

À LA RECHERCHE DU TEMPS PERDU A Paean to a Laudatory and Octogenerian Past!

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Good afternoon! Many thanks to all of you—it is indeed an honor to be here and to be recognized as the incoming president of this active and significant academic society. I look forward to working with you throughout the next twelve months and I hope that I can count on your assistance in maintaining the vibrancy of our Academy.

After I was elected to the position of vice-president of the OAH, I realized that I had to prepare an address for this gathering. I had two ordinary choices which focus on current research topics. First, I could examine some aspect of the seventeenth century *mazarinades*, i.e. pamphlets which proliferated during the Fronde in France, 1648-1653, but the names and historical references are better suited to a meeting of French historians than a multi-disciplinary gathering of this nature. A second possibility focused on the *émigrés* of the French Revolution who sought refuge in the United States in the 1790s, but that did not inspire me at the moment. Then came the realization while examining the web page for the OAH that we would be celebrating a special anniversary during my tenure as president, i.e. the eightieth birthday. Perhaps a retrospective would be appropriate at that time. Now the title of this address should become apparent. The French words are the title of a novel by the famous, French literary giant of the twentieth century, Marcel Proust—it is better known in English as *Remembrance of Things Past*. However, before I begin my more formal remarks, I would like thank my colleague Betsy MacLean (also former president of the Academy) and the staff at the Ohio Historical Society where I perused the archives of the OAH which provided the needed information for today's presentation.

During my research I discovered that there were two opportunities for "our OAH ancestors" to focus on the Academy's past. First, during the presidency of George Knepper, successful efforts were made to honor the founders in 1972—eight were able to participate in the festivities. Again on the occasion of the forty-fifth, Wallace Chessman presented a formal retrospective. Interestingly, he was a professor at Denison and his

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speech was delivered on 8 April—thirty-four years later here I am with a reminder about the important work of the Academy.

Piecing together the early years are somewhat problematic. As Chessman said in 1977: “Like lawyers who seldom write their own wills, historians can neglect their own past.”¹ And this is true about the first twenty years. But what emerges from the archives is a somewhat fascinating story, much of which is found in his 1977 speech . A gathering of historians who were employed at institutions of higher learning in Ohio was actually encouraged by the curator of the Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Society (forerunner of the present Ohio Historical Society) as early as 1930. It was he, Harlow Lindley, who encouraged historians in Ohio to meet in conjunction with the Ohio College Association in Cleveland on 8 April 1932. Two “guiding lights” made sure that this happened: Harold Davis of Hiram College and David Moore of Oberlin. This first, rather informal meeting of some thirty historians included lunch and an address by Robert Fletcher of Oberlin—the topic is unknown. But we do know that this gathering was successful since Moore was elected president and plans were made to meet informally in the early fall. It should also be pointed out that Arthur C. Cole of Western Reserve College observed that “a sophisticated name might attract attention” and hence the title Ohio Academy of History was adopted. Obviously the Ohio College History Teachers Association that was originally proposed was too clumsy and we know today inappropriate with the active participation of secondary school historians. Despite the difficulties of the Great Depression, the Academy continued to meet both with a formal conference in the spring and an informal gathering in the fall. In the regards the latter, for several years members traveled to Lake Mitiwanga, east of Sandusky, for swimming, golf, and other recreational pleasures.²

In his comments in 1942 about the Academy, Harold Davis pointed out that membership was small--similar to the size of history faculties at the state’s colleges, “but that only enhanced the ‘social . . . opportunity to meet and discuss questions of common interest.’” Davis later stated in that decennial address: “The organization is now in an excellent position . . . for making it an instrument by which the historical scholars of the State may assume their rightful responsibility for historical activity within the State along all lines: research, archives, historical

instruction in the schools, State historical activities and publications, and the elevation of the general level of historical consciousness throughout the State.”³ This sounds like mission of our Academy today almost seven decades later. Consider carefully the various awards now offered to encourage sound scholarship in our multi-faceted discipline.

