



aseh news

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Spring 2021***

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[Environmental History Week is Here!](#)

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Your registration confirmation email will include links to the virtual events.

Check out the [EVENTS CALENDAR](#) for information about all that is happening next week and the rest of the month.

- Here is full list of planned [Events](#) - panels, roundtables, conferences, networking and social events, and more.
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- Walk or run (or don't walk or run) and register for the [Virtual Hal Rothman Fun\(d\) Run](#) to support graduate student research.
- Visit the [EH Week Virtual Exhibit Hall](#) for great deals on your favorite environmental history and studies books.
- Wearing down from a long year? Pick an event or two and consider [Teaching EH Week](#).

We look forward to seeing you online!

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Hal Rothman Fun(d) Run



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The University of Alabama Press is sorry to miss meeting at ASEH this year, but pleased to participate in #EHW2021. We are offering 50% off orders placed directly on our [website](#) with discount code ASEHW2021. You can also call 800-621-2736 to place an order. The #EHW2021 discount applies to all formats of our books and is effective through 10/26/2021. [Click here for a complete listing of discounted books.](#)

EH Week Book Exhibit

Register for EH Week

Environmental History

The April 2021 issue is on its way to you!

Access *Environmental History* online.

environmental
HISTORY

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN: What Do Presidents Do?

Good golly, I wish the Nominating Committee warned me about the Covid pandemic when it asked me to stand for ASEH vice president/president-elect four years ago. Nah, I think I will take a pass, I would have said. But think of the perks, they might have replied. You will not have to pay for conferences during your term. You can cancel them, stay home, and learn Zoom instead!

The Covid crisis was not the only thing I did not know about the presidency. I had no idea what the president did beyond a few public duties. I saw ASEH presidents write columns for the newsletter, present addresses at conferences, sign public statements, and manage a crisis (Harriet Ritvo guided ASEH through a controversy about a conference site). The bylaws said the president chaired Council meetings, appointed members of committees, and served on all committees. I sensed presidents had other duties behind the scenes, but they were mysterious. There was, literally, no manual to guide me.

I suspect most members, too, have little idea of what the ASEH president does. My final column seems like the ideal place to pull back the curtain and reveal how one president approached the job. I hope it will advance transparency and create a record that future officers might find useful. ASEH has no requirement for presidents to submit reports, but I think reports would be valuable records. This column serves that purpose as well.

At some point it dawned on me that ASEH left it up to presidents to decide what they wanted to do beyond the duties listed above. It seemed wise to focus on a limited number of priorities, so I asked myself what seemed like ASEH's biggest challenges. The three I came up were **finances**, **membership**, and **diversity**. Those became my priorities. The Covid crisis joined them midway through my term. The president also has management duties.

What tools did I have to advance priorities? Presidential powers fall into four main categories. One is **agenda-setting**. I realized that one of the best ways to advance my agenda was to propose policies and practices to Council. That would institute practices that could continue indefinitely. A second is the power to **appoint** members of committees. A third is **management**. That means overseeing the executive director, who is a contractor. The fourth is **emergency powers**. In a crisis, the president can act unilaterally to stave off catastrophe. Here are some ways I used those tools.

Finances

My concern with finances began when I was vice president. That office is responsible for fund raising. The biggest financial need seemed to be to ensure ASEH's long term future. The society had been operating on annual income. It had some money in the bank, including some investments, but no endowment to fund activities using interest while protecting principal. A focus on annual income was appropriate for most of the society's history because it operated on a small margin. But I thought it was time to start putting the society on a permanent financial footing. I began with the idea of an endowment but was convinced by others that a permanent reserve would be wiser. It would be legally simpler and achieve the same goal.

Starting a permanent reserve became my main financial goal. I suspected that asking for donations to a general reserve might not be appealing to donors. The benefits would be too diffuse to grasp. Plus, it would be hard to sense progress if our only goal was hundreds of thousands of dollars. We would be short of that goal for years and years.

