

“MORE MATERIALS INTO PLAY: Celebrating Our Wide Eighteenth Century”

Dennis Moore’s SEA Presidential Address -- Williamsburg, June 7 ’007

Good morning, and thank you very much, each and all, for being here to help launch this historic joint conference of the SEA and the OIEAHC. If you’ve seen our most recent SEA Newsletter, you’ll recognize this celebratory sentence: “here’s a hearty THANK YOU to **Ron Hoffman, Beverly Smith, Sally Mason, Mendy Gladden,** and **Fredrika Teute** at the Omohundro Institute, all of whom deserve a great deal of credit for the work they’ve put into this summer’s conference.” Now, ¿where is everyone? “Gentlemen now abed in New England,” to update Henry V a bit, “will think themselves accursed they missed this morning’s session.” Well. Many of you have been attending the SEA’s earlier conferences, and to you I say welcome home; one of my predecessors, who could not be with us this time around, e-mailed me following our 2005 conference, in Old Town Alexandria, to say “The SEA is obviously thriving; each conference is more enjoyable than the last.” To those of you who are attending your first conference involving the SEA, then, I extend a hearty welcome and look forward to chatting with you at this conference -- and at subsequent ones. Meanwhile, even given that we’re all early Americanists, it’s admittedly a bit early in the day; I think back to the first of our biennial conferences, in Charleston in 1999, when the “Welcome and Opening Remarks” session, including a talk by Phil Gura, was also at this early hour and I thought, “That **David Shields.**”

It is in fact good to recognize our past and future presidents, after which we have a small amount of business and I will have some remarks in the form of a rather modest

proposal. Neither **Carla Mulford** nor **Sherry Harris**, our first and third presidents, could be here, but I’m pleased that **Rosemary Guruswamy**, our second president, is on a panel this afternoon. Here’s **Phil Gould**, our fifth president, as well as my own predecessor, **Zabelle Stodola** -- and my successor **Thomas Krise**, along with his successor **Susan Clair Imbarrato** and our newly elected Executive Coordinator, **Hillary Wyss**, who will serve in turn as our tenth president, all in good time.

As many of you know, the SEA is quite interdisciplinary; in that context it is especially appropriate to mention that we are the Americanist affiliate of “ASECS,” the American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies. If you were at last year’s ASECS, in Montréal, you applauded **Anna Mae Duane**, whom the then-president of ASECS recognized as recipient of the SEA’s seventh annual Essay Prize; if you were at our biennial meeting two years ago in Old Town Alexandria, you saw **Elizabeth Maddock Dillon** receiving that year’s Essay Prize. Details about this tradition are on the salmon-colored sheet in your packet, which reminds everyone giving a paper at this Williamsburg conference is eligible to enter the competition for our ninth annual Essay Prize. Meanwhile, it is a pleasure to introduce Professor **Laura Stevens** of the University of Tulsa, editor of TSWL and the chair of our Essay Prize Committee, who has graciously agreed to present this year’s Prize, the eighth. Laura. Thank you, Laura, and congratulations, **Martin**.

Congratulations as well to the 19 recipients of mini-grants the SEA has been able to award for travel to this historic conference. Thanks to our immediate past president **Zabelle Stodola**, with the help of **Lisa Gordis**, we received another \$3,000 grant this year from the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History; we have in turn written

