

2015 American Society of Environmental History Society Executive Committee Meeting
Saturday, 21 March 2015, 12-4 pm
Washington, DC

Attending:

Officers:

Gregg Mitman, President
Kathleen Brosnan, Vice President and President elect
Graeme Wynn, Vice 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 (also incoming VP)
Daniel Soucier, Graduate Student Representative
John McNeill, Ex Officio, Past President
Lisa Mighetto, Executive Director
Harriet Ritvo, Ex Officio, Past President

Guests:

Steven Anderson, Forest History Society President
Lisa Brady, Editor of *Environmental History*
Kurk Dorsey, Chair 2015 Program Committee
Emily Greenwald, incoming ex comm
Christof Mauch, incoming ex comm
Kathryn Morse, incoming ex comm
Cindy Ott, incoming ex comm
Trish Thomas, Oxford University Press
Cassie Thompson, Oxford University Press
Melissa Wiedenfeld, Chair 2015 Local Arrangements Committee

12:50, Gregg Mitman called the meeting to order.

1) Approval of Minutes

After brief introductions, the minutes for the 2014 Executive Committee Meeting were moved, seconded, and approved pending changes reflecting the dates of the Executive Director salary and the inclusion of inter-meeting decisions.

2) 2015 Election Results

Lisa Mighetto reported on this year's election. Outgoing executive committee members include Sterling Evans, Sara Gregg, Louis Warren, and Graeme Wynn; incoming members include Emily Greenwald, Christof Mauch, Kathy Morse, and Cindy Ott. Nancy Langston departed as ex-officio past president, while Graeme Wynn is incoming Vice President/President-elect. Congratulations were extended to all.

3) Conference Report

Melissa Wiedenfeld gave the 2015 Local Arrangements Committee report. In addition to Wiedenfeld as chair, the committee included Dawn Biehler, Lincoln Bramwell, Kate Christen, Meredith Denning, Gerald Fitzgerald, Roger Hamilton, Mark Madison, Betsy Mendelsohn, Gabriela Petrick, Martin Reuss, Darren Speece, Jeffrey Stine, Thomas Wellock, and Thomas Zeller. We had 683 registered attendees, which is the second highest total after San Francisco, and donations totaled over \$18,000 from Oxford University Press (\$7.5K), Georgetown University (\$3K), University of Maryland (\$2K), Smithsonian-George Mason University (\$2K), Historical Research Associates (\$1.5K), USFWS (\$700), League of Conservation Voters (\$500), Dawson & Associates (\$500), CHASES at Mississippi State University (\$500), and Sidwell Friends School (\$200). The final budget broke even. The National Archives and Records Administration Workshop was free to the 25 registered participants, but 10 were no-shows. The presenter cancellation number seemed average with other years, but this problem plus the issues of presenter registrations and memberships were discussed later in the meeting. Having Gina McCarthy, the Environmental Protection Agency's Assistant Administrator, as this year's plenary speaker was a high point of the conference, which also featured three breakfasts, three free receptions, six field trips, and free Metro passes for the field trip participants. The committee also made an effort to recycle as much material as possible on busses, plus file carbon offsets and encourage people to use public transit.

Kurk Dorsey gave the 2015 Program Committee report. In addition to Dorsey as chair, the committee included Mike Dockry (representing the Diversity Committee), Jacob Hamblin, Mark Hersey, and Cindy Ott; Melissa Wiedenfeld and Lisa Mighetto also participated as ex officio members. The committee issued the call for papers via several internet listservs, including HNET and H-Diplo. The initial response amounted to only 30 full panel submissions, so the committee extended the deadline from July 15 to July 31. The final total was 106 panel proposals (94 accepted) and 125 individual proposals which resulted in 6 more full panels plus one more panel to discuss OUP's *Handbook of American Environmental History*. The plenary speaker Gina McCarthy was suggested by Karl Brooks. The result was 1 plenary, 101 panels, and 20 posters. Dorsey also mentioned some hitches with the All-Academic submission management system regarding mass emails; Mighetto reported that the system is fixed.

Wiedenfeld and Dorsey left the meeting.

4) Journal Reports

Trish Thomas of Oxford University Press gave the publisher's report. Thomas began by noting that the *Environmental History* production process was timely except for the last issue of 2014, and that the production graphs overstated the delays. Continuing subscription declines reflect both shrinking library budgets and growth in consortia agreements. The declines in print-only and individual subscriptions continue the trend that began several years ago. OUP projects that digital subscriptions will continue to develop but mostly overseas since the North American market seems saturated. This year's digital usage data reflects a change in the counting system that the press thinks more accurately reflects real-world conditions. The resulting numbers for 2014 are "good" and follow the usual annual rhythm of usage, with some growth in spring, declines each summer, followed by more robust usage in fall. Much of the digital demand for *EH* articles seems tied to course assignments. The impact factor continues to trend upward, and the journal is charting very well in comparison to other history journals. Ads on journal and article pages currently generate minimal revenue.