Rather than leading us through a year-by-year chronological examination of our Academy now that we have explored a little of its early years, I would like to examine a variety of topics and themes that became apparent as I read through the files of six of the eight boxes of our archival materials. In the first place in the 1930s, only some thirty to forty historians attended the spring conference. For example, in 1937, there were thirty-six present for the luncheon—and of this number there were only three women (and one or two were spouses!). The programs were informal, usually with a presentation before lunch and another plenary session after. However, there was one telling handwritten note of 1939 from A.T. Volwiler at Ohio University, who was president of the Academy at that time, to William Overman, one of the “founding fathers.” “What would you think of asking one our Catholic brethren to read a paper?” He noticed a lack of interest by the historians of those colleges—and there were more than a half-dozen of them at that time. Because of the nature of the conferences, apparently presenters were officially invited to deliver a paper. In the limited amount of information available from the 1940s and early 50s, it is apparent that his suggestion was followed since historians from Catholic colleges were noticeable on the attendance lists.⁴

Reflective of changes in college demographics encouraged by the G.I. Bill of Rights and the baby boom necessitating an increase in the number of qualified teachers, the number of historians who attended the annual conference began to grow by the end of the 1940s. Approximately seventy signed the attendance sheet at the 1949 conference at which only four papers were delivered including the luncheon address which was not given by the president. The practice of the “inaugural speech” did not seem to start until late in the 1950s. However, by 1955, I noticed that 108 signed the register, but still there was a paucity of women since only five were present for the luncheon and of those two were apparently spouses.⁵ But such figures did not seem to concern the membership until awareness of gender equality became a cultural theme in the 1960s and 1970s. Only under the leadership of

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John Carroll University's remarkable Marion K. Morton did the Academy face this problem with a special report on the Status of Women in 1973. It pointed out that only 10% of full time faculty were female while they constituted 50% of the part-time staff.⁶ As an aside, do we need to examine the issue of gender equality once again today.

While examining the archives, I was also impressed by the quality and variety of presidential addresses. Before saying something about them, I must note that in its almost eighty years, the OAH has elected seventy-six different historians to its presidency. Two of them served two year terms during World War II because, as one little note in the archives indicated, there were restrictions on travel, especially with gas rationing. Only one agreed to be elected on two different occasions to the position—Jacob Dorn, our outgoing president. He first served in 1991-2. Congratulations and thank you for your dedication and service! And now to the presidential addresses! Those that I was able to read in a short amount of time available were compelling and fascinating. Here are a few examples. Roger Grant of the University of Akron in 1987 presented "Utopia is Possible" with references to Shakers, Zoarites, and others of their ilk, while in the following year, Richard Ortquist of Wittenberg University decided to reflect on the state of the historical profession. Here he motivated in part by the job crisis in history positions. His concerns are echoed today as we all know. Alonzo Hamby of Ohio University followed in a reflective mode, but in his case "on writing the biography of Harry Truman." While I have enjoyed his work on Truman, I was also attracted to Carl Ubbelhode's address on the "creation" of the modern lawyer in Cleveland during the Progressive Era—an historic time that has always fascinated me and one that some of my colleagues hope will have a renaissance soon. In a different vein, I was attracted to Marcella Barton's address in 1996 where she focused on the descendants of Welsh immigrants in southeastern Ohio who made distinct efforts to maintain their own culture even after several generations. As a third generation American (and even as a former French teacher), these efforts are remarkable especially with the strong impulses by the media to create a homogenous society. Of course as an ecclesiastical historian (though one of seventeenth-century France), I have been fascinated by Jake Dorn's two addresses both of which focused on radical priests, one Catholic and the other Episcopalian. Both of his characters could "stir up

the people” and reflect U.S. society and politics at the beginning of the twentieth century at least on the more leftist fringe. One of his characters even asked if Jesus were a socialist—some are still asking that question today I am sure.⁷

Jake Dorn’s successor in 1993 was Stuart Givens of Bowling Green. His concerns and questions are still ones that are with us today. He entitled his address: “Does the Past Have a Future or Even a Place?” At the opening he stated “faculty bemoan the inadequate preparation of students entering college.” Certainly many here will agree with him, especially in the open-enrollment universities and colleges. Then Professor Givens continued with a quotation from Thomas Kean, President of Drew University: “Our ivory tower is under siege. People are questioning our mission and questioning who we are. They claim we cost too much, spend carelessly, teach poorly, plan myopically, and when questioned, we act defensively.” Again prophetic words that reverberate in our contemporary Ohio! And finally he quoted Governor Voinovich when he spoke to some two hundred trustees from Ohio’s public universities and colleges: “We’ll be making some significant investments in science and technology, research and development.”⁸ Again, a prophecy, but this time for what is fondly called STEM programs in upper administration circles while making cuts to the liberal arts.