checks to nine deserving secondary school teachers, who are participating in this conference and whom I will ask to stand in a moment. I’ll also ask the ten graduate students who have each received a \$150 travel grant and a free one-year membership in the SEA to stand. Those funds for grad students have come from three sources: **\$835** in tax-deductible donations from individual SEA members, who take advantage of the convenient “check off box” at our on-line membership renewal form; a **\$600** subvention from the English Department at Florida State University; and **\$65** from the SEA’s petite treasury. ¿Did I mention that contributions for this incredibly worthy cause are tax-deductible? Given that we had applications from 27 graduate students, we had to turn down some very, very highly qualified applicants, and so the ad hoc panel of judges -- vice president **Tom Krise**, Executive Coordinator **Susan Imbarrato**, Executive Coordinator-elect **Hillary Wyss**, and I -- made an executive decision to award a free one-year’s membership to each graduate student who applied by the deadline but did not receive a travel grant. Let’s have both groups stand for a moment, then, the Gilder Lehrman recipients and the graduate students recipients, so that we can thank them for being part of this conference. You’ll be pleased to know that a total of 20 teachers have registered for this conference; the nine Gilder Lehrman recipients’ names and schools are on a list at our website, and I understand that the 11 additional teachers here come from all across the continent: one each from California, Maryland, Texas, and D.C., two from New York, and five from here in Virginia. We thank each of them for being here.

Speaking of thank-yous, you might have noticed the tradition of the SEA’s turkey plaques, each of which bears the three-turkeys logo. Two we’re presenting *in absentia*, one to **Michael Clark**, our founding webmaster, and one to our listmaster, **Ray Craig**,

and we’re honoring **Zabelle Stodola**. We also have a thank-you certificate for each of these stalwarts: **Ed Gallagher**, who literally started our website’s Teaching Page, and **Drew Newman**, who volunteered five summers ago, while a graduate student, to put together our on-line Directory. Before we applaud them, I’m asking our Webmaster **Susan Imbarrato** to stand so we can thank her, too, if only for having figured out how to have membership renewals on-line as an option. Thanks, Drew, Ed, and Susan.

Professor Imbarrato also deserves our gratitude for the report she presented at last month’s American Literature Association conference, in Boston. Highlights include the fact that we have over 350 paid memberships, including a dozen Lifetime Memberships. Several of our newest Life Members are here, and we have a framed certificate for each of them: **Kristina Bross**, of Purdue University, who will co-host our early-April 2008 conference, “Prophetstown Revisited: A Summit on Early Native American Studies,” and who is out of the country right now on a Fulbright; **Michael Drexler**, of Bucknell University; **Richard Frohock**, of Oklahoma State University, whom we thank for having agreed to serve as Bill Scheick’s successor as Editor of the SEA Newsletter (and who is en route to Williamsburg, having had to teach a summer class); **Jeffrey Hammond**, of St. Mary’s College of Maryland; **Gordon Sayre**, of the University of Oregon; and **Lisa West**, of Drake University. The report that included those details was part of our official Business Meeting -- and rather than trying to summarize or relive everything that went on, I will mention these highlights:

Tom Krise summarized the panels that have comprised the SEA’s presence at this year’s annual ASECS and ALA conferences, in Atlanta and Boston, respectively. Based on the success of the panel **Lisa Logan** had organized on our behalf for ASECS the year

before, ASECS agreed to my suggestion that we get to have two SEA Sessions this year; as Tom happily reported, the success of this year’s panel convinced ASECS to allow us to have two at next spring’s ASECS conference, March 27-30 in Portland. Similarly, Tom reported that the ALA approved his request to schedule a fourth SEA Session at this year’s Boston conference, as we had done last year when the conference was in San Francisco. This year, like last year, we made sure one session focused on pedagogy, and I couldn’t help noticing that this year’s pedagogy session, at 8:00 a.m., attracted a slightly larger audience than did our three other sessions. Tom also made sure to keep our tradition alive of co-sponsoring a reception with the Society for the Study of American Women Writers and the journal Studies in American Fiction; the latter co-sponsor joined us last year. This year’s reception took the form of a coffee klatsch that began at 8:00 a.m. that Saturday.