Cassie Thompson of Oxford University Press discussed OUP's social media advertising. E-table and alerts networks now have 1600 followers. In the last year marketing targeted promotion of several *EH* issues, including the Wilderness Act issue that garnered over 1200 downloads, and Shawn Miller's "Minding the Gap: Pan-Americanism's Highway, American Environmentalism, and Remembering the Failure to Close the Darién Gap," which garnered over 1200 hits among Latin America and Portuguese readers and, as a result, will likely displace William Cronon's "Trouble with Wilderness" as the journal's most popular article among online users.

The executive committee discussed several issues with the report, including how to improve online journal demand and revenues from OUP downloads, the revenue split between OUP on the one hand and ASEH/FHS on the other, strategies for heightening hits and support for the journal.

5) Editor's Report

Lisa Brady gave the Editor's report for *EH*. Article submissions were up by ~20 percent; thus the acceptance rate fell to ~12 percent. This casts a positive implication on the quality of published articles, which is good for the journal's rankings and reputation. Brady attributed the increased submissions to the recruitment efforts of journal board members and Gregg Mitman's call at last year's conference. Neil Maher and Cindy Ott are in the process of stepping down as the editors the Gallery Section. Finis Dunaway will take over in June. Finn Arne Jørgensen continues as the online editor, and he is working to ease online access and to increase online interest through social media. Field note essays are now peer reviewed, but they are still difficult to recruit. Online teaching and virtual issues remain under development. Jack Hayes continues as book review editor. His greatest challenge is receiving many more books than can be reviewed in the journal. Brady noted that the journal page count shrunk significantly because she took a conservative approach to the amount of content. She explained that she is still learning to anticipate the size of each article, and she undershot on several issues. The average time to publication also rose last year because of delays by referees, reviewers, and revisions. Later discussion by the executive committee noted that Brady should probably report average and

mean time to publication since much of the statistical rise is due to a few egregious cases. The reason for difficulty in finding referees for some manuscripts stems less from themes than geographical focus. Discussion also focused on the trend toward longer articles and larger discursive citations. Brady is considering expanding the word count from 8K to 10K because she is actually receiving 12K- to 14K-word manuscripts by demanding that discursive footnotes be eliminated. There is also concern that longer manuscripts could exacerbate the journal's time to decision statistic. Brady noted that it may be time to seek historiographical articles as a way to fill in length gaps in the page count. Further suggestions included adding film and exhibit reviews, both of which validate work and might be collectively located under a rubric such as "Applied Environmental Scholarship." Although no Forum articles have yet appeared in the current volume, two are in process, there is a lot of interest, and many proposals have been submitted. Brady is still unsure whether the shift to filing Forums as a single, multi-authored citation had actually elevated the journal's impact factor, but she will continue the practice at least until she can assess the effect. The group also discussed the phenomenon of aggregator stories, and how the editor and press can effectively tap into these networks, since newspaper editors often rely on aggregators to contact authors for op-eds.

6) Journal Management Group Report

Richard Judd and Adam Rome were not present to report for the Journal Management Group. Steve Anderson reported that they are still gearing up. Anderson concluded by noting that Cheryl Oakes is retiring as the Forest History Society's librarian, and he suggested that it would be nice if the ASEH acknowledged Oakes long service to both organizations. Members agreed that this was a good idea. **There was a motion to commend Cheryl Oakes's service as the FHS Librarian. This was moved, seconded, and approved.** Mighetto will write the citation.

Anderson, Thomas, Thompson left the meeting.

