



Ohio Academy of History

Newsletter

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OHIO ACADEMY OF HISTORY NEWSLETTER

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Fellow historians,

Almost all of us, I would wager, have participated in a survey or poll of one sort or another, never to hear anything about the results of the effort. The Ohio Academy of History has what seems to me a "better idea." We want to share the findings with those who responded to our "Survey of Historians in Ohio" in the spring of 1989. That's the purpose of this Newsletter.

Jacob H. Dorn of Wright State University chaired the ad hoc Committee on the Future of the Ohio Academy of History, which distributed the questionnaire to all historians listed in the Academy Roster (not just to Academy members). The committee has analyzed the responses to the Survey, and has transmitted to the Academy's Executive Council a series of recommendations based on that analysis.

Some of those recommendations have already proved useful in guiding the Officers and the Executive Council in fashioning this year's agenda of activities. Others await acceptance and application in the future. This is an excellent moment to inform Ohio historians--again, Academy members and others--about the results of the Survey and the nature of the committee's recommendations.

Nothing could prove more pleasing--and rewarding--than hearing from those who read this report. The Academy's officers and Executive Council welcome your comments about the findings and the recommendations; we are equally interested in suggestions you may send to us about how the Academy may best exploit the information and ideas from the Survey to make itself a useful, instructing, collegial organization, responsive to the needs and interests of Ohio's professional historians. My address is: Carl Ubbelohde, President (OAH), Department of History, Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio 44106.

Report of Ad Hoc Committee on the Future of the Ohio Academy of History

Following a careful examination of the responses to the "Survey of Historians in Ohio" that was distributed in the spring of 1989 to all those listed in the Academy Roster, the committee reached the conclusions set forth in this report.

Before presenting the committee's recommendations, some observations about the survey are in order. First, the rate of response was quite good. Out of approximately 1,352 recipients of the

questionnaire, a total of 382 responded. Judging from the dearth of flippant or sarcastic comments, virtually all respondents took the survey very seriously. Many went beyond circling the alternative opinions provided to make additional statements. These statements total twenty-five single-spaced, typed pages. The only serious problem with the questionnaire seems to have been the wording of question # 13, which implied that all historians are teachers and to which a number of respondents objected.

Four questions identified sub-groups within the survey population. These were by: 1) degree of activity in and/or knowledge of the Academy [#1]; 2) type of institutional employment [#11]; 3) field of history [#12]; and 4) length of employment in Ohio [#13]. The percentages in each category among all respondents were as follows:

<u>Activity/Knowledge of Academy</u>	<u>Type of Institution</u>
Active Member.33	State University40
Inactive Member.32	Private University12
Former Member,	Private College13
Interested4	Community College.3
Former Member,	Secondary School1
Uninformed5	Historical Society/ Museum17
Non-Member, Interested/ Informed6	Other14
Non-Member, Little or No Knowledge.19	
<u>Field of History</u>	<u>Years in Ohio</u>
Ancient3	0-527
Medieval.5	6-10.9
Early Modern/ Modern Europe . .19	11-15.7
Asia.3	16-20.17
Africa.2	21-25.17
United States . . .49	Over 25. . . .24
Latin America4	
Other16	

[Because percentages are rounded to whole numbers, they do not always add up to 100. In addition, because some respondents did not mark all items, these percentages are for fewer than 382 in each category.]

The committee was struck not only by the good rate of response, which was reinforced by expressions of appreciation that the Academy has undertaken a self-evaluation, but also by the numbers of non-members and of non-teaching historians who participated in the survey. There seems to be a market for membership growth if the Academy wishes to reach out to such persons. It also seems noteworthy that a significant number (27 percent, or 83 individuals) are relatively new to Ohio, although it is unclear what proportion of this group consists of graduate students who may leave Ohio upon receiving their degrees.

In the most general terms, the survey indicates that respondents are satisfied with the Academy and its activities, but that there are also a substantial number who are either openly critical or, if not critical, at least open to change.

Recommendations

Through the efforts of Vladimir Steffel, the committee was able to analyze responses according to each of the four categories mentioned above. Where differences among sub-groups seemed important, they were taken into account. The questions seemed to fall into three sets of issues: 1) program formats [#2], range and balance [#6], and quality [#7]; 2) date [#3], location [#4], and site [#5] of the spring meeting; and 3) the fall meeting [#8], outreach and services of the Academy [#9], and membership dues [#10]. The committee's findings follow this outline.