In my own report at the Boston meeting, I described the intensive working session, last June here in Williamsburg at the Institute’s offices, of the interdisciplinary committee that has organized this historic joint conference. I was happy to report that **Mary Balkun** has agreed to look into what would be involved in adding a “Jobs Board” to our website, for posting simple announcements about job openings in history, literature, and so on; that **Lisa Logan** has agreed to chair our liaison committee with ASECS for an additional year; and that **Laura Stevens** has likewise agreed to chair our Essay Prize Committee for one additional year. The Essay Prize, which I described a few minutes ago as entering its ninth year, figures in these four suggestions I laid out for consideration:

(1) I suggest that we continue looking for simple ways to expand our offerings of essay prizes, as a way to offer additional encouragement and recognition for first-rate

scholarship on early American topics. One simple way to do so would be simply to create another annual prize that is open to papers which aren’t eligible for the existing prize; the existing one is for papers at ASECS or at any of its affiliate organizations, which includes the SEA and therefore includes papers here at this summer’s Williamsburg conference -- and so we might want simply to create a prize for papers at OAH, AHA, the ALA, the MLA, and so on. If we do, and I do hope we’ll figure out how to do so, I think it will be important to build on this existing tradition of essay prizes, rather than mooshing it together and diluting the value of, say, the prize we saw **Martin** receiving this morning. This idea of finding additional ways to recognize excellence in early American scholarship is one we began discussing last year in San Francisco, at our 2006 business meeting.

(2) In suggesting that we figure out a way to fund our travel grants, I was pointing out the obvious: our tradition of encouraging graduate students will be increasingly effective, in the short term, if we can develop a fund for travel grants not only to our biennial conferences but, ideally, to other meetings at which these young scholars are presenting their work. Such a fund can, and I believe should, include travel dollars for which school teachers can apply, following the model of the mini-grants we have been fortunate to award out of money the Gilder Lehrman Foundation has given us.

(3) I do suggest that we figure out what simple updating our Constitution and By-Laws could use, to bring them a bit more in line with the way this organization has been evolving. It sounds as if a committee would be in order.

(4) I also suggest that we think about commemorating, at the end of this decade, the SEA’s twentieth anniversary -- and that, as the four-hundredth anniversary of 1619 approaches, we consider having that year’s biennial conference focus on the legacy of the slave ships that introduced slavery to these colonies.

Meanwhile, you’ll recall that a moment ago I said I had four suggestions, but I do have a fifth one, the one I referred to at the beginning of these comments as something of a modest proposal. It involves two expressions, critical mass and “early Native American Studies,” and two questions. One of those questions is ¿Aren’t we observing a critical mass, right now, in the development of early Native American Studies? The other question I’ll get to in a moment.

Critical mass: glancing even casually at the program booklet will show you that the session in this auditorium following this one, “Indian Performance in Early America,” and the session this afternoon on **Annette Kolodny**’s “rediscovered treasure,” The Life and Traditions of the Red Man, by Joseph Nicolai, are hardly the only ones involving early Native American Studies, nor is the session that **Kris Bross** organized and that **Hilary Wyss**, the SEA’s next Executive Coordinator, has agreed to chair tomorrow morning, “Indians, Missionaries, Christianity, Contact,” nor is the “Power on Native Grounds” session, which Professor **Axtell** will be chairing at this time Sunday morning. There are numerous individual papers on other sessions, of course, such as “Chestnuts and Navajos: Teaching the Old Chestnuts to American Indians,” by one of our Gilder Lehrman grantees, Dr. **Betty Donohue**, and **Matt Cohen**’s “Seeing and Believing in Pequot Country,” on this morning’s “Puritan Promiscuities” panel, and **James Spady**’s paper “Cultural Apprenticeship as Social Welfare for a Colonial Republic,” on the