So, I thought it would be wise to identify specific ASEH activities and set reserve amounts for them that were achievable in a two-year period. That way, people could picture the benefit of their donations, and we could advance toward a large reserve by realistic steps. Prizes seemed like great initial projects. They are popular, they cost a specific amount of money every year, and the prize amount could be funded with reserves of tens of thousands of dollars. Council agreed and set \$30,000 as the permanent reserve amount for each prize. The Rachel Carson Prize seemed like a good first project because

it is prominent and honors an important woman. So, my goal was to get the Carson Prize fully funded during my presidency. To encourage donations, Council agreed to match the first \$15,000 donated.

I am thrilled to announce that I learned, just today, that **the Rachel Carson Prize is fully funded**. This means that the interest on the reserve will pay for the cash prize in perpetuity. No longer will we need to fund this prize from annual income, which frees up funds for the many other important things ASEH does, such as financing graduate students and awarding other prizes.

To all those who donated to the Carson Prize Fund, thank you, thank you, thank you.

An unexpected threat to finances reared up a year ago, and it reinforced my conviction that we need a permanent reserve. Our biggest expense is the annual meeting, which usually breaks even. We pay hotels a certain amount, and we recoup that amount from registrations and sponsorships. When we cancelled the Ottawa conference because of Covid, we faced a loss of \$250,000. The hotel said we had to pay that amount so long as it was open, Covid or no Covid. So, when we cancelled, we expected to lose \$250,000 to the hotel. That amount was about half of our bank account. It would not bankrupt ASEH, but it would put us one more cancelled conference away from bankruptcy. That possibility seemed realistic. We might have to cancel the 2021 conference in Boston and owe the hotel there another \$250,000. Two losses of \$250,000 would bankrupt us (or come close to it) by spring 2021—that is, by now. That prospect literally kept me awake at night.

Thankfully, you rallied. Many members told us to keep their conference registrations as donations. Others made new donations, thanks to encouragement from Gregg Mitman, Nancy Langston, and other past presidents. These measures eased my worries, but not by much. I was grateful for every dollar, but the total fell far short of \$250,000.

Then we drew the “Get Out of Debt Free” card. On the Friday we would have been meeting in Ottawa, public health officials closed the hotel, which relieved us of the need to pay. If the closure came a few days later, we would have been out \$250,000. Covid has proven the need for a permanent reserve to protect us from future catastrophes.

The great news is that your donations have made a big difference to ASEH finances. When I took office, we had about \$512,000 in the bank. Today, we have about \$618,000—an increase of \$106,000, or 21 percent. Almost all of the increase came from donations, which rose dramatically. They were \$7,000 in 2018, \$16,000 in 2019, and \$89,000 in 2020.

Donations were responsible for 99% (\$105,000 of \$106,000) of the increase in ASEH funds over the past two years. Last year’s donations alone were responsible for 84% of the increase in funds over the last two years.

Unfortunately, we expect donations to fall this year. Last year’s donations made a big jump because members told us to keep their Ottawa registrations,

and others made donations to cushion our expected loss. This year, some people are paying the registration fee of \$75 for Environmental History Week, but most are registering for free. If you cannot afford \$75, please donate whatever you can to ASEH. And if you can afford to contribute more than \$75, I urge you to do so. I always feel good when I donate to ASEH.

Membership

The number of members fluctuates throughout the year. A big increase usually comes in the spring when people join to register for the annual conference. Fluctuations make it hard to be certain about trends, but we appear to have held roughly steady over the last few years with 700-900 members, depending on when one does the counting. Those numbers include joint members with Forest History Society. Steady numbers mean we gain and lose about the same number of members each year. The two ways to increase numbers are to recruit more members and to retain members at a higher rate.

In the past, many people joined societies to get journal subscriptions. Now most members can access journals through their library, eliminating that incentive. Another incentive to join is to register for the annual meeting. We did not meet in 2020 and will not meet in person this year, so that incentive is temporarily in abeyance. The future trajectory, then, is unclear.