1. Program Format: While the largest number of respondents (48 percent) "wouldn't change" the pattern of presented papers, a significant 44 percent would "welcome experimentation." From the additional comments, the committee concluded that the desire for more varied sessions is intense among this latter group.

Program Range and Balance: A large majority of respondents (over 54 percent) concur in the statement that the "mix" of topics has been "quite good," but there were enough criticisms of neglect of Third World histories and of the ancient and medieval periods to warrant concern. Moreover, larger numbers faulted past programs for slighting public history, teaching and professional concerns, and the interests of local historians.

Because the programming implications of responses to these two questions overlap considerably, the committee combines them in its recommendations. The intent of these recommendations is to modify Academy practices so that those interested in doing something different can do so with ease. The committee therefore first recommends that the following four procedural changes related to the Program Committee occur:

- a. steps be taken to appoint the Program Committee a year earlier, so that timely announcements, contacts with specialty groups, and planning of particular sessions by the committee itself might be facilitated;
- b. consideration be given to appointment of members of the Program Committee from the same part of the state, on a rotating basis, in order to make the committee's work more efficient;
- c. field coverage be a primary criterion for appointment to the Program Committee and the Program Committee include a public historian; and

- d. some sort of mechanism be created by which working groups of area and period specialists might be given a place in the program (without abrogating the Program Committee's designed responsibility to screen proposals for professional quality, balance, and audience appeal).

Second, on the basis of significant openness to experimentation and specific respondents' comments, it seems reasonable to urge the Program Committee to:

- a. include more round-table type sessions, so that the reading of papers is not as predominant as it has been;
- b. provide sessions in which broad historiographical developments are presented, including some that cross national boundaries;
- c. increase the attention that is given to public history [which seems to be the strongest demand articulated in individual comments]; and
- d. give more emphasis to professional concerns (teaching, grant applications, how to get books and articles published); and
- e. solicit the participation of qualified historians who are willing to undertake some of the kinds of sessions that might not automatically come into being through the usual process of inviting proposals for papers.

Program Quality: While the Academy can take pride in the fact that many members (26 percent) affirmed that program quality has been "high," it is a matter of some concern that as many described programs as "uneven or, on average, mediocre." [Perhaps surprisingly, 44 percent could not judge because they had not attended meetings.] Some critics mentioned what they considered an excessive involvement of graduate students, papers that were trivial or insignificant, dated research, poor delivery, sessions that allowed insufficient time for audience participation, and less than rigorous commentaries or commentaries that were really additional papers. United States historians tended to be more critical than those in other fields. Neither degree of involvement in the Academy nor length of service in Ohio made respondents more favorable on this matter.

The committee concluded that problems of program quality are endemic to the profession, that age and rank are not related to the success of a paper or commentary, and that no amount of care in planning can insure uniformly high results. Several practical suggestions, however, emerged from the committee's deliberations:

- a. An experienced Academy member might write an article for the Newsletter on "What Is a Conference Paper?" This could be of suitable length to distribute to participants prior to each spring meeting. Similar pieces on "What is a Panel?" and "How to Comment" might also be helpful.

- b. Moving to more informal sessions, as recommended above, will reduce the role of commentators. Beyond that, the Program Committee might be urged to consider that not all sessions, even those with formal papers, be thought of as requiring a commentator. Those proposing sessions might be given the option. In order to protect audience participation, the committee is emphatic that no session with three papers should include a commentator.
- c. The authority and prerogative of moderators to enforce time limits should be recognized. Moderators should also be made to understand that deadlines for submission of papers must be enforced, and they should insist that authors who exceed prescribed lengths bring their presentations into conformity in advance of the annual meeting.
- d. The Program Committee should encourage participants to interpret their topics broadly enough that non-specialists will find interest and benefit in sessions outside their own fields of expertise. [The Academy plays a somewhat different role for its members than the American Historical Association or Organization of American Historians: it need not be a "mini" version of those organizations.]

