

SEA Minutes and Correspondence 1994

Minutes of the Business Meeting
Society of Early Americanists
Saturday, June 4, 1994

Officers present: Carla Mulford, Rosemary Fithian Guruswamy, Sharon Harris, Raymond Craig. Seven members attended.

Called to order: 8:08 a.m. Closed: 8:56 a.m.

1. The first issue discussed was the low turnout at the meeting, and whether or not a later time in the day might be better for business meetings. Carla Mulford said it was difficult to schedule the conference, and might be more so next year because it is a day shorter.
2. The minutes of the previous business meeting were approved.
3. Carla Mulford traced a brief history of the development of the Society during the past year. It now has 275 members, over 100 joining during the 1993-94 academic year. The Constitution and By-Laws have been ratified and are now operational. The membership list has been rented out. There were 34 submissions of papers or proposals for this Conference. The 1995 Conference will be in Baltimore, May 26-28, 1995 with Gloria Cronin as director. The number of sessions the Society will have has not been set yet. The feeling of the membership was that another teaching session would be nice. Ray Craig suggested a poster session, where large pads and easels might be used to set forward ideas. Various possibilities for the organization of the session were discussed.
4. Carla Mulford announced that plans are being solidified with Philip Gura for a reduction to Society members in the cost of a subscription to Early American Literature.
5. Sharon Harris gave a financial report as well as approximate figures of institutional support from the Officers' affiliations. Penn State University has provided [on file] the University of Nebraska has provided [on file] and Radford University has provided [on file]. The University of Texas at Austin also provides discounts for the production of the newsletter. Carla Mulford noted the importance of institutional support for the success of the Society, and the need for new officers to have such support.
6. Rosemary Guruswamy discussed the production and distribution of the Directory of Members. How often to distribute this Directory was discussed, and every other year was agreed on as a good goal. One member suggested the Constitution and By-Laws be included in the Directory. The possibility of an e-mail directory was discussed, but this might present problems with list rentals and privacy of members.
7. Ray Craig discussed the electronic bulletin board, EARAM-L. There are 200+ members and activity has increased this year. When he returns to Kent State, Ray plans to continue the major questions raised in the session on teaching. He also announced that the Society will have an FTP site for the posting of syllabi and other information that might be downloaded by members. He also discussed technological problems that would occur during the summer due to the replacement of equipment at Kent State.
8. Carla Mulford discussed the upcoming rotation of officers. She noted that nominees must agree to a six-year commitment, as the person elected will begin as Executive Coordinator and move up through the other two offices. She also noted that other members of the Council of Officers may have longer-term appointments because of specific tasks they perform. Carla Mulford also put forth her idea that the At-Large position might be offered to a graduate student or a retired/independent scholar on an annually rotating basis. She plans to work on job descriptions for offices and publish these before nominations are open. She also opened the discussion for suggestions about the nomination process. One member suggested a committee be formed to mediate and limit the list of nominees. Carla Mulford said the Executive Officers could do this. The member suggested that, once the Society is well underway, a separate committee might be set up so as to avoid in-breeding. Carla Mulford said this might be established by a change in By-Laws in the future.

9. Carla Mulford then suggested that the Society is willing to co-sponsor conferences instigated by members.

Respectfully submitted,

Rosemary Fithian Guruswamy
Vice-President,

SEA Minutes of the Council of Officers Society of Early Americanists
Thursday, June 2, 1994

Present: Carla Mulford (Chair), Rosemary Fithian Guruswamy, Sharon Harris, J. A. Leo Lemay, Raymond Craig,
Jeffrey Hammond unable to Attend: William Scheick

Meeting Called to Order: 3:11 p.m. Meeting Closed: 5:20 p.m.

