



ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN HISTORIANS

OAH

NEWSLETTER

Vol. 2, No. 1

July, 1974

THE DENVER MEETING

The Organization met in Denver in April and enjoyed bright, sunny days throughout the four-day period. The snow-filled Rockies were in view each day. The crowded conditions of the sessions and the comments of those who attended them suggested that the program was also very attractive. Nearly 1700 people registered for the meeting, and every state, the District of Columbia and five foreign countries were represented. The attendance figure was substantially below the total of more than 2600 in Chicago in 1973, but nearly half of the Organization's members live within 500 miles of that city while less than 10 percent of the members live that close to Denver. Attendance there was influenced also, it appears, by the economic problems of the profession. The job registry supplied additional evidence on those problems. The registry listed 57 positions and 212 applicants. This crisis was one of the subjects discussed in the Executive Secretary's report to the Business Meeting. (See the September issue of the *Journal of American History*.)

THE OUTCOME OF THE ELECTION

The following members were elected to office in the March election: President, John Hope Franklin, University of Chicago; Vice-President, Frank Freidel, Harvard University; Executive Board, Robert Johannsen, University of Illinois at Urbana; Mary F. Berry, University of Maryland, and Joseph Wall, Grinnell College; Nominating Board, Richard H. Brown, The Newberry Library; Jane DeHart Mathews, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, and Alfred Young, Northern Illinois University.

AN INCREASE IN DUES

In their April meetings, the Executive Board proposed and the Business Meeting accepted an increase in dues that will go into effect at the beginning of 1975. The decision was dictated by the impact of soaring inflation upon the costs of the Organization and the mounting problems of the profession. The goal of the change is an increase of at least \$50,000 in the annual income of the OAH.

In addition to the increase, the change introduces the ability-to-pay principle to the dues structure. The Board concluded that the graduated method would distribute the

burden more equitably than an across-the-board increase would, and the Business Meeting agreed.

The new structure will be as follows:

Student	\$ 6.00
Regular—earning less than \$15,000	
per year	\$ 15.00
\$15,000 - \$20,000	\$ 20.00
over \$20,000	\$ 25.00
Life	\$300.00
Emeritus.	\$ 6.00
Institution	\$ 25.00

You will note that the categories for married couples have been dropped. This change was made for two reasons. The categories were difficult to fit into the graduated structure, and this type of membership has been losing its attractiveness. Members have apparently been concluding that it does not benefit them.

We assume that members will agree that the changes are necessary and desirable and that the OAH and the *JAH* are worthy of the burden that the new structure imposes.

PROPOSED CHANGES IN THE CONSTITUTION AND BYLAWS

This summer, members are being asked to vote by mail ballot on three issues. One is a change in the bylaws that was proposed by a majority vote at the Business Meeting. It would add the category "Associate" to our list of membership types and would place dues for members in this category at \$15. The definition of Associate is a member who does not earn his or her livelihood as a historian, and the motivation behind the proposal is a desire to encourage such people to join the OAH if they have an interest in history and to do so even though they have the expense of membership in societies in their own profession.

The first proposal for constitutional change concerns Article V, Section 2. As it now reads it instructs the Nominating Board to nominate one candidate for Vice-President. The proposal would change that title to President-Elect and instruct the Nominating Board to nominate two or more persons for President-Elect. The person elected would serve one year in that position and then succeed to the presidency.

The second proposal deals with Article IV, Section 2. According to that provision, former presidents continue to serve on the Executive Board for six years immediately succeeding their presidency. The proposal would reduce the

term to three years. The Executive Board would then be composed of the President, the President-Elect, the Editor, the Executive Secretary, the Treasurer, three past presidents, and nine elected members.

To reduce mailing costs for the Organization, the ballot has been mailed with this *Newsletter*. The deadline on voting for the proposed change in the Bylaws is August 8, while the deadline on the proposed constitutional changes is October 1. We are forced to establish the August deadline because of the printing schedule for our new bill which will be in use before the end of the year. We have established the later date for the constitutional changes so as to give members who do not receive their mail during the summer an opportunity to vote on these very important issues.