apprenticeship panel **Karin Wulf** will chair tomorrow. And so on, as we gather here to celebrate this anniversary of the intersection between Europeans and the indigenous peoples in this part of the world. Plus there’s the smaller, topical conference that the SEA is hosting next April at Purdue, “Prophetstown Revisited: A Summit on Early Native American Studies.” In fact, I learned about 48 hours ago that **Kris Bross** has managed to schedule a talk by **Chris Eyres**, director of Smoke Signals and Skins, who is working on the PBS documentary series “We Shall Remain” and is in charge of the Tecumseh / Tenskatawa segment; “we have hopes,” she said in an e-mail, “that we will be able to screen part or all of his documentary on Tecumseh. If not, we will screen another film directed and/or produced by a Native company or artist.” Wait, there’s more: “Our other confirmed keynote speakers are **Rick West** [founding director of the National Museum of the American Indian], and **Gregory Evans Dowd**, historian, and author of A Spirited Resistance among many other publications.” That’s the SEA’s mini-conference next spring, “Prophetstown Revisited: A Summit on Early Native American Studies,” and in a moment I’ll describe another conference or two coming up in ’008.

Meanwhile, critical mass: Native American culture was certainly at the heart of much of what we learned at the smaller, topical conference the SEA co-sponsored last year with, and at, the Newberry Library, “Early American Cartographies.” One of the papers there was by **Drew Newman**, who is helping us better understand the Walking Purchase; one of the panels, “Native American Cartography in the Nineteenth-Century Midwest,” was led by **Brian Hosmer**, Director of The Newberry’s D’Arcy McNickle Center for American Indian History. Checking out scholarship in the various journals that we most readily turn to, we see much more, of course -- **Phillip Round**’s lead piece in the very

latest issue of American Literary History, for example, and there’s “Native Americans: Writing and Written,” the recent special issue of ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance, guest-edited by **Carolyn Sorisio**, with contributions by, among others, **Yael Ben-Zvi** and **Eric Gary Anderson**. We see more, much more when we look at recent and forthcoming books: **Laura Stevens’** The Poor Indians: British Missionaries, Native Americans, and Colonial Sensibility, for example, which will be the focus of a “Colloquy With the Author” roundtable at next spring’s ASECS conference in Portland, and the forthcoming anthology that **Kris Bross** and **Hilary Wyss** are assembling as well.

Well, that list is a reminder that we early Americanists have a great deal to celebrate in terms of scholarship on, and attention to early Native American culture, as a part of the broader category we think of as American Indian Studies. ¿Does this term critical mass apply, then -- or rather, doesn’t it apply now?

I said I had two questions, but that wasn’t one of them. Neither is this one, which I asked a young colleague several months ago: ¿What is the place of early American studies in American studies? The latter expression, as the name of an institution, might well ring a bell for those of you who read the “Candidates’ Statements” that my predecessors assembled back in the fall of 2000; in mine, I mentioned hoping to find ways of strengthening the presence of early American scholarship within the realm we know as the American Studies Association. Back then, I thought perhaps it might even be possible, and mutually desirable, for the SEA and the ASA to figure out some form of affiliation; I learned that they don’t do affiliations, so in the summer of ’004 I got two dozen colleagues to go in with me as the original co-proposers of something we called and are still calling the ASA’s “Early American Matters Caucus.” At last count it has

260 members but no, I’m not proselytizing; I mention this group that many of us at this joint conference belong to simply as a reminder that the thought of bridging that gap is hardly a new one. When I posed the question to this young colleague, ¿What is the place of early American studies in American studies, he came back with quite the thoughtful answer, and I’m quoting briefly here from his e-mail with his kind permission:

My attempts to address this question have been, for the most part, conceptual, and they have involved thinking through how early Americanist scholars can draw from Native American studies. I've suggested that early Americanists can attend to the ways in which the archives we work in are bound up with contemporary struggles over issues such as nationhood, sovereignty, and landed belonging.