1:50 break

2:05 meeting reconvened

7) Treasurer Report

Mark Madison summarized the Society's financial report. The ASEH realized a \$66,000 profit for the year; we are now a half-million-dollar society. This is an important milestone, but our costs are also up, amounting to \$150K in annual fixed expenses. The 2014 earnings were very high due to one-time contributions. This is not normal nor predictable. Peak donations came in 2001 with \$20,000. Since then travel grants and prize money have grown from \$1,000 to \$7,500 annually. Madison observed that this has become a large annual expense even though the ASEH mission statement does not include prizes. So far the executive director's salary has been offset by the many grants that the executive director obtains each year, but this "pass through" money does not stay in the coffers. So far the 2015 budget is in the red, with \$27,000 representing a worst-case scenario. The figure represents very conservative estimates on profit-share and other income. The new membership system that was installed last year has succeeded in gaining the society a clear sense of where our money comes from. The conservative estimate also reflects that this conference, unlike previous meetings, will most likely break even. Madison suggested

that the Society should seek counseling to rebalance its investment portfolio. This is necessary for tax reasons, but it should be deliberated through an online discussion and vote. Membership is still the society's primary income stream, so we need a clearer picture of our demographics. The joint membership category is still opaque. Discussion noted that the membership issue is important since individual subscriptions are falling. About 20 percent of conference attendees are not members. Several discussants suggested ways to strengthen the incentives so conference attendees and grant applicants will join the ASEH. **A motion emerged to require that travel grant applicants be members, and to no longer waive the registration fee for recipients. Moved, seconded, and approved.** Further discussion explored additional ways to increase the value of registering for the conference, including gating the book exhibit or requiring attendees to register for the conference. **A motion emerged to structure the registration pricing so that it is more affordable to join as an ASEH member. Moved, seconded, and approved.**

The executive committee then discussed a new line in the budget for \$8,000 for to support matching funds for internship grants such as the existing Newberry Fellowship. Candidates for these internships must join the ASEH to apply. **The executive committee moved, seconded, and approved the 2015 budget.**

8) Fund Raising and Development Committee

Kathy Brosnan gave the Fundraising Committee report. The committee includes Sarah Elkind, Martin Melosi, Martin Reuss, and Brett Walker. Brosnan suggested that the president-elect be the standing chair of this committee to create continuity of leadership and institutional memory. Fund raising requires constant and significant effort, and there are always potential conflicts of interest with members' home institutions. She also suggested we tweak the registration process and membership renewal system to encourage year-end donations. The committee is preparing materials to encourage planned giving and to issue a pamphlet about the ASEH that can be sent to members and corporate donors in time for the Seattle conference. The Treasurer noted that the ASEH cannot accept truly anonymous donations since the treasurer must report sources to the IRS. The main discussion focused on the donations policy. There has been a lingering problem with this proposal over the need to recognize conflicts that may arise as much from the source of the contribution as from the size of the donation. The proposed changes to the policy are mainly in Point 3 and concern the interpretation of the word "significant." This phrase anticipates both the amount and source of monies, and the decision on significance will rest with the president and executive director; they will inform the executive committee when any donation triggers a significance ruling. Point 9 of the proposal ensures that the ASEH concerns mesh with local arrangements committee operations. Discussion by the group noted that a provision for reporting decisions to the executive committee must be inserted somewhere in this policy, but not in the materials sent to potential donors. **A motion emerged to add the phrase "any significant donations" to Point 3, and the proposal was moved, seconded, and approved.**

9) Executive Director Report

Lisa Mighetto reported on new membership system. There have been many positive responses to the changes. We currently have 467 memberships, and there was no difference in the numbers coming from the Oxford University Press subscription system. Mighetto expects more members

will rejoin when the journal doesn't show up in mail, but the office is currently spending a lot of time tracking down memberships and it needs help in reaching out to recruit members, review the membership system, and make adjustments. Mighetto asked if we can we appoint an ad hoc committee to study this problem. Discussion then shifted to the still opaque category of joint memberships. The FHS and ASEH membership systems still conflict because the ASEH does an annual renewal and the FHS does an anniversary renewal. Thus the new registration system is the first step toward joint management of joint memberships. The group offered suggestions for tracking down lapsed members, such as mass-emailing conference goers, but agreed that such efforts must be targeted at non-members. We currently receive an electronic renewal notice in November with a follow-up in December. Perhaps a hardcopy third response is necessary. There was also a request to task the ad hoc committee to pull joint members out of the OUP black hole. This is currently done manually by Mighetto, and currently there are 330 joint members; this number fluctuates monthly due to the nature of the FHS anniversary renewal policy. **A motion emerged to create an ad hoc committee on membership with a graduate representative. This was moved, seconded, and approved.**

Madison left for AV duties.