If passed, the amendments to the constitution would go into effect immediately and would affect the November meeting of the Executive Board and the 1976 elections.

The proposal for a contested election is so important that two past presidents have agreed to present their opposing views in the issue. John Higham of the Johns Hopkins University has written a statement favoring the change, while T. Harry Williams of Louisiana State University has written in opposition to the proposal.

For The Amendment

By its very nature a profession is self-regulating. It is a body of people who maintain a specialized culture by continually evaluating one another. Among American historians a significant part of that evaluative function is exercised through the OAH—through its *Journal*, its annual meeting, its award of prizes, and its choice of officers. Perhaps the most visible and the most central exercise of collective judgment is the annual selection of a future President. Many professional responsibilities are necessarily assigned to one person or to a small committee, but we can all contribute directly to the choice of a spokesman for the Organization. To proceed otherwise would seem to deprive our members of full participation in professional life.

This is the heart of the matter; but several subsidiary reasons may be offered for making the Presidency fully elective. First, the participatory demands of professional life are reinforced in our time by a broader impulse toward more equality. Increasingly, elitist procedures are required to justify themselves as necessary departures from an egalitarian standard, rather than the other way around. If that is so, the burden of proof now lies on us to justify a procedure that impedes an open competition for the presidential office. Our constitution allows for a contest, to be sure, but it puts any challenger at the almost insuperable disadvantage of having to oppose the judgment of the regularly constituted nominating board.

Understandably, that breeds resentment, the resentment leads to a hardening of factional lines. In the American Political Science Association, when procedures similar to ours persist, an opposition party has formed, and fields a full slate of candidates. By incorporating diversity and open choice within the regular constitutional process, we would reduce the likelihood of such polarization arising in our ranks as well. We would give the nominating board a broad-

ly inclusive mandate and thereby forestall the possibility that it might be driven into a defensive posture by the pressure of an organized opposition.

Finally, the size and variety of our membership suggest that a small nominating board may be less able than it once was to reach an independent decision that is broadly acceptable. When there were only a few special fields and our members were more concentrated geographically and institutionally than they are now, nearly all the leading people knew one another, and nearly everyone knew a good deal about them. It is regrettable but undeniable that we no longer constitute so cohesive an intellectual community. There are many fields, many interests, many points of view. Not always, but perhaps with increasing frequency, a small committee may not contain within itself enough of those fields and points of view, or may not be in touch with a wide enough cross-section of the profession, to be able with any confidence to make a final and exclusive judgment.

Among the arguments against the change which the Executive Board has recommended, two deserve particular attention. First, will the Organization be politicized? Will merit be subordinated to other considerations? The question is actually one of degree: will our choices be more political if made by the membership at large than if made by a committee? I think not. The open politics of an election seem to me as compatible with the high standards of our profession as the quiet politics of the committee room.

Secondly, it may be thought that the membership at large can not take the long view that often disposes a committee to award the Presidency to different segments of the profession on a kind of rotational basis—give the Lancastrians a chance this year because York ruled last. Decisions which take account of alternative options in the past and the future are certainly easier for a committee to make than for an electorate. But the committee, through its nominations, will still be able to play a constructive role in that respect. The electorate will assume only a share of the responsibility. For the electorate to have a share—for the members to come under an obligation to look to the long-range interests of the whole profession—seems healthier than leaving that responsibility to a bare handful.

Against The Amendment

I welcome this opportunity to express to our membership my opposition to the proposed change in the constitution providing for a new method of choosing a president, the official known presently as vice president but under the proposed system to be known as "president-elect." The suggested new title may be preferable to the former designation, but the arrangement to select this individual is, in my opinion, inferior to the conventional method, fraught with danger and disadvantage and offering few benefits.