However, after thinking over your question for a few days, and talking to some folks in Philadelphia on Saturday and Sunday, it occurred to me that there is another very different way of addressing the question of the place of early American studies in American studies. In addition to our theoretical and interpretive work, I think the potential exists to use editorial work and textual scholarship to expand American studies by making early Americanists texts more widely available. Our field is one that enjoy special links to bibliography, book history, and textual scholarship. Yet it seems that so many of our key texts exist either in nineteenth-century AAS editions or in editions from the post-WWII reinvention of early American studies. I mean, we are still teaching Bradford out of Morison’s edition! I think a major, cooperative editorial initiative could very much be on the agenda for the SEA in the next few years. . . . Simply put, I think early American studies would not be bracketed in the way that it is if we had more of these texts out there in paperback editions.

An initiative such as this would obviously be the work of numerous scholars. I think even a proposal for such an initiative would have to be the work of many scholars working in different parts of the field. . . .

Thanks again, **Jeff Glover**, for that thoughtful reply and for allowing me to read it here. I

was impressed, in a recent phone conversation, at your suggesting **Matt Cohen** and **Phillip Round** deserve credit for such an idea. As for your reference to “a major, cooperative editorial initiative” as something that “could very much be on the agenda for the SEA,” I do have this caveat: I don’t see the SEA as operating such an initiative, but I do think that the SEA could help in figuring out how it might look. So here’s the question you have raised for me and, therefore, for this audience this morning:

¿Mightn’t we get together a panel next spring at Prophetstown to help figure out how such a “major, cooperative editorial initiative” could look?

That’s my second question, and it’s one I’ve already run past our colleagues who are hosting that conference at Purdue, **Kris Bross** and **Ned Watts**; their response was a hearty Yes, let’s see what the response is when you bring it up with the all the historians and literary types who are assembling at Williamsburg. I’ve also bounced some ideas with **Eric Anderson**, **Matt Cohen**, **Philip Round**, and **Hilary Wyss**, and I deeply appreciate their thoughtful, judicious responses.

Phillip Round, you raised three crucial questions, which I’m quoting here: “What do we mean by early?” “What sort of ‘texts’ will we consider?” “Finally, I think in doing this -- choosing texts, assembling them -- we would need to be committed as a Society to working with tribal communities.” Going back to my point about not seeing the SEA’s role as the actual publisher, I wholeheartedly agree that the group of scholars proceeding with such an initiative must plan on “working with tribal communities”; as you point out, “**Joanna Brooks**’ recent edition of *Occom* is a good example of fine Euro-American scholarship paired with tribal input and knowledge.” A fine one indeed, as is the Nicolar project that **Annette Kolodny** and **Patricia Clark Smith** will be describing in some detail this afternoon. Meanwhile, alongside that crucial question of “how early is early?”

and the reminder to work with tribal communities, **Eric Anderson**, you were wise to raise a caution about the importance of taking several other upcoming conferences into account: “Actually, my major worry about a Prophetstown panel is that there will be a huge, important Indigenous studies conference the following week, April 10-12, at the University of Georgia. As you might know, many of us met at the University of Oklahoma in early May to discuss the establishment of an interdisciplinary indigenous studies association [and the] UGA meeting is the second in a planned three-year sequence of conferences, and this group has a LOT of momentum. So I’m worried that a lot of us might not be able to come to Purdue because of the UGA meeting. (And the annual Native American Literature Symposium, which meets every spring, though the dates for this one have not yet been announced.)” **Matt Cohen**, you very helpfully asked whether such a project would have “a digital component” and emphasized that “it’s that range of visual and sonic signifying stuff that needs to be presented.” Hear, hear! And **Hilary Wyss**, your response was especially helpful, and so I appreciate your permission to quote this portion of them here, like so:

I love that you are emphasizing the growing importance of Native Studies in SEA, and I hope you will direct people to the conferences and editions that are in the works. Same with transatlantic studies, etc, etc. What I have always appreciated about SEA is precisely the fact that it is not focused on one aspect of early American Studies -- it is the place you come to be introduced to a variety of approaches and find people who can introduce you to others whose work relates in all kinds of interesting ways. That is, I loved it when Ralph Bauer was emphasizing multiple colonialisms -- introducing many of us to scholars working in Ibero American studies for the first time. His conferences spun off from SEA but never fully encompassed the organization, and that’s what made it all so cool. I LOVE that right now Native studies is getting a lot of attention from SEA -- but let’s not

pretend that we can do it better than Robert Warrior, Craig Womack, etc -- only that we want to bring their work to the attention of our members in ways that might not otherwise be available, and that perhaps our work can help them as they shape Native American Studies today.

