Forty campaign.

3:51 break

4:05 meeting reconvened

G) Distinguished Service Award

Joel Tarr was nominated and second for the ASEH Distinguished Service Award. Candidates were discussed, and the nomination for Tarr was approved.

H) Membership Subscription System

Mighetto briefly explained the proposal to adopt a new system for managing memberships. The key upsides are better cost management and control of data. Members noted that the current system through OUP causes confusion and poses access problems. The new system will also allow us to generate more data about our members than OUP can do because of UK legal restrictions. There were suggestions to query the JAH on how they have managed to retain good access to the OUP site, and to use the new system for conference registrations as well. The motion was moved, seconded, and approved.

I) Graduate Student Committee Report

Demuth presented the report. In the last year the committee has organized a grad student writing workshop and speed-dating meet-the-presses event for the San Francisco conference. Both went well. There is a desire to create two panel slots to address grad student needs. Demuth also asked the executive committee to do a better job of advertising graduate student positions on ASEH committees, and for the ASEH to create dedicated spaces on the ASEH website so grad students can promote their research, and in the journal or other forums so more grads can publish. Several members replied that creating dedicated panels at conferences or publishing spots in the journal creates problems of privilege. Regional journals currently do provide publishing opportunities, but there were also peer-review-like ways to publish online. NiCHE's *The Otter*, *Environment and Society*, the Rachel Carson Center, and *Boom* are examples. The ASEH could create a "New Scholars Page" on its website, a dedicated section in its newsletter, and mentorship services—such as Agricultural History and Urban History do—on its website. All would be added reasons for people take out ASEH memberships.

J) AAUP 75th Anniversary

Mitman noted that the Association American of University Professors is preparing to celebrate the 75th anniversary of its Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure. A motion was made, seconded, and approved that the ASEH sign on to this statement.

K) New Business

Langston noted that conference panel/paper rejection rates have climbed over 50 percent. Several members agreed that this was getting too high, and that we needed to find ways to include more presentations: four-paper panels, shorter presentations, fewer comments, no two-years-in-a-row presenters, no being on the program more than once a meeting, mentor workshops, and requiring membership were all discussed. There was also renewed discussion about maintaining a list of no-shows to identify repeat offenders, and of creating a formal policy of inviting rejected panelists to submit posters instead.

Taylor briefly described the pre-conference digital history workshop at Stanford's CESTA and requested permission to create an ad hoc committee on digital scholarship. Moved, seconded, and passed.

Stroud and Brosnan requested that next year's name tags be on lanyards with bigger fonts.

Mitman adjourned meeting at 5:05 pm.