The proposed change places the method of selecting a president on a new basis, advocates a different philosophy of selection. The present system operates on the sound premise that the office is honorific—a recognition that the organization bestows annually on one of its members who

has demonstrated high qualities of scholarship. This individual is not designated because he or she possesses qualities of leadership or administration, although such may be the case, or because he or she is popular with large numbers of colleagues, although again such may be true. The primary, the predominant principle in governing the selection is the scholarship of the individual, the reputation of the designee as a historian, and the purpose of the designation is to recognize and honor this person.

The suggested system throws this philosophy aside. If the change is adopted, the names of two scholars will be placed before the membership which will have to choose which one of them should be recognized. Two individuals of perhaps equal attainment, and who are perhaps friends, will have to compete for an office that should be honorific. This is not the way to recognize scholarship or to designate the president of a society of scholars. One should not have to compete for this recognition from his fellows. (In this connection, it should be noted that several past presidents have said they would not have competed for the office and that several potential nominees have said they would be extremely reluctant to compete.) The philosophy behind the proposed change is wrong, and the change if effected will have had results for the organization.

These results will be many, but only a few can be indicated. One wonders as to the fate or future of a defeated candidate. Supporters of the proposed change argue that the nomination of a candidate is a recognition that the individual might otherwise not secure. But if the candidate is defeated, the recognition will be a hollow honor. And what happens after that to the rejected candidate? Having gone down once, will he then be forgotten by nominating committees and not again be placed in contention and never achieve a recognition he might well gain under the present system? Or will he be renominated in the following year and win on a "sympathy vote" over an equally qualified rival? The proposed change will create many such distressing situations. Worst of all, it will introduce divisiveness into our organization, and perhaps attempts to organize campaigns and mobilize votes. The latter devices have not been unknown under the present system but the method of selection has kept them to a minimum. Under the proposed system they would become more overt and blatant.

The members of the organization are confronted with a fundamental question—the method and the philosophy of choosing their president. I hope that they will retain the present system that is so appropriate to a company of scholars.

THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

In addition to finances and the constitution, the Executive Board dealt with several other important issues in its April meeting. Included were ways of increasing membership, the taping of sessions, OAH participation in the Bicentennial, the status of history, academic freedom, legislation of interest to historians, and ways of strengthening the representation of the profession in Washington. The job crisis once

again occupied a substantial part of the meeting time. The Board instructed the Executive Secretary to make a survey of unemployment and discussed with Wayne Rasmussen, the chairman of the new Committee on Non-Teaching Opportunities, the plans being developed by that committee. The Board also authorized the establishment of a special committee to consider the future of the Frederick Jackson Turner Award and approved a proposal for a roster of historians of women.

THE PROGRAMS FOR 1975 and 1976

The Program Committee for 1975, chaired by Professor John Blassingame of Yale University, is completing its work, and the Program Committee for the 1976 meeting in St. Louis is taking shape. The chairman for 1976 is Professor Alden T. Vaughan of Columbia University.

FOREIGN MEMBERSHIP

The OAH has an encouraging number of members outside the United States—nearly 650. Approximately two-thirds are institutions; thus foreign readership of the *JAH* is much greater than 650. The largest concentration is in Canada with 226 members. Great Britain is next with nearly 100, and Japan is not far behind with 75. Membership in several countries—Australia, West Germany, France, New Zealand, Sweden, India, and Russia—ranges from 34 to 10. The additional members include 43 in Europe, 23 in Asia, the same number in Latin America, and 17 in Africa. The figures suggest that there is some interest in American history in nearly every part of the world and that the *JAH* is widely regarded as an important means of pursuing that interest.

STATEMENT OF OBJECTIVES BY THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON HISTORIANS AND ARCHIVES

Recognizing that the health of historical scholarship in this country depends to a very considerable extent on mutual confidence and goodwill between historians and archivists and a close and cordial working relationship between the two disciplines, a Joint Committee on Historians and Archives has recently been established by the American Historical Association, the Organization of American Historians, and the Society of American Archivists. This committee is exploring all aspects of problems and policies that affect both historians and archivists as they relate to the custody and research use of manuscripts and archives collections.

