

MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL AND GENERAL MEETING OF THE SOCIETY FOR
HISTORIANS OF THE GILDED AGE AND PROGRESSIVE ERA

Friday, April 11, 2014

Atlanta, Georgia

President Julie Greene, University of Maryland, College Park called the council Meeting of the Society for Historians of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era to order. Also in attendance were:

Lloyd Ambrosius, University of Nebraska, Lincoln
Gordon Bakken, California State University, Fullerton
Albert Broussard, Texas A&M University
Robert Cherny, San Francisco State University
Rosemary Feurer, Northern Illinois University
Gayle Gullett, Arizona State University
Julia Irwin, University of South Florida
Benjamin Johnson, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee
Robert Johnston, University of Illinois at Chicago
Alan Lessoff, Illinois State University
Jacqueline Moore, Austin College
Christopher Nichols, Oregon State University
Elaine Franz Parsons, Duquesne University
Heather Cox Richardson, Boston College
Axel Schäfer, Keele University
Phil VanderMeer, Arizona State University
Amy Wood, Illinois State University

After introductions, Julie Greene asked for a motion to approve the minutes from the previous Annual Meeting (April 12, 2013). The minutes were adopted.

President's Report (Julie Greene)

Julie thanked Phil Vandermeer, Alan Lessoff, and (in absentia) Wendy Gamber for their service. She also thanked the Development Committee (headed by Jo Ann Argersinger) that was created last year as an ad-hoc committee to raise funds for their good work. Julie has asked the committee to keep going, and no further action regarding the Development Committee is needed at this time.

Julie acknowledged the written reports from committee chairs, officers, and editors that were pre-circulated and asked members to review them so that the meeting could focus on three pressing issues regarding presidential nominations, membership, and the website.

The Nominating Committee's Report (Bob Cherny)

Bob Cherny, Chair of the Nominating Committee, summarized the report of the Committee. The Committee recommends that the terms of the President and Vice President/President-Elect of SHGAPE be shifted from two years to one year. Currently, the Vice President serves for 2 years, the President serves for 2 years, and then the ex-President continues to serve on the Council for four years. This entails an eight year commitment. Bob explained that this rotation made sense when the organization began, because they were initially worried that they would run out of viable candidates for the office of the presidency. But now that the organization is more robust, the Nominating Committee believed they have a wealth of choices. They also believed that an eight year commitment might be too burdensome for some potential candidates, especially senior colleagues whom we might want to honor with the office of the presidency.

Much discussion over the pros and cons of this recommendation ensued. The cons were that, with a shorter term, the incoming president would have a steep learning curve, and it would be harder to implement actions to help the organization grow. This would be especially the case since we do not have an established infrastructure maintaining the day-to-day affairs of the organization. We would risk losing continuity. It was suggested that there might be other ways to honor senior colleagues, though the Distinguished Lectureship or through the Lifetime Achievement Award.

A motion was then offered: *The council directs the officers to provide language to change the bylaws, to be brought for a vote by SHGAPE members, to do the following:*

- Change the term of the President-Elect (Vice President) to one year
- Change the term of the President to one year
- Change the term of the past President on the Council to two years

After further discussion, an amendment to the original motion was put on the table that would retain the existing terms of the Vice President and President (two years each), but change the term of the past President on the Council to two years rather than four. This would reduce the commitment from eight years to six years. The Council unanimously voted to adopt the amendment. The Council then unanimously voted to adopt the original motion with the amendment. The final language is:

***The council directs the officers to provide language to change the bylaws, to be brought for a vote by SHGAPE members, to change the term of the past President on the Council to two years.*

Treasurer's Report (Gordon Bakken)

Gordon Bakken offered a brief summary of our financial condition, which continues to be very strong. Due to our arrangement with Cambridge University Press, our publication income has gone up slightly, and we have been able to increase our endowment. Phil Vandermeer, the outgoing treasurer, noted that with an increase in our revenue, we might want to increase our expenditures. Gordon also said that he would like to retain our relationship with Croghan Bank, despite Wendy Gamber's suggestion from last year's meeting that we switch to a bank that can take electronic deposits. Gordon does not see this as an issue and is happy with their service.

Programming Committee (Lloyd Ambrosius)

Lloyd Ambrosius noted that the Programming Committee's report had omitted one session that the Committee had endorsed for the 2014 OAH Meeting. The session is:

"North on South: Rethinking Regionalism in the 19th -Century United States," Sunday, 9:00-10:30, with papers by Michael Bernath, Yael A. Sternhell, and K. Stephen Prince; James Cobb, chair; Karen L. Cox, commentator.

The Committee's Report has been amended.

Membership (Amy Wood and Julia Irwin)

As Julia Irwin (Chair of the Membership Committee) detailed in the pre-circulated Membership Committee report, we have seen a sharp decline in memberships since 2011/2012. We lost about 60 members in 2013, though our early numbers for 2014 are looking better than they did at this point in 2013. Julia, Amy Wood, Benjamin Johnson, and Alan Lessoff, had met with Jasmine Harris of Cambridge University Press that morning to discuss ways we could boost membership. Amy and Julia gave a summary of that meeting and the main proposals that came out of it. Overall, we agreed that we need to market the Society separately from the subscription to the Journal, especially as more and more people can gain electronic access to the Journal through their libraries. We would like people to want to join the Society in order to become part of community of like-minded scholars. We would also like to create an environment in which people want to join and it's easy for them join. One of the first things that needs to be done is create a website for the Society, through which people could easily access the CUP website to join. Some of the other proposals discussed that would increase our visibility and encourage people to join the Society were:

- Create a graduate student prize for best conference paper, for which the award would be a year's membership.