1. Carla Mulford called the meeting to order. The minutes of the previous meeting were approved.
2. Carla Mulford gave a general summary of the Society's progress: there are 275 members and the Constitution and By-Laws have been fully ratified (Sharon Harris has the figures of the vote.)
3. Carla Mulford informed the Council that she has offered the membership list for rental. Routledge has accepted, and is paying the Society [on file]. Oxford University Press has inquired. Sharon Harris is handling inquiries.
4. Carla Mulford reported that 34 people had submitted papers or proposals to be read at this Conference, and 20 people were on the various panels. The next Convention will be in Baltimore on May 26-28, 1995. Gloria Cronin will be the director.
5. Carla Mulford informed the Council that Robert Arner plans to convene one panel for next year's Convention that will feature papers read by several prominent people in early American literature. The Society will also (pending the director's approval) have 2 open call panels and a discussion session. The Council decided to ask members at the business meeting what topics they would like to see addressed in the discussion session. Leo Lemay suggested some back-up ideas, such as major authors, or multicultural literature. Ray Craig suggested a session on the state of early American scholarship. Leo Lemay noted that field was very broad. Sharon Harris suggested pinpointing a certain year, such as 1795, when several texts appeared. It was also suggested that the Society ask for another session on a single early American text. Carla Mulford will ask for suggestions.
6. Carla Mulford discussed her conversations with Philip Gura about offering Society members reduced rates on Early American Literature subscriptions. The University of North Carolina Press has scrutinized our membership list and ascertained that 100+ of our members already subscribe. Gura feels he should also offer the discount to MLA division members. Right now he is leaning toward offering a first time reduction for MLA division and SEA members and graduate students. He is fairly certain some sort of reduction will be offered in the near future.
7. Sharon Harris distributed and discussed the current financial report (see attached), and said the IRS will scrutinize such reports soon. Carla Mulford stressed the importance of the Officers' universities making a commitment to fund SEA business activities. Leo Lemay suggested including the university expenditures in the financial report. Rosemary Guruswamy offered approximate figures for the production and distribution of the Directory of Members, and will give exact figures to Sharon Harris at a later date. The process of bulk mailing was discussed.
8. Rosemary Guruswamy gave a report about the production and distribution of the Directory. Carla Mulford asked about the feasibility of indexing and cross-referencing interests, but Leo Lemay said it would be very difficult. Ray Craig suggested he could put the directory on the electronic bulletin board as an FTP, but Carla Mulford was worried about member privacy. It was decided that members could list themselves on the bulletin board, if they so desired.
9. Ray Craig then discussed the EARAM-L electronic bulletin board. There are 200+ members on line. Activity has

picked up since last year, but it is still a fairly quiet list. In February, there was a lag due to technological problems; Ray noted that it would happen again this summer as Kent State University replaced its technological equipment. Ray Craig requested newsletter deadlines so he could send material solicited through the bulletin board to Bill Scheick for the newsletter. Carla Mulford said July 1 is the deadline for the fall issue, and generally Jan. 22 and Aug. 17 are deadlines. She suggested Ray forward material to Bill once a month. Ray also announced he has an FTP site to store material that can be downloaded by interested parties, such as course syllabi. He reported confidentially that he and David Shields are working on an electronic archive for early American literature texts in a CD-ROM format. The first phase will be eighteenth-century poetry still in manuscript. An editorial board will be needed in the near future.

10. Carla Mulford then brought up the issue of the rotation of officers, which will be delayed one year. She stressed how work-intensive these positions are, and suggested the Council be careful about how they went about replacing the Executive Coordinator. She also announced that Jeff Hammond's At-Large position would be open for 1994-95. She suggested either a graduate student or a retired/independent scholar might fill that position. The Council expressed consensus that an assistant professor might not be a good candidate for the Executive Coordinator position, and then debated possible procedures for nomination and election of the new officer. Members felt strongly that the universities affiliated with candidates should give written commitments about their willingness to support financially Society business activities. According to the Constitution, nominations must be open, the Executive Council then decides the slate of candidates, and the whole Society votes. Carla Mulford agreed to draft a statement about the qualifications a candidate must have, to send it for perusal to all members of the Executive Council, and prepare it for the January issue of the newsletter.

11. The Council then discussed the possibility of separate meetings or conferences. It was suggested that Bill Scheick do a running calendar of anniversary dates in the newsletter. Rosemary Guruswamy will send these to him on a continuing basis. There is a possibility that Philip Gura would co-sponsor a conference.

Respectfully submitted,

Rosemary Fithian Guruswamy
SEA Vice-President

General Newsletter:

With each new member, each useful newsletter, each paper delivered before our large and engaged audiences at conventions, the Society is strengthened and made more stable, more varied, and more interesting.