2. Program Date: Over 70 percent of respondents indicated that an April date works well or only occasionally conflicts with other obligations; less than 20 percent reported frequent conflicts. The committee concluded that there will always be scheduling conflicts for some members. A meeting in March would face a variety of spring break periods; a winter date would introduce uncertainties of weather and travel; an October meeting would collide with football on many campuses, as well as with annual meetings of other historical societies. Not only were all other times discussed by the committee flawed for one reason or another, but the problem of re-educating the Academy's members also presented risks that seemed greater than any possible gains a scheduling shift might achieve.

The committee therefore recommends making no change at present.

Location: While 13 percent of respondents claimed to be willing to go "anywhere in Ohio" and 22 percent insisted on a "central" location, 19 percent said they would like to visit different locations and 39 percent that they were "flexible" so long as they don't have to go to "the far corners of the state." There seems to be a loose consensus that movement is desirable so long as it does not involve extreme distances. Movement might have the advantages of mobilizing people in different sections of Ohio and reducing the monotony that centrally-located people may feel toward Columbus. It was pointed out that attendance at Wittenberg increased over the preceeding year, and that the last meeting at Ohio State had the largest turn-out in a decade.

The committee recommends that the Executive Committee continue to seek variety in location, perhaps by moving from Columbus and its environs to more distant places in alternate years.

Site: A very large majority of respondents (75 percent) preferred a campus or other educational environment. Only 17 percent said that a commercial site is "all right," and over two-thirds of those selected the option "if costs do not rise sharply." Those newer to Ohio (0-5 years) and historical society/museum respondents were less fixed on educational settings. In individual comments, concerns about conveniences (parking, insulated meeting rooms, etc.) were strongly emphasized. A small but articulate group expressed interest in utilizing historical sites, which might lend themselves to program emphases or excursions involving local history.

The committee recommends that Academy meetings continue to be in educational settings. These might include, however, historical societies/museums, where facilities and accommodations are suitable, as well as the educational facilities operated by certain business corporations.

3. Fall Meeting: Fewer than 20 percent of respondents reported that they attend the fall meeting and find it useful; over 24 percent did not consider it "an important function of the Academy." Interestingly, 42 percent indicated that it would hold more interest for them if it included "a substantive program." Several individuals commented sharply that the fall meeting reflects the Academy's "old-boy-network" character.

The committee concluded that there should be some experimentation with program enhancements of what ought to continue as primarily a social occasion. From individual comments, it seems that something other (or more) than an after-dinner paper by the winner of the book award is called for. For many members, attending a reception, dinner, and lecture are not worth the time, effort, and cost required. One option might be to work with a host institution to provide historically-related local tours or presentations. The Academy should not endeavor to plan such opportunities itself: having to have two program committees would be, in the committee's judgment, a mistake. Whether a "program," however defined, would draw better if offered on a Friday afternoon than on a Saturday morning remains an unanswered question. The committee believed that the Executive Committee is the proper body to pursue this issue.

Outreach and Activities: The largest group of respondents (47 percent) expressed themselves as being satisfied with what the Academy is currently doing. However, roughly the same number indicated that they think it should either "do more to bring historians together" (23 percent) or more actively promote the study of history and the "concerns of historians" (26 percent). If this is not exactly a mandate for a more aggressive organization, neither is it reason for standing pat.

The committee recommends several possibilities for further consideration by the Executive Committee:

a. Changes in the Newsletter:

- 1) More frequent issues (3-4 annually) would heighten consciousness about the Academy and enable members and prospective members to see greater benefits in belonging.
- 2) The contents might provide more topical, and less departmental, information, making the Newsletter more of a marketplace of ideas, with contributions about teaching and professional concerns, a column in each issue dealing with public history, and the like.

[These suggestions imply no criticism of the Newsletter as it currently exists. Many respondents praised it enthusiastically.]

- b. Postage: With an increase in dues (discussed below), the Executive Committee should consider greater use of first-class postage for the Academy's mailings, to insure timely delivery and the sense of professional self-esteem the organization deserves.
- c. Review of the Academy's role in advancing history in Ohio: This seems to be something that the Executive Committee, or some specially appointed body would have to undertake. Such a review would include consideration of the potential role the Academy's resources might enable it to play in the General Assembly and with other public organizations (e.g., the Ohio Humanities Council) to make them sufficiently aware of and responsive to issues concerning the support of history.
- d. Review of Academy Standing Committees: In particular, the potential roles of the Standards Committee and the Historical Societies and Archives Committee stand in need of discussion. Neither seems to have a clear, ongoing agenda of positive responsibilities. Both could be important instruments of an energized Academy.