The committee has as one of its objectives the elimination of sources of friction and misunderstanding between these two professions in order to facilitate the close working relationship that is vital to sound and effective historical scholarship. The committee is especially concerned with working out means whereby historians will be better able to

appreciate the methods, techniques, and policies used in administering archives and manuscript repositories and thus gain a better understanding of archival needs. Archivists, on the other hand, must become thoroughly familiar with the needs and viewpoints of scholars, who are dependent on access to manuscripts and archives collections in order to conduct their research. Mutual understanding and mutual support by each group for the other will strengthen both the in attainment of their professional goals.

Among the matters to which the joint committee is giving its attention are:

1. The more speedy declassification of security-classified government records.
2. Stimulating businessmen and congressmen to interest themselves in the proper preservation in libraries and archives of those portions of their records and papers which are worthy of permanent preservation for research purposes.
3. Encouraging the removal of unreasonable restrictions by donors on manuscripts and archives and the removal of unnecessary restrictions (including fees) imposed by archival and manuscripts repositories.
4. Encouragement of governmental agencies and other institutions through continuing liaison and advice, to maintain historical programs as well as archival programs at adequate scholarly levels.
5. Encouragement of able young scholars and students of history to consider the fields of archival administration and government historical programs as careers.

STATEMENT ON USER FEES AND ACCESS BY THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON HISTORIANS AND ARCHIVES

One of the unfortunate effects of the current financial crisis is pressure to restrict the availability of manuscripts and archives for research purposes. The severe budget stringencies which now prevail in most agencies have led administrators to seek new sources of income and new methods of reducing expenditures. In such cases manuscript and archive operations have been under strong pressures to introduce practices which can only be regarded as far more harmful than any of the alleged benefits they would confer.

There have been many suggestions by administrative officers that fees be imposed on persons not affiliated with an institution who wish to make research use of that institution's rare and unique manuscripts collections. The requirement that fees be collected from persons wishing to make scholarly research use of manuscripts and archives runs counter to the whole cultural tradition of this country. It would impose a kind of means test on scholars which would shut out impecunious or poverty stricken young persons, no matter what their promise or ability, while giving special privileges to those who, in effect, are able to purchase access to material which is denied to others on grounds which have no relationship to their potential scholarly contributions.

Similarly, proposals that access be limited to students and faculty of the institution where the materials are

housed, thus turning the university's manuscript collection into a kind of private hunting preserve for its own students and faculty, are out of harmony with those traditions of scholarship which have always opposed erecting walls around libraries and scholarly resources. There should be no privileges in the world of scholarship except those based on demonstrated merit and ability. Privilege based on income or place of residence can in the long run only be harmful to the professional goals of both the historian and the archivist.

FIFTY-YEAR INDEX

A valuable research tool, the *Fifty-Year Index* to the *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* (1914-1964) is now available. The volume is priced at \$25 for individuals and \$35 for institutions. Purchasers may send orders directly to the Executive Secretary, Organization of American Historians, 112 North Bryan Street, Bloomington, Indiana 47401.

ROSTER OF HISTORIANS OF WOMEN

The Committee on the Status of Women announces the creation of a ROSTER OF HISTORIANS OF WOMEN, a list of scholars and teachers in the field of women's history who are available to write textbooks or sections of textbooks on women's history, to read manuscripts for publishers, to advise publishers on revising textbooks to deal more adequately with the history of women, to lecture on women's history, to develop material on women's history for television programs and filmstrips, to advise secondary schools in integrating materials about women into their curricula, to advise public libraries about augmenting their holdings on women's history and about creating programs relating to women, and to act as consultant on women's history. The roster, which will sell for \$2, will be published in mimeographed form and will be advertised widely. Any specialist in women's history who is already listed on the AHA's women's roster will be included automatically in the OAH publication. Other women and men in the field who wish to be included should send the following information to the Executive Secretary, 112 North Bryan Street, Bloomington, Indiana 47401: name, address, phone, institutional affiliation and rank, degrees and dates, dissertation topic and advisor, areas of specialization, publications, teaching experience, editing experience, and administrative experience. For further information contact Professor Nancy Weiss, Department of History, Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey 08540.