While I am focusing on politics, I must conclude that topic with Ronald Lora’s address in 1997. The title is compelling especially in our contemporary world: “Disposition and Doctrine: The Widening River of American Conservatism.” As he stated: “As the twentieth century nears its end, we see a greatly broadened conservative moment that gathered to find communism, the welfare state, and the secularization of society.” They faced what Professor Lora called the “untidy politics of American democracy at work and . . . an unsettled pluralist society still in formation.”⁹ Are we there? Do these comments ring true in 2011?

Teaching standards and pedagogy have been concerns for the OAH over the years. Stuart Givens told us that in the late 90s, but he was not the first. In the 1950 spring conference in Columbus, the morning session was entitled: “Teaching History to College Students in 1950: Traditional Methods Enriched and Vitalized.” This was followed by a lunch program called “The Dilemma of the Historian in a Democracy”—an interesting title as the U.S. was on the threshold of McCarthyism. The

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afternoon was devoted in part to plans to charge a committee to examine the standards for the teaching of history in Ohio. Later in the 50s, the following resolution which began in the following manner was approved by the OAH: "Whereas the standards of instruction especially in history in the public schools of Ohio are a matter of concern. . . ." ¹⁰ The Academy proposed that all high school teachers of history have at least twenty-seven hours in that discipline before being certified! ¹¹ Please notice today there are similar concerns but that they have been extended to the problem of certification by institutions of higher learning involved in the "Seniors to Sophomores" program sponsored and encouraged by the Board of Regents. And the concerns of 1950 about secondary instruction still remain with us today.

During the past few minutes I have been lauding the presidents of the Academy for their professional and often prophetic statements, but now it is time to mention something about those who have contributed heavily to its success and longevity. They remain often in the background, but their influence is great. First, one must praise the secretary-treasurers—in the past seventy-nine years, there have been nineteen including our present professional servant, Kevin Kern of Akron University. This could be often a thankless job, but they are a necessary part of the team that makes the Academy work. We do not have time to honor all of these individuals by name except one and that is Vlady Steffel of OSU-Marion who took on the task for fifteen years. ¹²

Next, as another "glue" for the Academy is the newsletter. At the spring meeting in 1969, the Executive Committee voted to print a semi-annual newsletter. Robert Twyman of Bowling Green rose to the task and prepared the first issue by the fall of that year. It was the one that announced the grand opening of the new center for the Ohio Historical Society. Only nine colleagues have guided it since that time, but here I must give special notice to Stuart Givens for his eighteen years—his nearest "rival" was Donna Van Raaphorst of Cuyahoga Community College West with her eight dedicated years. Our thanks now to Betsy Hedler from the OHS who is continuing in this fine tradition of excellence. ¹³

Of course, besides all these individuals with a strong sense of professional responsibility, I want to take notice of those who have served on the various committees of the OAH over these past seventy-nine

years. To mention all of them would be impossible, but I want to acknowledge their efforts—I am sure that many, if not most of those present here today have served or I hope will be willing to serve in the near future.¹⁴

Now I must turn to another aspect of the Academy's work—that is how it encourages quality scholarship. Research and critical thinking are hallmarks of the historian's craft. There is indeed a magnetic force which draws us into our research. Perhaps Elizabeth W. Oliver, my French history colleague and poet, said it aptly:

Reading the words
of one long dead [François Buzot, 1760-1794]
written in his own hand
in some certain haste
on fine grade paper
still unyellowed
these two hundred years
the very ink
seemed to command
me to listen---
to listen to the music
of those well-chosen words
that necessary testament
to what had been
and to what almost was.

Sitting there
in the fading winter light
of the old bibliothèque [library]
surrounded by voices
from the near distant past
I willingly surrender
to the insistent melody
appearing before me
and time ceases
to exist

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I can hear him clearly now
his voice determined to be heard
can see his slender fingers
racing across the clear white pages
pausing now and then
to cross out nearty
the occasional misspelled word
for there is not time
to make a perfect copy now---¹⁵