Hear, hear!, Hilary. As I’ve emphasized to these colleagues and am certainly emphasizing this morning, the idea is not, repeat not that the SEA needs to get into the business of publishing, be it in the form of books or digital media or both. As I’ve emphasized to them, I certainly have no preconceptions at all about what form such an initiative might take nor about who the specialists are who should shape it and operate it; while editing is part of what many of us do, I have zero illusions that I’m the appropriate person who would do the shaping, the operating. I’m asking the question, and the idea is not that we set off for next spring’s “Prophetstown Revisited” conference at Purdue with a plan or a diagram or a map in hand. Maps we focused on last year, at that Cartographies conference at The Newberry, and since then I’ve run across this droll little piece of wisdom that Sherman Alexie has the character Thomas Builds-the-Fire say: “Listen, maps just give advice anyway” (Reservation Blues 49). On that note, I’d appreciate some advice from this roomful of knowledgeable, articulate colleagues.

So, ¿can we talk? One question I anticipate is whether this idea, this “major, cooperative editorial initiative” is something I would want to see competing in any way with, say, the SEA’s traditional emphasis on and support of scholarship involving women writers, and the answer is a hearty No, not at all! As many of you know, former SEA president **Sherry Harris** has begun organizing a “Collective that would focus on bringing scholars of early women’s writings together and developing a webpage with primary texts, illustrations, etc. to help visualize women’s presence in early American

culture.” That description comes from an e-mail Sherry sent me shortly after the SEA’s ’005 conference at Old Town Alexandria, at which there was, again in Sherry’s words, “a particularly enthusiastic session about early women’s writings.” More recently, in fact on her way out of the country, Sherry e-mailed this update: “let me clarify that I am not working on the Collective -- it is a group effort, and all I am doing is developing a website. If others want the Collective to thrive, they will be able to take it in whatever directions they think best.” We do all want the Collective to thrive, and it’s an initiative I applaud and see as a sign of the SEA’s health and the health of this enterprise we call early American studies.

Within that enterprise, we are also experiencing and benefiting from a dazzling array of inquiries into the Caribbean as part of the phenomenon we call, variously, *the Atlantic World*; *the Circum-Atlantic*, along with Joe Roach; *the Black Atlantic*, along with Paul Gilroy; and *the Wide Eighteenth Century*, as in the subtitle of this paper I’m calling “More Materials Into Play: Celebrating Our Wide Eighteenth Century” -- and the title of the panel I enjoyed assembling for the ASECS conference 10 years ago (“The ‘Wide’ Eighteenth Century: North America, the British Isles, and the West Indies”), on behalf of the Society for Eighteenth-Century American Studies, the group that merged into the SEA in 1999. Alongside that broader emphasis, then, as well as the Collective’s focus on early women’s writings, how about this idea of a “major, cooperative editorial initiative” that would focus on early Native American materials?

It’s a pleasure to think about the amazing array of panels and sessions that stretch before us, including tomorrow’s Women’s Caucus Breakfast, sponsored by the SEA, and of course the time we’ll get to spend at Jamestown on Saturday. Substantive papers and

lively, collegial conversations and memorable receptions are integral parts of what draws so many of us to SEA conferences, be they the smaller, topical ones like next April’s at Prophetstown or the larger, biennial ones such as we have combined, this time around, with the Institute’s annual conference. Our next biennial SEA conference will be at Bermuda in the spring of ’009, but for now we’re at Williamsburg, together.

Thank you, each and all.