10) Distinguished Service and Scholar Award

Sarah Elkind and Sterling Evans nominated Melissa Wiedenfeld for the Distinguished Service Award in recognition of her behind-the-scenes work on H-Environment in its early years, her networking with Latin American and Caribbean groups, and her service as book review editor. There were several nominees, but Wiedenfeld was the consensus choice. **The nomination was moved, seconded, and approved.**

Elkind and Evans then nominated Martin Melosi for the Distinguished Scholar Award. This is in recognition of Melosi's body of scholarship in urban environmental history, environmental justice, and public history. **The nomination was moved, seconded, and approved.**

The group then discussed the nomination process, whether nominations can be forwarded to next round of consideration. Elkind suggested that we amend the guidelines to accommodate this and to formalize the nomination process with an online submission form. Other issues included the timing of the process and whether decisions should be conducted online, but the present process was confirmed both to make it timely for the award winner and to preserve the confidentiality of the process. **A motion emerged to amend the process so that nominations are carried forward through two subsequent cycles of the award. Moved, seconded, and approved.**

Madison returned during discussion.

11) Graduate Student Liaison Report

Daniel Soucier gave the report for the Graduate Student Caucus. The caucus has grown from 20 to 75, and it now convenes online as well as at the conference. There is now an online forum for information sharing through an internal email listserv. The third graduate student workshop worked well, and members expressed interest in more workshops, room sharing services for the

conference, and greater participation in committees. There are also efforts to be more involved in publishing, to address the challenge of post-grad jobs, and to create more conference events and mentorship programs. The Meet-the-Presses event was popular and will be reprised at future conferences. Members do want a more sophisticated caucus website, including sharing and blog services, but they wonder whether the executive committee wants to provide space on the ASEH website or a separate domain. Networking, peer review, and informal publishing services would increase interest in the caucus and the ASEH. Forthcoming panel proposals include “Tales from the Job Market.” Discussion focused on the proposal for webspace for blog and sharing services. This could be done through a sub-domain, but there are logistical issues such as who would be responsible for monitoring the site. A blog already exists—monitored by Nancy Germano—but this is a gated amenity and ASEH membership is required. Others noted that blogs are public forums, and other experiences have demonstrated that these can be “beasts to feed.” There were doubts about the site’s capacity to service a very diverse membership, and other services already exist through Rachel Carson, CHE, and NiCHE. A question about the goal of the blog revealed that the graduate students are primarily interested in a low pressure, non-peer-review way to get work out. The group noted that this is what H-Environment currently does, and only peer-review publications really matter. The ASEH could create more value to memberships by providing an online sharing/peer-review service. The executive director suggested that a caucus member join the website committee. On a separate point, there was a suggestion that the graduate panel be scheduled so it segues into, rather than competes with, the graduate reception.

12) New Business

There was a discussion about how to create value-added online features. One strategy would be to archive gated materials that can only be accessed by members. Another would be to develop database services. Still another is to tap our human resources. We have many book exhibitors, so a speed-dating publishing service that links editors and grad students can enhance conferences.

There was also a discussion about organizations and institutions approaching the ASEH for co-sponsorships of events. Sometimes all they are seeking is our name and blessing, sometimes they want money. We are getting enough requests that the president and executive director need guidance from the executive committee.

Paul Sutter recused himself from the meeting before the WHEATS discussion.

WHEATS seeks blessing and money for this year’s meeting in Boulder. There was a discussion about whether to approve this request in particular and whether to develop a more formal process for future requests. Ritvo explained the genesis of WHEATS at MIT and Mitman attested to the high level of intellectual performance of this grad-student-led conference, now in its eleventh year. **There was a motion to sponsor WHEATS but not set a precedent. Moved, seconded, and approved.** The group then discussed the need for a more deliberate policy. We have finite resources and must re-evaluate all co-sponsorships. Brosnan offered to draft a co-sponsorship policy, and there was a suggestion to post this on the ASEH website.

Sutter returned to the meeting.

The final discussion focused on the conference. The online submission process seemed more complicated because the CFP was not clearly written. The CFP did state the basic submission process, but one needed to be very attentive. Future CFP need greater clarity. There were also concerns about very sparse attendance at some panels, including the poorly titled Camp Lejeune panel that included an important whistle blower. The idea of coding panels was again raised, but other examples showed that this is no guarantee of success. The group felt that better advertising will help in these situations. The AHA does spotlight panels with emails before the conference, but this doesn't always work. There was also a suggestion for more community-wide events that involve all ASEH members.

Mitman adjourned meeting at 4:22 pm.

Addendum:

Inter-meeting activities:

The executive committee approved the Membership Committee's proposal to add two categories to ASEH's membership options (an under \$20,000 income category and a lifetime membership category) on November 20, 2015.

The executive committee approved a motion to approve Riverside, California as ASEH's 2018 conference site on October 20, 2015.

The executive committee approved a sponsorship policy for external organizations on September 10, 2015.

The executive committee approved a motion to approve Chicago as ASEH's 2017 conference site on January 29, 2015.