- CUP will enclose join/renewal membership forms when they send offprints to authors who have published with articles or book reviews in the Journal. (Jasmine indicated that they would go ahead and start doing that)

- Send letters to people presenting on SHGAPE-endorsed panels at the OAH and AHA encouraging them to join the Society

- Expand the reach of our conference programming. We might consider sponsoring programs at the Southern Historical Association or Western Historical Association meetings, for example. Or we could organize roundtables relating to SHGAPE topics at the OAH and AHA. We also discussed whether SHGAPE wants to sponsor our own conference or mini-conference as means to boost visibility and increase membership. While a separate conference is not feasible at this time, we might do a mini-conference either before the OAH or during the OAH - a conference within a conference, wherein we would have our own SHGAPE panels running in sequences on one day of the OAH. Lloyd reported that the Committee often identifies panels on the program that SHGAPE could co-sponsor, but the OAH won't let us endorse as many as

we would like. We can also sponsor our own panels even if they have not been accepted by the OAH Programming Committee. We may do that this year if the panels we have endorsed do not get accepted.

We also discussed what benefits we could offer members beyond being part of a community. CUP is particularly concerned that we offer members tangible benefits as a means to entice people to join. Ideally, people would want to join not for tangible benefits, but out a sense of what Julia called "volunteerism" - that academic societies like SHGAPE should be supported, and that being part of that community is the benefit.

One tangible benefit that was proposed, however, was a mentorship program for graduate students and junior colleagues. Young scholars would be paired with a senior scholar who could mentor them on publications, teaching, job hunting, etc.. This would be rather easy to implement. We would need volunteers to serve as mentors. When young scholars joined the society, they would be paired with a mentor. It was noted that SHAFR already has such a program in place. Everyone agreed that this program would be a good idea.

We then moved the discussion to the website, since constructing a website is the first and crucial step to increasing visibility and membership.

Report of the Website and Online Outreach Committee (Christopher McKnight Nichols)

Chris Nichols summarized his committee's report, which made the case that the Society needs its own website. We've been operating through H-NET, but as H-NET transitioned to the Commons, we were locked out of making changes to our website, such as updating committee memberships, although we could still send notices out on the listserv and post book reviews. Now that H-NET has moved to the Commons, Chris can now update the site, but it would still benefit us to have our own site that we managed ourselves.

There is also a lot of archived material on the SGHAPE page that, if it gets moved over to the Commons, will be need to sorted, deleted, archived, or updated. Chris does not believe that he and his team are equipped to do that work.

A new website would also allow us to streamline and combine the various SHGAPE-related websites that exist. And we need one central site that would then link to CUP (which would still handle memberships) and JGAPE's site. We would still use H-NET for the listserv and book reviews.

Chris proposed that we create a site using Wordpress, which he and others have had much success with. He would need about \$1000.00 to hire a web designer to create the site, and then hosting fees would cost about \$6.99/month. We would then need a couple of webmasters or web editors (from the Society) to keep the site updated. Ideally, we would start fresh with this site, though we could migrate some material from the older sites over.

Discussion then ensued about what content we might put on the new website: teaching content, bibliographies, interviews with major scholars in the field. A blog was also proposed, though

we would need a firm commitment from members to post regularly on the blog for it to be successful. It was suggested that we limit certain website content (for instance, course syllabi) to members only; this would provide a benefit for membership. (This same idea was proposed during our meeting with Jasmine from CUP). But some were concerned that doing so would create a sense of exclusivity when our goal is to create an inclusive community. A compromise position would be to keep open access to the website while it was new, but install a paywall for certain items once it gets going.

After much discussion, Chris offered the motion that: *the Council authorize the construction of an independent website with the cost to be determined in consultation with the officers.* The motion was seconded and approved unanimously.

Chris then noted that we will need a new website committee and asked for suggestions on how to recruit and set up this committee. We do not need new H-NET editors, but any website committee members could be authorized to post on H-NET.

Julie ended our discussion of membership/website issues by asking Council members to pass on any ideas they have about expanding membership to Amy or Julia.

JGAPE Report (Alan Lessoff, Ben Johnson, and Robert Johnston)

Alan Lessoff gave an overview of the transfer of editorial duties from himself to Ben and Robert, which has been going smoothly. The largest issue facing JGAPE is the renewal of our contract with Cambridge. The new contract would not begin until January 2016, but we need to start the renegotiation process now. Ben and Robert would like to stick with Cambridge, but Ben has been doing "due diligence" by researching other presses to see if we could get a better contract from CUP. The central issue is that, in our original contract, we sacrificed some revenue for the sake of stability. Now that we are more stable, and we are bringing in revenue for CUP through electronic downloads, we might be in a position to increase our royalty rate. We may also want to talk to CUP about profit-sharing.

Robert reported that he and Ben have new ideas about going forward with the journal in terms of content, but that they are happy to hear new ideas for the journal from the Council.

Julie then adjourned the meeting.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Amy Wood
May 14, 2014