Perhaps the most prominent award is given for publications and this has been the case since 1971. What should be impressive to all of us is that the list of honored over four decades is in a variety of sub-disciplines. It includes Clifton Crais' *Politics of Evil: Magic, State Power, and the Political Imagination in South Africa* (awarded in 2004) to David Stebenne's *Modern Republican: Arthur Larson and the Eisenhower Years* (awarded in 2007) and Robert Chazan's *Medieval Jewry in Northern France: A Political and Social History* (awarded in 1975). Indeed it must be noted that the foci of these celebrated publications are eclectic—from Russia to the Ottoman Empire to the Old South and even to the Akron, Ohio rubber workers. The title that intrigues me is John Burnham's *chef-d'oeuvre* entitled *Bad Habits: Drinking, Smoking, Taking Drugs, Sexual Misbehavior, and Swearing in America*. As a major footnote to support of excellence in scholarship, the Academy established an award to for Distinguished Historian in 2005. Six of our colleagues have been so honored including Alonzo Hamby who challenged us yesterday evening with his thought-provoking presentation.¹⁶

Scholarship in history is not only that of research but of communication, i.e. teaching. That talent to inspire our students are among the foundations of our discipline and the OAH has made sure to acknowledge that since 1981 with the recognition of my colleague, Larry Kaplan, from Kent State University. While looking at the list of honorees, it is admirable that not one of our colleges dominate, but that excellence is noteworthy throughout the state. But again some names should be acknowledged like Tom Taylor (also former president and secretary-treasurer), Ron Lora (former president), George Knepper (former

president) and, of course, Jake Dorn. The twenty-six who have been honored represent the strength of our discipline—surely there are many others who have not been acknowledged.¹⁷

Since 1971, the Academy has honored colleagues for their Distinguished Service. Again we notice that professional responsibility is not limited to our colleagues at one location but that distinguished professionalism is spread across the Buckeye State. Perhaps a few names should be noted like Betsy MacLean of Otterbein, Larry Wilcox of Toledo, Shelley Baranowski of Akron, the ever-active Phillip Shriver and Erving Beauregard, Vlady Steffel, (would you believe Jake Dorn), and . . . !!! The list is noteworthy and the work for the profession is most impressive. Kudos! Their example should prepare a younger generation of historians to emulate them.¹⁸

Next, the OAH has been recognizing excellence among the doctoral students at Ohio universities. Since 1995, fifteen have been honored for crafting the best dissertation of the year. Indeed this is a superb method for encouraging solid and significant research. One would hope that all of these honorees were stimulated to share their insights not only with the academic community but the larger educated audience. The topics range from tourism in postwar American cities and the war in Vietnam to birth control in India and the formation of the Caulite monastic order in Europe in the Middle Ages.¹⁹

Instruction in history takes place in the classroom, the library, books, etc., but also in historic sites. The OAH has recognized this since 1997 and has continued to encourage public history through its annual award. Nine have been honored for their work since then and this includes the Newark Earthworks Center at OSU-Newark, Shawnee State's documentary of the 1937 flood, Youngstown State's focus on brickyard laborers and immigration, and the Campus Martius program on migration to the Ohio Valley from 1850 to 1970.²⁰ What a great way to encourage excellence among our public historians.

It has been only four score years since there was an inspiration for the Ohio Academy of History. But as we have seen in that time it has attained the goals that Harold Davis set forth in 1942 and that is to "make it an instrument by which the historical scholars of the State may assume their rightful responsibility for historical activity within the state along all lines. . . ." ²¹ I commend my colleagues for their diligence and

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perseverance for making this possible and charge them to continue on this path of excellence.

Notes

¹Ohio Academy of History Records, Ohio Historical Society, MSS 888, box 1, file 4.

²Ibid., box 7, file 13.

³Ibid., file 13 (W. Chessman's speech, p. 8).

⁴Ibid., box 5, file 13.

⁵Ibid., box 3, file 7.

⁶Ibid., box 4, file 8.

⁷Ibid., box 1, file 5.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid., box 1, file 6.

¹¹Ibid., box 1, file 2.

¹²Ibid., boxes 5 & 6.

¹³Ibid., box 1, file 3; to examine the newsletters see box 2, files 23 to 26.

¹⁴Ibid., boxes 3 & 4 contain the records of the work of various OAH committees.

¹⁵Elizabeth W. Oliver, *Confluences* (Austin, Texas: Morgan Printing, 2005), 89-90.

¹⁶OAH Records, boxes 8 & 9.

¹⁷Ibid., box 8.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Ibid., box 9, file 10.

²⁰Ibid., box 9, file 8 & 9.

²¹Ibid., box 1, file 13.

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