SALE OF BACK ISSUES

The price of back issues of the *JAH*, Volume 51, No. 2 (Sept. 1964) through Volume 59, No. 4 (March 1973), has been cut from \$4 to \$2 for a limited time. This was done in hopes of reducing the size of a very costly inventory. The issues are available from the Office of the Executive Secretary and will be mailed postpaid upon receipt of \$2 (continued on page 5)

BALLOT

PROPOSED CHANGE IN THE BYLAWS

The first bylaw should be changed by adding the category "Associate" to the list of membership types and the dues for an Associate Member should be \$15.

Yes ☐

No ☐

This ballot must be received at the Bloomington office no later than August 8.

PROPOSED AMENDMENT TO THE CONSTITUTION

Article V, Section 2 should instruct the Nominating Board to nominate two or more candidates for President-Elect.

Yes ☐

No ☐

This ballot must be received at the Bloomington Office no later than October 1.

PROPOSED AMENDMENT TO THE CONSTITUTION

Article IV, Section 2 should limit the term of service of former presidents on the Executive Board to three years immediately succeeding their presidency.

Yes ☐

No ☐

This ballot must be received at the Bloomington office no later than October 1.

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for each copy ordered and an additional 25¢ per copy for overseas mailing. With the exception of Volume 56, No. 1 (June 1969), all issues are available. Orders will be filled as they are received.

TWO PROGRAMS OF INTEREST TO HISTORIANS

Members should be aware that state bicentennial groups now have funds available for programs. Historians should take advantage of this opportunity for service and should cooperate with such groups in planning programs.

An Ethnic Heritage Studies Program has been established and funded by the federal government and should supply teaching, research, and service opportunities for historians. To obtain copies of the guidelines for the program, interested individuals should write to the Ethnic Heritage Studies Program, Office of Education, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Washington, D.C. 20202.

EVALUATION OF THE TEACHING OF HISTORY

The Executive Secretary is cooperating with Roger Panetta, a member of the OAH Committee on the Status of History in the Schools, in his efforts to obtain the cooperation of historians on the high school and college levels in the administration of a history evaluation form in the Fall of 1974. The assumption of the program is that changes in history curriculum and/or instruction should be based on specific information about the nature of the teaching process, student reactions to it, and the attitudes of teachers toward the history classroom. The form seeks to ascertain student and faculty reactions to the study of history as they have experienced it to date. It is not an evaluation of individual professors. Instead, it is an effort to develop an understanding of the collective student-faculty impression of the study and teaching of history.

Faculty willing to cooperate should write to Professor Roger Panetta, Department of History, Marymount College, Tarrytown, New York 10591. Those who do so will be provided with a self-evaluation form and the questionnaire to be administered to their students this Fall. All participating departments and individual faculty members will receive copies of the report.

FINAL REPORT AVAILABLE

Copies of the FINAL REPORT OF THE JOINT AHA-OAH *AD HOC* COMMITTEE TO INVESTIGATE THE CHARGES AGAINST THE FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT LIBRARY AND RELATED MATTERS are available from the Executive Secretary, 112 N. Bryan Street, Bloomington, Indiana 47401. Please send a complete mailing address and fifty cents to cover postage and handling.

MISSING

The Executive Secretary would appreciate receiving the mailing addresses for the 1949 and 1950 Pelzer Memorial Award winners, C. Bruce Staiger and Ted R. Worley.

ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN HISTORIANS
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