I tried to advance the recruitment and retention of members by broadening the charge of the Membership Committee (which formerly had no responsibilities beyond recommending dues levels), forming a new Professional Development Committee (chaired by Melissa Wiedenfeld), and appointing new members to both. These efforts were facets of the revision in committee structure and operations described below. I also appreciated the efforts of the Graduate Student Caucus and CODIE to recruit and retain members.

Diversity

We have made some progress on diversity—and have a long way to go before we look like the rest of the nation. It was a pleasure, as president, to cheer on the leaders of the Women's Environmental History Network (WEHN) and the Committee on Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity (chaired by Kathy Brosnan) as they led diversity efforts.

Diversity on the program in Ottawa was a priority of the Program Committee, led by Nancy Jacobs, and the Local Arrangements Committee, led by Will Knight and Kirsten Greer. They organized events on First Nations, African Americans, and environmental justice (among other topics), and they worked hard to attract more diverse conference participants. One of the disappointments about cancelling the conference was the loss of these events.

It was a delight, then, to see Nancy Jacobs and others rally to put panels on line instead. I enjoyed the panels and was delighted by the attendance—hundreds of people at each, which was far more than conference panels usually attract in person.

With CODIE, WEHN, and the Program Committee in the able hands of others.

... committees, training, and the program committee in the case names of others, I focused my diversity efforts on a process I controlled as president: committee appointments. ASEH has two kinds of committees: committees whose members are chosen by the Nominating Committee, and committees whose members are appointed by the president. When the society was small, the president could know almost everyone, which meant almost everyone was a candidate for presidential appointment. That is no longer the case. ASEH has too many members for the president to know everyone, especially members who joined the field recently. And, because younger scholars in ASEH tend to be more diverse than senior scholars, it would reduce the chances of appointing diverse committee members. I was aware of another risk of a limited circle of acquaintances, which was overburdening a few members from underrepresented groups by asking them repeatedly for service.

Sarah suggested that we address these problems by introducing a self-nomination process for committees appointed by the president. This ensured that everyone, including people from underrepresented groups whom the president has not met, could be in the appointment pool. Self-nomination eliminated the problem of overburdening specific individuals. If someone volunteered, they were asking for a job. The self-nomination form asked individuals whether they would enhance diversity and, if so, how. The president could appoint other people, too, but the self-nomination process broadened the pool. The process worked beautifully. More members volunteered than could be accommodated (a good problem to have), and they were diverse in many ways. It was a delight to appoint such talented, diverse, energetic committee members.

We had other problems with committees. Many committees were inactive, and opportunities to join them were limited because members served without term. I suspected that the two were related. Inactivity was partly a result of permanent membership. People burned out but stayed on committees in name. Permanent membership also limited opportunities for new members. Because committees help prepare future Council members and officers, we were doing a suboptimal job of preparing diverse future leaders.

I decided to address all these problems by developing bylaws governing committees, which we did not previously have. The bylaws said that our standard committee structure would be three members with staggered terms. This way, spaces for new members opened every year, and members rotated off before they burned out. Council adopted the bylaws, along with the practice of having committees overall reflect the diversity of the membership.

The new system is not perfect. I heard complaints from some members who did not see themselves represented. This was mainly a product of reducing the number of committee members, which limited the number of slots. Even so, I think the new committee structure and self-nominations will lead to more diverse, active committees that will advance our common goals.

Covid

Covid was not one of my priorities when I took office. It dawdled offstage for a year and then ran to center stage in the middle of my term. Every day for the

past year, I have thought—and usually worried—about the impact of Covid on ASEH.

We got through the initial Covid crisis by cancelling the Ottawa conference. But what about the Boston conference scheduled for 2021? I feared that we might repeat the nightmare of 2020. We could pour enormous time into organizing the conference, and commit enormous funds to host it, and then go through the trauma of deciding to cancel all over again and squandering all those preparations. Plus, we could lose a quarter million dollars because public health officials might not order the Boston hotel to close. And, while no one knew how prevalent Covid would be in 2021, it seemed unlikely that a vaccine would be developed, produced, tested, and administered to the whole county in less than a year.