It has been a three-year process, but SEA members should be proud of their individual contributions and our cooperative accomplishments: we've gone from Bill Scheick's valiantly initiated and continuously excellent newsletter to a formally organized and officially sponsored Society of Early Americanists with a membership numbering over 280. We have ratified our Constitution and Bylaws, and we have successfully filed with the IRS for non-profit status. Our membership is so attractive to publishers that we have been asked to rent our list out. (If you'd prefer your name to remain off any rented Society lists, please let Sharon Harris know.) We have regular, well-attended sessions at the American Literature Association conventions. We have been asked to sponsor sessions at other conventions, such as last fall's Symposium on Women Writers. And we have just published--with the hard work generously contributed by Rosemary Guruswamy and Sharon Harris--our first Directory of Members (with an anticipated publication of an updated directory every other year). This would not have been possible without the interest, support, and suggestions of our many members.

The recent American Literature Association meeting in San Diego again provided Americanists a provocative example of our accomplished members' work. The three formal sessions of papers--"Community Story-Making and Communal Stories in the English Colonies," "Reconstructions of Early American Poetry," and literary Politics in the Early Republic"--were excellent instances of the range and vitality of early Americanists' scholarly endeavors. The session "Teaching Early American Writings and Culture" included nine members speaking about their work and offering suggestions and teaching materials. So interesting was the panel that we look forward to an ongoing discussion of teaching issues, coordinated by Ray Craig, on the Electronic Bulletin Board, EARAM-L; we also look forward to the

publication of the teaching forum in forthcoming issues of The Heath Anthology of American Literature Newsletter (to get yours, free, call D.C. Heath [. . .]). Finally, the Society's second teaching seminar, this time on Mary Rowlandson's captivity narrative and directed by Frank Shuffelton, was a resounding success.

Other points of interest for the future include the development of sessions for other conferences and of entire conferences apart from the ALA sites, along with the prospects of our first election of an Executive Coordinator.

The next American Literature Association convention will be held in Baltimore, MD, May 26-28, 1994. The Society will sponsor its sessions at the convention, as usual, although the shortened time period of the convention might require our hosting fewer panels. Papers and proposals for papers should go to each of the Executive Officers (Mulford, Guruswamy, Harris) by November 30. No faxes can be accepted. At some point in the future, we hope to establish ad hoc committees to review submissions. Please let me know your thoughts about ad hoc convention committees. Also, if you'd be interested in serving on an ad hoc committee to review these proposals and papers, please let me know.

With our strong membership interest, we are likely to be asked more and more frequently if we'd like to sponsor sessions at conferences other than (and in addition to) the American Literature Association convention. This happened already with last fall's Symposium on Women Writers. And it has happened again! The American Literature Association Conference on American Humor (sponsored by the American Humor Studies Association and the Mark Twain Circle) is seeking papers, abstracts, and panel proposals for its conference in Cancun, Mexico, December 8-11, 1994. Conference Director David E. E. Sloane has expressed a particular interest in having early Americanists on panels at the conference. Why not write to Prof. Sloane directly if you'd like to submit something for the conference: Prof. David E.E. Sloane, [...]

We are also considering sponsoring, perhaps in conjunction with the journal *Early American Literature*, separate conventions entirely for members of the Society of Early Americanists. We are in the process of soliciting members' input on possible organizational formats, conference sites, and interest in such separately sponsored conventions. Indeed, because of earlier newsletter and Society business meeting announcements about this, I've already heard from one member who enthusiastically offered his institution, with institutional support for our programs and the possibility of plenary speakers. Please write to any of the Executive Officers if you'd like to think about sponsoring a conference for Society members. We seek your input, your advice, and (especially) your assistance.

Finally, during the fall we will ask your assistance in identifying and nominating members who might be interested in becoming Executive Coordinator of the Society of Early Americanists. As many of you who have had occasion to write to Sharon Harris can guess, this is a very rewarding but highly work-intensive post. The officers are currently outlining the responsibilities of the post, along with the expectations of institutional support, and will be officially seeking nominations by the late fall. While we hope to find a few members are interested in the post, we are hoping that you'll hold off on making nominations until the workloads and levels of necessary support have been clarified. The period for official nominations will begin with a separate mailing. At some point in the future, we will consider developing an ad hoc nominating committee. Please let me know your thoughts about--or experiences on--such committees.

I'd like to conclude by again extending my thanks to Sharon Harris for her unflagging organizational efforts as our Executive Coordinator and to Bill Scheick for his superb work on the newsletter. Without their continued interest and consistent hard work in behalf of their many early Americanist colleagues, the official founding of and continued stability of the Society would have been far more difficult to manage.