The Executive Committee, in consultation with present and recent committee chairpersons, should write job descriptions for all committees.

Finally, in order to facilitate communication and meetings, the same kind of "regionalization" that the committee recommends for the Program Committee should be considered.

Dues: Only 18 percent of respondents seem to believe that the current \$5 membership charge is appropriate. While 28 percent expressed the view that dues should increase only to keep pace with inflation, 29 percent would accept an increase to \$5-10 and 20 percent an increase to \$10-15 in order to expand the Academy's functions. Together with 3 percent who would go beyond \$15, the latter two groups constitute over half of all respondents. The committee found quite interesting the comment that "\$5 is peanuts & would tell some that OAH doesn't offer much." Naturally, the question of dues is linked for many with the services the organization provides.

It is in the light of these responses that the committee recommends a phased increase in dues, first to \$10, and at some subsequent date, after further review, to a higher rate. The committee believes that an increase to \$10 would result in negligible membership losses, especially if coupled with a more frequent Newsletter and additional outreach and advocacy efforts.

The committee wishes to make two other recommendations. One is that the Academy make a serious effort to secure new members. Of 382 respondents, 96 reported that they had never been members. Yet they demonstrated enough interest to participate in the survey. For many, this was their first contact with the Academy. This seems to be an important pool of potential new members, and there are hundreds more listed in the Roster who might also respond if approached with a convincing message.

Secondly, the committee also believes that it is important to report the decisions that grow out of this survey to both the membership of the Academy and those non-members who responded. Such a report will enable them to see that the effort was worthwhile and that the Academy takes a serious interest in their views.

Respectfully submitted,

Jacob H. Dorn, Chair
Wright State University

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Capital University

Barbara E. Clements
University of Akron

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Denison University

Vladimir Steffel, ex officio
The Ohio State University-
Marion

Warren Van Tine
The Ohio State University

Ad Hoc Committee on the Future of the Ohio Academy of History

Summary of Recommendations

Program Format, Range, Balance: To facilitate work of Program Committee:

- a. Appoint earlier [action]
- b. Compose regionally [consideration]
- c. Compose to represent broad cross-section of fields, including public history [action]
- d. Create specialty working groups [action]

In addition, authorize Program Committee to:

- a. Increase proportion of round-table sessions [action]
- b. Include historiographical sessions of general interest [action]
- c. Increase public-history emphasis [action]
- d. Increase emphasis on professional concerns [action]
- e. Recruit participants to meet special program needs [action]

Program Quality: To enhance quality of individual sessions:

- a. Prepare materials to guide participants [action]
- b. Use commentators with discretion [action]
- c. Strengthen moderators' control [action]
- d. Encourage broad interpretation for non-specialists [action]

Spring Program Date: No Change.

Spring Program Location: Seek variety, perhaps by alternating between Columbus and other accessible locations.

Site: Continue to use educational sites, broadly interpreted, with primary consideration of suitability of facilities and accommodations.

Fall Meeting: To increase attractiveness and value:

- a. Feature some program in addition to after-dinner lecture [action]
- b. Explore opportunities for historically-related local tours or presentations [consideration]

Outreach and Activities: To increase organizational outreach and effectiveness:

- a. Publish Newsletter more frequently and broaden content [consideration]
- b. Upgrade mailings by greater use of first-class postage [consideration]
- c. Review Academy's role as advocate for history [action]

d. Review standing committees

- 1) Prepare committee job descriptions [action]
- 2) Compose committees regionally [consideration]

Membership Dues: Increase to \$10 [action]

Follow-Up:

- a. Launch drive to enlarge membership [action]
- b. Report results of survey and decisions [action].

Addendum: Copies of the survey breakdown may be requested from Vladimir Steffel, OSU-Marion Campus, 1465 Mt. Vernon Avenue, Marion, Ohio 43302.

ACADEMY BUSINESS

Jacob Dorn, President-Elect, urgently requests all members to provide him with nominations, themselves or others, for all standing committees by April 30, 1991.

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(Subscription to the OAH NEWSLETTER is included in the OAH membership fee.)

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