Given that the Covid epidemic seemed likely to continue into spring 2021, I thought it would be good to be proactive. If we approached the hotel far in advance and proposed rescheduling the Boston meeting, the hotel might be willing to let us do so without cost—especially if it thought it had time to line up other people to fill guest rooms. And if we postponed the conference a year in advance, the Program Committee, Local Arrangements Committee, and conference attendees would not invest time and money in a cancelled conference.

So an idea developed. What if we replaced the 2021 central meeting with dispersed regional meetings? I was picturing that individuals could organize local events, shortly before they wanted to host them, in spring 2021. That way, no one would waste time organizing something that turned out to be unrealistic. This was the Earth Day model, which comprised many local events organized under a broad umbrella. Plus, local events could diversify attendance. A central meeting attracts people willing to invest time and money in traveling. Plenty of people who were unwilling to invest so much might be willing to spend an hour or two at a local event. Some events could be on line. Another advantage was piloting a lower-carbon model for conferences. We have discussed ideas for reducing our carbon footprint over the years, and here was a way to do that dramatically.

The vice president oversees conferences, and the executive director organizes them, so I talked this idea over with the current office holders, Sarah Elkind and David Spatz. They liked the idea, so we took it to Council, which agreed. Sarah and David took the lead from there. The Boston hotel agreed to reschedule the meeting for a future year at no cost. Originally the idea was to have Environmental History Day. Like Earth Day, it would have many local events built around a national theme. I figured the day would be a success if we had five regional events. Then Sarah expanded the concept to Environmental History Week. Sarah contacted leaders of environmental history societies around the world to invite them to participate. David handles the infrastructure.

The idea took off. At last count, we have about 90 events scheduled for Environmental History Week. The format is different than I originally pictured. We all got used to meeting on line over the past year, and Environmental

History Week reflects that. Instead of organizing local events, most organizers put together on-line events. This means people anywhere in the world can present at, and attend, the ASEH conference this year, and no one risks Covid exposure. Our expenses are low, so registration is low--\$75 is the standard registration, and those who cannot afford \$75 can register for free.

We have built it. The question now is: will you come?

Management

One of the president's duties is working with the executive director to manage the society. We are fortunate to have David Spatz, a skilled and responsible person, as executive director. I did not want to micro-manage David, but I did want to know what he was doing. I also wanted him to feel supported and valued. He works without office mates, and I did not want him to feel isolated. David and I began meeting each week by Zoom.

About midway through my presidency, Vice President Sarah Elkind joined our weekly meetings. This has worked out wonderfully. David and I benefit from her wisdom, institutional memory, and initiative. In particular, Sarah has been essential in dealing with the Covid crisis—both when deciding what to do a year ago and in taking the lead on Environmental History Week. One of the vice president's duties is overseeing the annual meeting, and Environmental History Week is our meeting this year. In addition, the meetings have become training for the president-elect. Sarah will be up to speed on presidential activities and duties when she takes office next week.

Another advantage of the weekly meetings is that the president, vice president, and executive director have become ASEH's executive committee. Three people is just the right number for getting multiple views on issues while remaining decisive.

David and Sarah have been ideal partners. When I worked on the activities described above, I rarely acted alone. I almost always took ideas to David and Sarah first, and the three of us would refine them. This teamwork enabled us to write joint memos to Council recommending policies and practices.

Another management innovation was to initiate semi-annual Council meeting. Council had previously met only once a year, at the annual conference in the spring. It seemed important to meet more often to make decisions and move ahead, and the internet made it realistic to do so without gathering in person, so we added an on-line Council meeting in the fall. We started this before Covid hit, so we had the model in place when Covid forced us to meet online a year ago instead of at Ottawa.

The endeavors described above relied on three of the presidential tools I mentioned: agenda setting, committee appointments, and management. I remember using the fourth tool, emergency powers, only once. That was to cancel the Ottawa conference. Council was in the midst of discussing, online, whether to cancel. It had not voted, but the consensus seemed to be to cancel. We knew that members were anxious for a decision, and were anxious to make a decision, but we were negotiating with the hotel before canceling to

see if we could reduce our financial loss. Once we cancelled, we would lose all leverage. As pressure from members soared online, a past president phoned and recommended I use emergency powers to cancel. I talked it over with the executive committee and then did so. I immediately took the decision to Council for a vote. If they disagreed, they had a chance to go on record in opposition. As expected, Council voted unanimously to cancel.

It has been a high honor to serve you as president, and to work with the wonderful people environmental history attracts as members and officers.

I wish all the best to Sarah Elkind in her presidency.

Edmund Russell
ASEH President, 2019-2021

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2021 ASEH Prize, Award, and Fellowship Winners

The **Distinguished Scholar Award** is given every year to an individual who has contributed significantly to environmental history scholarship.

Congratulations to 2021 winner:

NANCY LANGSTON

The **Lisa Mighetto Distinguished Service Award** is given every year to an individual who has contributed significantly to the development of ASEH as an organization. **Congratulations to 2021 winner:**

MARK MADISON

The **Distinguished Career in Public Environmental History** is presented every two years to an individual who has promoted environmental history to the public over time. **The winner this year is:**

TERRY TEMPEST WILLIAMS

The **Public Outreach Project Award** is presented every two years to an environmental history project that engages the public. The award was postponed in 2020. **The winner this year is:**

CLIMATE WITNESS: VOICES OF LADAKH

George Perkins Marsh Prize for best book in environmental history

Winner:

Jamie Kreiner, [*Legions of Pigs in the Early Medieval West*](#) (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020)

[Jamie Kreiner and Katherine Morissey discuss the book](#)

Finalists:

David Fedman, [*Seeds of Control: Japan's Empire of Forestry in Colonial Korea*](#) (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2020)

Grace Karskens, [*People of the River: Lost Worlds of Early Australia*](#) (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2020)

Rachel Carson Prize for best dissertation in environmental history

Geoffrey Wallace, "The History and Geography of Beeswax Extraction in the Northern Maya Lowlands, 1540-1700," McGill University

[Geoffrey Wallace and Ted Melillo discuss the dissertation](#)

Leopold-Hidy Prize for best article in [*Environmental History*](#) (with [Forest History Society](#))

Elizabeth Hennessy, "Saving Species: The Co-evolution of Tortoise Taxonomy and Conservation in the Galápagos Islands" (April 2020)

Alice Hamilton Prize for best article outside journal *Environmental History*

Christopher Konz, "Sheep, Scab Mites, and Society: The Process and Politics of Veterinary Knowledge in Lesotho, Southern Africa, c. 1900-1933" (August 2020) in *Environment and History*

Samuel P. Hays Research Fellowship

Caroline Grego for her project "Hurricane of the New South: How the Great Sea Island Storm of 1893 Shaped the Jim Crow Lowcountry"

Equity Graduate Student Fellowship

Teona Williams for her project examining Black women's intellectual and social engagement with ecology, land, and Black national ideologies across the Mississippi Delta

Hal Rothman Dissertation Fellowship

Terrell Orr for his project "The Roots of Global Citrus in "Nuevo South" Florida and Rural São Paulo, 1965-1995"

J. Donald Hughes Graduate Research Fellowships

Alyssa Kreikemeier for her project "Aerial Enclosures: From Commons to Conflict in the American West"

and

Matthew Plishka for his project "Battling Banana Blight: Panama Disease, Smallholders, and Jamaica's Agroecosystem, 1870-1962"

Congratulations to all of the winners of ASEH's 2021 awards and prizes!

ASEH thanks all of the selection committees for their hard work.

Join Us in Eugene, Oregon for ASEH 2022



Delta ponds in Eugene



Plank Town Brewing
Company



Three Sisters

ASEH Election Results

The votes are in and tallied and we are excited to announce the newly-elected members of the ASEH Council officers and members and ASEH Nominating Committee members.

Officers:

- **Nancy J. Jacobs**, Brown University, Vice President/President-Elect
- **Frederick "Fritz" Davis**, Purdue University, Treasurer
- **Peter S. Alagona**, University of California, Santa Barbara, Secretary

Council Members:

- **Sarah Hamilton**, Auburn University
- **Sean Kheraj**, York University
- **Ruth Morgan**, Australian National University, Canberra

ASEH Nominating Committee members:

- **Emily Pawley**, Dickinson College
- **Maya Peterson**, University of California, Santa Cruz

And welcome to **Christopher Slaby**, the incoming President of the ASEH Graduate Student Caucus.

Congratulations! We look forward to working with you in the coming years.

Thank you very much to the departing members of the ASEH Council: Mark Madison (Treasurer), Kathy Brosnan, (Past President), Kieko Matteson, Lynne Heasley, and Conevery Bolton Valencius (Council members), and Ramya Swayamprakash (Graduate Student Caucus President).

Thank you to departing members of the ASEH Nominating Committee Liza Piper and Kendra Smith-Howard.

NEWS AND OPPORTUNITIES

- **Call for Papers - The United States, War, and the Environment in the Twentieth-Century Pacific World** - The Center for Military, War, and Society Studies and the Center for American History at the University of Kansas are sponsoring a two-day international workshop exploring the intersection of the environment and war in the twentieth-century Pacific World on October 15-16, 2021. To apply for participation in the workshop, please send a cover letter, a 3-page cv, and a 2-page synopsis of your paper to paul.landsberg@ku.edu. The **application deadline is June 1, 2021**. For the full announcement and more details, see the event page on the Center for Military, War, and Society Studies website: (<https://ipsr.ku.edu/military/warenvironment/index.shtml>)
- **Call for Papers - “Environmental Justice in North America”** - Chapter proposals are invited for inclusion in Routledge’s “Environmental Justice in North America” volume. Full details [here](#).
- **Teaching Post Doctoral Fellow-American Agricultural History - North Carolina State University** - The Department of History at North Carolina State University invites applications for a Teaching Post-Doctoral Fellow position in American agricultural history (any area of specialization). The Teaching Scholar will pursue their own individual research agenda and be guided by a faculty mentor in their respective field. The Teaching Scholar will be expected to teach a 2/2 load, including American Agricultural History (offered in the fall). For full details and to apply visit <https://jobs.ncsu.edu/postings/142744>. **Review of applicants will begin on May 15, 2021 and will continue until position is filled.**

Join Us in Boston for ASEH 2023



Massachusetts State House



Granary Burying Ground



Boston from above

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Edmund Russell, Carnegie Mellon University, *President*
Sarah Elkind, San Diego State University, *Vice President/President Elect*
Peter Alagona, University of California, Santa Barbara, *Secretary*
Mark Madison, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, *Treasurer*

ASEH Council:

Ellen Arnold, Ohio Wesleyan University
Kathleen Brosnan, University of Oklahoma, *Past President*
Mike Dockry, University of Minnesota
Lynne Heasley, Western Michigan University
Kieko Matteson, University of Hawai'i-Mānoa
Catherine McNeur, Portland State University
Ramya Swayamprakash, Michigan State University, *Graduate Student Liaison 2020-2021*
Conevery Valencius, Boston College
Marsha Weisiger, University of Oregon
Graeme Wynn, University of British Columbia, *Past President*

ASEH Council, Ex Officio:

Stephen Brain, Mississippi State University, co-editor, *Environmental History*
Mark Hersey, Mississippi State University, co-editor, *Environmental History*
David Spatz, ASEH, *Executive Director*

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